

THE HATRED OF THE HOUSE OF ANNAS

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AMONG the many things which the writers of the New Testament suppose to be known to their readers is the role which the high priest Annas played in the history of those days. But little is recorded about him. A study of Annas' personality and influence is practically a study and interpretation of texts of Flavius Josephus. If we are not mistaken, Annas' influence can be traced up to the Jewish war, for he seems to have served as a model and motive whenever one of his family became high priest. Thus Annas' personality stands out more clearly by being reflected in their attitude. That is the reason why we have chosen the subject and title of this essay.

THE HIGH PRIEST IN THE FIRST CENTURY A.D.

In order to understand the politics of Annas and his House, it is indispensable to illustrate briefly the situation in which the high priests found themselves in the days of Jesus and the early Church, not so much in their relation to Rome, as in their position within the Jewish people; to this end we have to cast a glance at the history of high priesthood. Since Sadoq had been made hereditary high priest by Solomon in 973 B.C., his family held that dignity in undisputed possession for centuries, even through the Babylonian Exile, and down to the days when Antiochus IV Epiphanes, the Seleucid king of Syria, began to persecute the Jews. In 175 B.C., he deposed the last high priest, Onias II, whose legality was founded on his inheritance, and replaced him by his brother Jesus-Jason. When in 172/1 B.C. Onias II was murdered by the king, his son Onias III fled to Egypt, where he succeeded in establishing a new temple, in which he acted as high priest. There, at On-Heliopolis, his descendants continued the Sadoqite high priesthood till A.D. 73, apparently without ever being molested or challenged as to the legitimacy of their office. This was possible only because in Jerusalem there was no longer a Sadoqite high priest.¹

These events were the root of three evils of the greatest consequences. The first of them was that all those who were high priests in Jerusalem

¹ The details concerning this period are taken mainly from Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem zur Zeit Jesu*, II, B, 1 Lfg. (Leipzig, 1929), pp. 40-59.

after Onias, were illegitimate high priests. The brother of Onias II, Jesus-Jason, was of the family of Sadoq, but without a claim to the dignity. When the king who had set him up deposed him again in 172 B.C., he gave him as a successor a layman from the tribe of Benjamin, whose name was Menelaos.² Ten years later this worthy was executed, and an ordinary priest, called Jakim-Alkimos, was put in his place. After Jakim's death (160 B.C.), the see of the high priest remained vacant for seven years, until the Hasmonean (=Maccabean) prince Jonathan (160-143 B.C.), following an offer of the Syrian king Alexander Balas, made himself high priest, in 153 B.C., although the Hasmonean family had no claims whatsoever to that position, being a family of only ordinary priests. The populace had given no assistance in taking this step; it was owing solely to the dynastic tendencies of the Hasmonean House.³ The proper thing to do would have been to call back from Egypt the legitimate Sadoqite high priest; instead, the Jewish rulers, by putting themselves in his place, sanctioned the illegitimate occupation of the highest religious dignity in Israel. However, the bad results of this sanction were delayed for the time being, when Simon, the brother of Jonathan, after the complete delivery of his nation, had the high priesthood declared hereditary in his House by a plebiscite.⁴ It was a doubtful measure, the legitimacy of which was never fully acknowledged by later generations. The high priests of Jerusalem remained illegitimate, usurpers of a dignity which belonged to other people; their office had been degraded to the level of a political position.

That all was not in order was felt in the very days of Simon. We see this in the decree whereby he was declared hereditary high priest: for in it the clause was inserted: ". . . until a reliable prophet rises."⁵ This was a clear sign that influential people among the Jews were not satisfied. This unrest came to the fore when the Pharisees demanded, first of Simon's successor Joannes Hyrcanos (135-104 B.C.), and again of Alexander Jannaios (103-76 B.C.), that they give up the dignity of high priest and content themselves with the purely civil power of rulers of their nation.⁶ The motive of this demand was obvious: the

² *Ibid.*, p. 44.

³ Flavius Josephus, *Antiquitates judaicae*, XX, 10, 3 (§238) (cited hereafter as *Ant.*).

⁴ I Macc. 14:41. ⁵ *Loc. cit.* ⁶ *Ant.*, XIII, 10, 5 (§291); 13, 5 (§372).

Pharisees, and with them all those who took their religion seriously, wanted to have a legitimate high priest of the family of Sadoq. This same desire smouldered beneath the surface throughout the coming years, as long as the temple stood. Herod the Great knew about it. He tried to meet it by raising an otherwise absolutely insignificant man from Babylon, Ananelos, to the highest religious dignity. Ananelos in fact belonged to the clan of Sadoq, but not to the branch to whom the high priestly dignity belonged by right of inheritance. Herod had chosen him in order to avoid having an influential high priest from Egypt. Ananelos was twice high priest, in 37–36 B.C., after the murder of the last Hasmonean high priest Aristobulos, and again from 35 B.C. onward.⁷

Naturally, Herod's action was far from satisfying the pious in Israel. But under him, and for a long time afterwards, they could do nothing, until in A.D. 67 the powerful Zealots excluded all the ordinary sacerdotal families from the high priesthood. "They had [the members of] a high priestly family come [to Jerusalem], Eniakim by name, and chose a high priest by casting lots."⁸

That all the high priests of that period were illegitimate was known to everybody and to themselves. It was a thing hard to forget or to overlook. We should bear this fact in mind if we are to understand properly the fundamental tendencies of the high priests of those days. For by psychological necessity they felt urged to strengthen continually those factors upon which their high position depended—the good will of those who happened to hold the supreme power in the country, and the means (usually money) of commanding their good will. At the same time, these high priests bore an unconditioned hatred against all those whom they considered to be opposed to their being high priests. These latter were, in the first instance, the Pharisees, whose power in the decennia that concern us most was evidently on the upgrade, and who were by their whole program and tradition the most resolute opponents of the Sadducean high priests. In the second place, and for entirely different reasons, the high priests considered Jesus and His Church as their enemies, as we shall see. This hatred of the high priests both against the Pharisees and against

⁷ *Ibid.*, XV, 2, 4 (§22); 3, 3 (§56).

⁸ *Bellum judaicum*, IV, 3, 6 (§148); 8 (§155).

the Christian Church had the surprising consequence that the Pharisees, who were politically stronger than the Church, more than once sided with her in her conflicts with the high priests. More on that point will follow in these pages.

By interfering with the succession of the high priests the Seleucid kings also gave rise to another evil. They simply overruled the hereditary character of the high priesthood. In this respect, the Hasmoneans restored the former state of things for a century. But what the Seleucids had done was promptly imitated by Herod's despotism. He too began to interfere with the succession of the high priests, and from his time on—that is, after his murder of Aristobulos—there were no more high priests for life, nor any one who succeeded their predecessors by right of inheritance. Since that time, families of ordinary priests began to strive after the highest dignity. The frequent change of incumbency only multiplied their chances of putting one of their members upon the chair of the high priest, and increased their ambition enormously; for the *pro tempore* rulers in comparatively quick succession deposed the acting high priests, and replaced them by successors chosen at their whim. Naturally, the family which had succeeded in usurping the dignity did all in their power to keep it as long as possible, or else to undermine the position of their rivals, so as to get a chance for their own man. Ambition thus became the keynote in the struggle for the post of the high priest.

Perhaps even more fatal than the two evils mentioned was a third evil, more degrading and more detrimental to the spiritual character of the dignity of the high priest: this dignity became a bargain; one could have it for money. Money, therefore, began to play a decisive part in the struggle for the post of the high priest. This feature became apparent for the first time during the reign of Antiochus IV Epiphanes; Jesus-Jason promised to pay the king a high sum if he would make him high priest.⁹ And three years later, when the money was sent to the king, Menelaos, the messenger, outbid his master by 300 talents, and was given the post. These remained isolated cases, as during the Hasmonean reign there was little room for such transactions. Herod the Great, and also his successor Archelaos, in choosing the high priests, seem to have been guided only by political

⁹ II Macc. 4:7-10.

principles. But under the rulership of the Roman procurators the suggestion of Lysias to Antiochus Eupator, whose tutor he was, was carried out, viz., the post of the high priest of the Jews was leased for an annual fee.¹⁰ The procurators, or at least several of them, were not slow to see their advantage, and sold the dignity yearly to the highest bidder, provided the legate of Syria did not decide who was to be the high priest. About that custom of the procurators there is a trustworthy notice in the Talmud, which probably goes back to the Mishnaic period; at the time of the second Temple, it says, they paid money to become high priests, each time a fee for twelve months.¹¹ In this custom we have the best explanation of the word of St. John, that Caiaphas was "the high priest of that year";¹² he had for that year won the competition among the bidders, as he had for many years before, and was to do for years thereafter.

It would be interesting and helpful to know all the details about the financial position of the high priest. That to be high priest required wealth can hardly be denied.¹³ He had to live according to his social standing, and by it were also to be measured those expenses so typical of the Orient, ancient and modern, and of some other less civilized nations, without which no business of any importance could (and can) be done. Moreover, the high priest had to bear the expenses of certain daily offerings, and pay for the heifer on the Day of Atonement.¹⁴ Unfortunately nothing is known of his regular income.¹⁵ He had the first choice of all the priests with regard to certain offerings that fell to their share; particularly, the hides of the sacrifices were of no small importance to high priest and priest.¹⁶

In a more general way, history supplies some information. The family to which the actual high priest belonged invariably secured for its other members the second-best sacerdotal posts, particularly

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 11:3.

¹¹ On this passage, see U. Holzmeister, S.J., "Der Hohepriester jenes Jahres," *ZkTh*, XLIV (1920), 306-10. For other Jewish texts concerning the buying of the high priesthood, see Strack-Billerbeck, *Kommentar aus Talmud und Midrasch*, I, 953; II, 569.

¹² John 11:49: "Caiaphas being high priest of that year."

¹³ Jo. Ieremias, *op. cit.*, II, A, p. 13.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, II, B, 1 Lfg., pp. 7-8.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, II, A, p. 13: "Über de regelmässigen Einkünfte der Hohenpriester hören wir nie etwas."

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, II, B, 1 Lfg., p. 6.

those of the Temple treasurers. It is hard to avoid the impression that this was done because the enormous financial transactions of the Temple were turned to the personal benefit of this upper class of functionaries, and chiefly of the high priest himself.¹⁷ Jesus-Jason is a case in point. In 175 B.C., he promised Antiochus Epiphanes for the post of high priest "360 talents of silver [apparently from the Temple treasury], and 80 talents from other sources" (presumably from his private purse). These and other substantial sums of money Jason made in three years time,¹⁸ not to mention the money needed to carry on life and office. Later years must have yielded a multiple of the somewhat frugal days of Jason.

Only families of wealth, then, were in a position to go out for the dignity¹ of the high priest, and of such families there naturally were but few. At the time of our Lord it had already become an established custom that those few families held the post among themselves. Although they were fighting one another, they formed a compact group of upstarts, a new sacerdotal aristocracy. "These families," writes Joachim Jeremias, "which so suddenly had come to be nobles—partly they came from abroad (Boëthos), partly from the province (Caiaphas)—in a very short time formed a new and powerful, if illegitimate, hierarchy. There were practically four families, each of which endeavoured to keep the highest sacerdotal office as long as possible. Of the twenty-five illegitimate high priests of Herodian and Roman times no less than twenty-two belonged to these four families; to the House of Boëthos eight, of Hannas eight, of Phiabi three, and of Kamith three; and as to the remaining three high priests, it is likely that they also had some connexion with those families."¹⁹ We may consider them as the wealthiest among the priests, and soon enough they must have become the wealthiest in all Jerusalem. "We can indeed prove of most of those families of the new hierarchy that they had great wealth at their disposal, so of the House of Boëthos, of Hannas, and of Phiabi."²⁰

This is the background against which we have to hold all the information that has been recorded of the high priests of the time of Jesus and the earliest Church.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, II, A, pp. 13 f.

¹⁸ II Macc., 4.8-9; 23.

¹⁹ Jo. Jeremias, *op. cit.*, II, B, 1 Lfg., pp. 54 f.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 59. For details, see *ibid.*, II, A, pp. 11-14.

ANNAS (A.D. 6-15)

The first family that came to power after the extinction of the Hasmoneans was that of the priest Boëthos from Alexandria. Herod made Simon ben Boëthos the successor of Jesus ben Phiabi in order to marry that man's daughter with a greater appearance of dignity. It was after he had murdered his wife Mariamne (I), after 29/28 B.C., most likely in 22 B.C.²¹ After Simon, three more members of his clan functioned as high priests, but all three within the last year of Herod's lifetime.²² Under Archelaos the same conditions prevailed (4 B.C.—A.D. 6); the family of Boëthos seems to have prospered throughout.²³

Things changed when, in A.D. 6, the legate of Syria, Quirinius, deposed Archelaos. With him he also dismissed his chief officials and transferred the highest sacerdotal dignity from Joazar ben Boëthos to Annas of the family of Sethi.²⁴ If the deposition of Joazar is intelligible as a political measure, the choice of Annas was hardly made at haphazard. As we find the family of Boëthos in later years again successful in the struggle for the high priesthood, we may suppose it now made every possible effort to secure the dignity at least for another of its members, seeing that Joazar was no longer *persona grata*. The outcome of the struggle was unfavorable to Boëthos and meant nothing else than a first victory of Annas against other competitors. Other motives may have had weight with Quirinius, but, as far as Annas himself is concerned, he enters history as the successful competitor over his rivals. The task of retaining the coveted post now devolved upon Annas. The fact is that in the subsequent years Jerusalem saw Annas as high priest for a longer period (A.D. 6-15), and after him five of his sons, his son-in-law, and a grandson. It was the aim of his endeavours and those of his House to keep or to regain that dignity. Flavius Josephus, to whom we owe these facts says: "They say that this Ananos senior has been the most fortunate of men; for he had five sons all of whom actually served the Lord as high priests after he himself had held that office during a long period; none other of our high priests has enjoyed similar good luck."²⁵

²¹ Jo. Jeremias, *Ztschr. f. neuest. Wissenschaft*, XXVII (1928), pp. 98 f. The change of the High Priest and the motive for it are narrated in *Ant.*, XV, 9, 3, (§§319-22).

²² *Ant.*, XVII, 6, 4 (§§164-67).

²⁴ *Ibid.*, XVIII, 2, 1 (§26).

²³ *Ibid.*, 1 (§§339-41).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, XX, 9, 1 (§198).

During the 107 years from the beginning of the reign of Herod (37 B.C.) to the destruction of the Temple (A.D. 70), the House of Sethi, or as we here call it, the House of Annas, held the high priest's position for thirty-seven years—a remarkable achievement seeing that the rulers often enough deposed and set up high priests at their whim, and that there always was sharp competition for that place among the wealthy sacerdotal families.

We can explain the history of Annas and his family only on the supposition that from the beginning he strove for the high priesthood with an energy that was characteristic of him, and that he also succeeded in communicating to his offspring. It was one spirit that moved them all, the absolute will for power and wealth. When Annas became high priest, he was undoubtedly already a rich man; as high priest his wealth must have increased by leaps and bounds. His sons were equally thrifty; for in the Talmud we still read complaints about “the shops of the sons of Hanan,” or, “ware-houses of Temple requisites of Annas and Sons.” They sold the things which the pilgrims needed for the Temple cult, and did it on terms which at the time of Gamaliel's son Simeon amounted to outright usury.²⁶ It seems that by then they had the monopoly on such objects. It is not unlikely that Annas had something to do with the things sold within the precinct of the Temple in the days of Jesus; if the vendors were not his hired agents, at least he received some emoluments from them; otherwise they would never have been permitted to enter the Temple for the sake of business.

What the New Testament records of Annas is very little. John the Baptist made his appearance “under the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas” (Luke 3:2). These personages were known to the readers from the passion of Christ, but that knowledge was not sufficient to give to the words quoted their full significance. Luke, if he himself knew more about the time indicated, unfortunately added nothing to the source whence he took this notice. Another passage of his, of a similar enigmatic nature, is in Acts (4, 6): There were assembled “their princes and ancients and scribes, . . . in particular Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of a high priest's clan.” John is possibly identical with the

²⁶ The texts are collected in Billerbeck, *op. cit.*, II, 569-71.

son of Annas called Jonathan of whom we shall hear more. The man whose notes St. Luke here reproduces knew more about the men in power than did Luke or his readers. We only learn that Annas, for a particular reason, had the title "high priest" and took part in the council of the mighty. He had this latter privilege in common with many other people, but the title must have meant a special honor. We also legitimately conclude that he was one of a group of men to whom the young Church of Christ was a continual irritation, and who, therefore, would have liked to do away with her. From Acts 5:17 we gather that Annas was a Sadducee. St. John, in his Gospel, mentions Caiaphas as the son-in-law of Annas (John 18:13) and as the actual high priest; for John, otherwise than Luke, applies the title of high priest in its strict official sense.

From the sacred text we do not know why special honor was given to Annas. It says that Jesus, after His arrest, was first brought before Annas because he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the acting high priest (John 18:13). But after a closer consideration we cannot recognize this as the real reason; here the Evangelist knew more, and actually thought of more things, than he said. That relationship was of account only insofar as Annas, in affairs common to him and Caiaphas, was the nobler of the two, to whom special honor had to be paid. Evidently, then, the matter concerning Jesus was such a common affair. This could not be by public right, as Annas no longer held any office. So it must have been his personality. Not only was he of one mind with Caiaphas, in all that concerned Jesus, but he was morally the leader and chief factor in the process against the hated Galilean. Once this is taken for granted, many details of the Gospels make sense; e.g., the fact that Annas was informed about every step that had been taken in the matter, the fact of his keen interest in the favorable outcome of the nocturnal enterprise, his remaining awake in spite of the late hour and the uncertain duration of his vigil, and finally the satisfaction that Caiaphas gave to the old man by sending Jesus first to him. The general opinion on that point, then, is perfectly correct; we catch a glimpse of the all-surpassing influence and authority of Annas, to whose will all the members of his family bowed. He was the head of his family, had built up its power, and had conceived and communicated to his own an implacable hatred against

Jesus, whom he was determined to ruin completely. This is the formula which comprises all that the New Testament and Flavius Josephus tell us about Annas.

What were the reasons for his hatred against Jesus? The minds of Jesus and Annas were as opposite as possible, but that alone did not produce a deadly hatred. True, it sounded ill in the ears of a Sadducee when Jesus proclaimed: "Woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation" (Luke 6:24); and the ruling circles of Jerusalem may have looked with misgivings on Jesus gathering around Him the riff-raff of the populace that was so prone to violence. However, such aspects of Jesus' teaching and action were eclipsed by His claim to be the Messiah. In his early days, when Herod had died (4 B.C.), and again in the very year when he was made high priest, Annas had witnessed the disaster to which such claims invariably led. Of course, there had been false Messias' and Annas knew that the Pharisees and the whole people expected the true one. As a Sadducee, Annas, if not in theory, at least in practice, cared equally little for both; to him the *pax romana* meant everything, since by it he had gained power and riches. A messias, whether a false one (but successful), or a true one, meant the overthrow of the existing order. The religious liberalism of the Sadducees did not exclude a secret fear of the true Messiah whose undertakings would not be thwarted like those of a would-be messias. And Jesus was so totally different from such pretenders. It was this secret fear that made Caiaphas and the Sanhedrists ask Him: "Are you the Christ? Tell us" (Luke 22:66). It is even recognizable in their sneers when He hung on the cross: "Others He could save, now let Him save Himself if He is indeed the Messiah whom God has chosen" (Luke 23:35), that is, if He is the true Messiah.

If Jesus was the Messiah, it meant that the end, or at least a drastic change, of Temple, cult, and hierarchy was at hand. Of this menace Annas was the more convinced, as Jesus in fact continually spoke of the new order of things, which He called the Kingdom of God. Sometimes Jesus behaved as one who had more authority than the high priest, as for instance when He drove the merchants out of the Temple. There was also that enigmatic word about the destruction of the Temple (John 2:19). This word made a deep impression on the

chief priests; as the passion revealed, it was a source of deep concern. Whoever threatened the Temple was a menace to their resources. In particular, such a man meant the ruin of Annas' wealth, position, and life's work. To acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah would have been for him nothing less than to give up all he had worshipped and striven for. And seeing his Sadducean irreligiousness—for that is what it practically came to—an allegiance to Jesus must have appeared to him like a step into the void. Annas, therefore, as was to be expected, chose the other alternative: he began to hate Jesus, not with a fanatical hatred, but with a deliberate, cold-blooded, and implacable hatred. If in the first instance it concerned more the true, or pretended, dignity of Jesus, it soon enough extended to His person, because Annas, like the rest of his contemporaries in Jerusalem, had inwardly to answer the question: Who is Jesus? Whatever answer he gave, it could only make Jesus hateful to him.

JOSEPH CAIAPHAS (A.D. 18-36)

Between Annas and Caiaphas, a son of Annas, presumably his eldest, held the post of high priest, but about him we need say nothing. More important for our purpose is Caiaphas, Annas' son-in-law. The two worked in unison, Caiaphas being the faithful interpreter of Annas' mind. His hatred against Jesus was equal to that of his father-in-law. All the messiahs of those days wanted to break the Roman yoke and to deliver their nation. The Romans in turn treated all those people accordingly: whenever possible they were made to die the rebel's death on the cross, for in matters concerning her domination Rome knew no weakness. So, in 4/3 B.C., she sent Varus with an army against such rebels, to restore her power and the *pax romana*. Now, Jesus had a larger following among the people than any rebel-leader ever had had before Him, and the majority probably were warlike Galileans. That, as Caiaphas with Annas and all the chief priests viewed the situation, meant a danger to city and Temple, because all those who pretended to be the messiah invariably sought to occupy the Temple. If Jesus once had come that far, only one thing was going to happen: "The Romans will come [with an army] and annihilate both our place [the Temple] and our nation" (John 11:48). This general opinion of the Synedrium perfectly tallied with

Caiaphas' mind, for he had already drawn a practical conclusion therefrom: "It is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and not let the whole nation perish" (John 11:50). It sounded very patriotic, but was in reality a cloak to conceal his anxiety for the peaceful possession and exploitation of the sources of wealth. His hypocrisy soon came to light. If Jesus had been what Caiaphas supposed Him to be, why did Pilate, who by his secret service knew enough about our Lord, treat Him as a harmless man (to say nothing of the mysterious Something which he perceived in the prisoner)? This moral defeat, however, did not bother Caiaphas; after an obstinate struggle he forced Pilate to deal with Jesus as a rebel-leader against the *pax romana* and to condemn Him to the death of the cross. For the sake of power and wealth, Caiaphas, and through him Annas, in cold blood shouldered the responsibility of the murder of Jesus, the Messiah of God.

To Caiaphas' chagrin, all was not over with the death of Jesus. The activity of the Apostles, in particular of Peter, the first Pope of Christ's Church, soon aroused the chief priests, so that they made up their minds, at the first occasion to put a stop to the Christian movement. The chance came probably in the same year in which Jesus had died, the most probable date still being A.D. 33. When Simon Peter and John, after healing a man born blind, in the Temple, preached Jesus as the risen Messiah to a large gathering, the prefect of the Temple had them arrested and brought before the Synedrium. This prefect, in all likelihood was Annas' son Jonathan, whom we shall meet as high priest.²⁷ The situation was a new and delicate one, so that the Sadducean chief priests did not venture to call for drastic measures. "Having threatened them again, they discharged them, finding no way to bring them to punishment [scourging] on account of the people, because all were glorifying God for what had occurred" (Acts 4:21). Judging from subsequent events, we may suppose that the high priest and his group must have noticed that even the most influential and probably numerically strongest element of the Synedrium, the Pharisean rabbis, in considerable part showed a certain leaning towards the Christians.

The result of this first trial gave to Simon Peter and the Twelve

²⁷ Jo. Jeremias, *op. cit.*, II, B, 1 Lfg., p. 58, refers to Joma 3, 41a, 5, as a proof.

another spell of time to propagate the doctrine of Jesus, which they did with a remarkable zeal and courage. Finally, it became too much for Caiaphas. Probably in the course of A.D. 34, "the high priest and all his supporters—that is, the sect of the Sadducees—were roused, and filled with indignation; and they arrested the Apostles and put them in the public jail" (Acts 5:17). This time it was not an impromptu act, as in the previous year, but a deliberate step whose author was Caiaphas, the high priest. The Apostles were arrested in their dwellings, or wherever they happened to be—the chief priests kept themselves well informed about them—and imprisoned in order after a trial to be handed over to the hangman. The flogging to which they were finally condemned was not what Caiaphas had intended, but essentially less, a minimum concession which the opposition had to make to the high priest; what he had wanted from the beginning was their execution. But God's angel, by setting the Apostles free and ordering them to preach in the Temple, that is, under the very noses of the Synedrium, created for Caiaphas a situation which was most unpleasant and difficult.

Gamaliel, seeing the difficulties of the high priest, most cleverly exploited the circumstances in favor of the prisoners and the Christian movement. His proposal found approval among the Pharisees; and Caiaphas, who had intended to use the Synedrium as his instrument in destroying the Apostles—much as he had done in the trial against their Master—could do nothing in the face of the powerful opposition. His plan was thwarted; his instrument had turned against him. We do not know all the motives that caused Gamaliel to act as he did. From his words as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles it appears that he certainly had some sympathy with the Church, but it is more than doubtful whether he himself drew the conclusions from what he said in their favor. The chief reason, therefore, may be sought in another direction. Gamaliel realized the perplexity of the chief priests at the beginning of the session, caused by the mysterious liberation of the Twelve, by their new preaching to the crowd, by their report about the angel, by the fact that now the crowd knew about their appearance before the Synedrium. Gamaliel also may have known something about the tendencies of Caiaphas in the matter; all the chief priests knew them; they were no secret. And he saw a

precious chance to counteract the high priest and the whole Sadducean party, and thus to diminish their prestige—a chance no Pharisee failed to exploit if he could. The case of Jesus had been a rare exception; as a rule the two parties, the Sadducean and the Pharisean, were continually at loggerheads, and fighting a bitter struggle for the domination of the public religious life. From that moment on, when the Synedrium in a legal session, and in the course of a legal procedure, had sided against Caiaphas (Acts 5), it ceased to be useful against the Christians for quite a time; and so it happened that the Synedrium became a shield of the Church against her bitterest enemies, the high priests. This became manifest at the very next trial that befell the Church.

JONATHAN (AUTUMN, A.D. 36—SPRING, 37)

The next storm hit St. Stephen and the Hellenists among the faithful. Unfortunately, Acts does not give precise chronological data for the events of the period in question. If we take as the year of our Lord's death A.D. 33, Stephen's death must have occurred after 34. The persecution that followed ended with Saul's conversion. Now, St. Paul gives some relative dates as to the time when he became a Christian, but we do not know whether the three and the fourteen years which he mentions²⁸ are successive, or whether the three are contained in the fourteen; and whether he counts after the Greek fashion (which is the same as our own), or in the Jewish fashion, counting the end of one year (the first of a series) and the beginning of another (the last of a series) as entire years. This leaves a margin of about five years, say from 32 to 37. But there is another way to determine the time of the persecution. The political situation must have been such as to enable its authors to imprison and kill several people at will. It is most unlikely that the strong-headed Pontius Pilate as procurator would have tolerated such an undertaking. The earliest possible time, and in fact the only possible one, was the period between Pilate's removal from power, and the arrival of a new Procurator, or, as in our case, the intervention of the imperial legate of Syria; and this period was the time between the feast of Tabernacles,

²⁸ Gal. 1:18; 2:1.

36²⁹ and the feast of the Pasch, 37. What then happened was as follows.

Before the first-mentioned feast, L. Vitellius, the legate of Syria, following accusations against Pilate on the part of the Samaritans whom he had handled roughly, came to Jerusalem and forced Pilate to cease functioning as procurator and to repair to Rome in order to give an account of his deeds. As the procurators were nominated by the Caesar himself, Vitellius could not simply depose Pilate. Consequently, he did not nominate a successor to Pilate with the full capacity of a procurator, but set up a mere manager, Marullus by name.³⁰ This man had neither the necessary power, nor, as the events manifested, the knowledge or personal influence, to handle the difficult Jewish nation; probably he knew too little of the political conditions prevailing in Jerusalem to govern the Jews successfully. This was the kind of period adapted to a persecution, as described in the Acts of the Apostles; for such situations with great regularity gave rise to riots and other excesses. It is enough to mention the rebellions that broke out after the death of Herod the Great in 4 B.C., and at the deposition of Archelaos in A.D. 6. A parallel to our persecution we shall see in the last portion of our study, concerning the year A.D. 62. Whenever there was a break in the succession of strong rulers, the Jews seized the precious occasion to follow their own mind.

Moreover, Josephus tells us that in A.D. 36 Vitellius deposed Caiaphas.³¹ Why this happened he does not say. Presumably Caiaphas was a victim of the same accusers who caused the downfall of Pilate; he may have contributed to the persecution of the Samaritans on whom the Jews of those days lost no love. But it is equally possible that the driving force against him was the Pharisees. Whatever the reason one thing was surprising—that Vitellius should have chosen in his stead Jonathan, a son of Annas.³² It looks as though the legate had not been too well informed about the political tendencies and factors within Jerusalem Jewry. At any rate, Jonathan was the high priest under whom the persecution broke loose against St. Stephen and his Hellenist brethren.

²⁹ See U. Holzmeister, *Chronologia Vitae Christi* (Rome, 1933), pp. 52 ff.

³⁰ *Ant.*, XVIII, 4, 2 (§89). Marullus was not ἡγεμών, but only ἐπιμελητής.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 3 (§95).

³² *Loc. cit.*

The question is, who led the persecution, and what was the part played in it by the high priest Jonathan. If we study Acts closely, we discover that the persecution was a premeditated thing, not an outburst of fanaticism, notwithstanding the impression to the contrary which the report of Acts makes at first sight. For if the Zealots (*gana'in*) had come upon Stephen, they would not have dragged him before the Synedrium, but would have killed him off-hand. Further, we read: "They incited the people, and the ancients and scribes as well" (Acts 6:12). This remark is of importance because of the series: people—ancients—scribes; it reflects the course which a premeditated affair would take. First the people were made restless. This could not for any length of time escape the ancients or elders of the city, that is, "the heads of the most influential lay-families," or "the Jerusalem patricians."³³ When they had become anxious lest the commotion of the people might take a dangerous turn, they themselves were ripe to be influenced against Stephen as the pretended cause of the trouble. These nobles, after the Sadducean chief priests, were the second group of the Synedrium, themselves partly Sadduceans, partly Pharisees. Once the enemies of Stephen had come that far, they likewise endeavored, not without success, to influence the third group, the Pharisean rabbis. Judging by their names, as far as tradition has preserved them, they were one and all Aramean Jews. As such they had little commerce with their Hellenist brethren, and not much esteem for them. For that reason it must have taken some effort on the part of the Hellenist rabbis of the Synagogues of the Freedmen, of the Alexandrian Jews, and of those from Asia Minor to inform and persuade them of their own view.

Nor can their success have been complete, as subsequent events proved. This same division among the Jewish population between the Aramean and the Hellenist group was also felt in the young Church; it had been the ultimate reason why Stephen and his six colleagues were chosen as helpers of the Apostles. It was also the cause of the restriction of the persecution to St. Stephen and the Hellenist Christians, while the Twelve, and with them the Aramean part of the Church, remained unharmed. It is a fair guess that many of the Pharisean rabbis put up little resistance against a persecution of the

³³ Jo. Jeremias, *op. cit.*, II, B, 1 Lfg., pp. 89, 93.

former, but effectively shielded the latter. For the ideas preached by Stephen and held by the rest of the Hellenists were at the least "offensive to pious ears," even outright heresy from the orthodox Jewish standpoint; whereas from Simon Peter and the Twelve and other Aramean Christians such utterances had not been heard. For them, therefore, the Pharisean rabbis retained a certain degree of sympathy, because they lived an exemplary life according to the tenets of the Pharisees. That is why we attribute to these rabbis the distinction which was made in the persecution. We are even entitled to go further. Josephus describes the Pharisees as "circumspect"³⁴ and "by nature mild when punishing."³⁵ They may, then, have agreed that something should be done in the matter of Stephen's preaching, but in all likelihood did not think of acts of violence; they were taken by surprise when things actually happened.

With the Pharisean rabbis two of the three sections of the Synedrium were won; what of the third section, that of the Sadducean chief priests? They had proved themselves the sworn enemies of Jesus and of the movement started by Him, and it was not to be expected that they would create any obstacle against doing away with Stephen; on the contrary, such a thing could only be welcomed by them. That Jonathan and the other chief priests had indeed a hand in the game is proved by the events; the enemies seized Stephen at exactly the right day and hour, namely, when the Synedrium was in session; for like all such bodies it must have had its appointed periods and hours to convene. So it was possible to bring the accused man at once before the Synedrium, which also acted as the supreme court. This again proves careful scheming and does not permit us to consider the procedure against Stephen as an act of fanaticism. To bring Stephen to the Synedrium with the appearance of a tumult meant, of course, an interruption of the session. In spite of it, the order of business was at once changed in favor of the accusers; and here, if we are not mistaken, we see the hand of the high priest. If he had not been informed previously, he would not have entered upon the process against Stephen at once, as he actually did by putting to him the obligatory demand to answer the accusations. This is strongly suggestive of a previous arrangement and of the consent of the chief priests

³⁴ *Ant.*, XVII, 2, 4 (§41).

³⁵ *Ibid.*, XIII, 10, 6 (§294).

in general. The very promptness with which Jonathan acquiesced to the apparently turbulent demand to have Stephen judged betrayed that the high priest had a part in the conspiracy.

The interruptions of Stephen's speech (Acts 7:51, 54) and his being lead away were tumultuous, but not above suspicion. After Gamaliel had beaten Caiaphas so badly, one could not run the risk of suffering a similar defeat. When Jonathan agreed that Stephen be brought before the supreme court, he had to be certain that the Pharisees would not thwart the scheme this time. To this emergency the tumult answered suspiciously well; it simply ruled out a discussion and formal condemnation of the accused man. That all was not genuine was also demonstrated when at the execution the enemies fell back upon established rules; the first witnesses put their cloaks at the feet of Saul in their order as the first to throw stones at their victim, exactly as the Law prescribed. That was not the doing of religious fanatics who forgot themselves, but the action of people who acted with a set mind. The tumult against St. Stephen was to a great extent a fake. It showed a double face: it was too legal to be lynch-law, and too irregular to constitute a proper process. It was a concerted game, badly played, and very compromising for Jonathan. Considering all these incidents, we understand how Stephen could get a magnificent funeral with many orthodox Jews participating: "Pious men buried Stephen, and made a great mourning over him" (Acts 8:2).

The murder of St. Stephen was followed by a bloody persecution against the Hellenist Christians, wherein Saul of Tarsus played a prominent part. This development was likewise unthinkable without the cooperation of the high priest. For this persecution likewise was not an outburst of religious fanaticism; it was carried out with deliberation and according to plan. As we have surmised, the Pharisees had been taken by surprise when Stephen was dragged before the Synedrium and so abruptly executed; Jonathan now made his thrust against the Hellenist part of the Church before his formidable Pharisean opponents could recover and rally. It was his good luck that the initiative of the persecution, in reality or in appearance, came from the fiery Saul of Tarsus; this meant quick and energetic action. As high priest, Jonathan had the authority and the means to stop Saul

and the others from persecuting Jewish people; that he did not intervene, but on the contrary promoted the persecution, as his letter to Damascus shows, made him the moral cause of the crime, and responsible for it. With the hatred typical of the House of Annas, Jonathan thus in some way made good what Caiaphas, his brother-in-law, had failed to do; if he could not annihilate the whole Church, he at least did his share in undoing her Hellenist wing.

That by this persecution Jonathan as the responsible person encroached on the rights of the Roman government is beyond doubt; the *jus gladii* which he usurped was the exclusive right of the paramount power. That he ventured to do so not only was caused by the absence of a strong procurator, but also by the absence of the legate of Syria. After his visit to Jerusalem, the legate had been ordered by Tiberius to enter into negotiations with the Parthian king Artabanus; for this purpose he went to the Euphrates.³⁶ This happened in the winter of A.D. 36-37; so he was far enough away for Jonathan to give rein to his hatred, without fear of being interfered with.

New light on these events comes from the subsequent development. When back in Syria, Vitellius received orders to march against the Nabatean king Aretas IV, whose territories lay to the south and east of Palestine. Vitellius began his march from Akko-Ptolemais. When he was on the point of crossing Jewish territory, a deputation from Jerusalem met him and besought him to take his route along the coast, to avoid Jewish land and the defilement of its holiness by the images of the Emperors that were attached to the military signs. In all probability, this petition came from the Pharisean rabbis, who by their preponderance in the Synedrium caused the official deputation to be sent. Vitellius not only yielded to this request, but, as Josephus tells us, "with the tetrarch Herod [Antipas, the chief enemy of Aretas], and with his friends [that is, his suite] took the road to Jerusalem in order to offer a sacrifice to God, because a feast of the Jews [the Pasch, A.D. 37] was at hand. At his entry into the city he received a magnificent welcome from the population. He remained there for three days, during which he took away the high priesthood from Jonathan and transferred it to his brother Theophilus. On the fourth day, having

³⁶ *Ibid.*, XVIII, 4, 4-5 (§§96-105).

received a report of the death of Tiberius, he made the people take the oath of allegiance in favor of Caius [Caligula]." So far the report of Josephus.⁸⁷

He is more reticent than eloquent on this occasion. That Vitellius came to Jerusalem for the Pasch with the sole, or even with the main purpose of offering a sacrifice is obviously wrong; for all his understanding and sympathy for the Jews, Vitellius was no Jew himself, nor had he leanings toward Judaism. If he made this hasty trip to Jerusalem, he had other and more urgent reasons. There must have been troubles which his agent Marullus had been unable to overcome, and their centre was none other than Jonathan. For it is absurd to think that the legate deposed the high priest, as it were, by the way, after the latter had been in office only half a year. Marullus must have sent him word about the situation. As an imperial legate, Vitellius naturally had his body-guard with him, and it, joined with the Roman garrison in Jerusalem, gave weight to his visit at the feast. His intention, then, was to restore the troubled peace, or to prevent further disturbances. It was a necessary step because Judea was to be the rear in his expedition against the Nabateans. That the Emperor's death would be reported to him in Jerusalem was, of course, not known to him beforehand and therefore not a motive for going to Jerusalem.

Moreover, it seems that the Jewish envoys had something to do with his visit to the Jewish capital, and with the deposition of Jonathan. Jonathan had acted with brutality: "Now on that day [of the death of St. Stephen] there broke out a violent persecution against the Church in Jerusalem; and, with the exception of the Apostles, they were all scattered throughout the districts of Judea and Samaria" (Acts 8:1). There were arrests, imprisonments, trials before the court of justice, floggings, efforts to extract denials of allegiance to Jesus as the Messiah, and executions.⁸⁸ The wave of emigration started by that persecution reached even far-off Cyprus and Antioch in Syria (Acts 11:19) We do not know the exact number of the Hellenists who thus lost home and livelihood, but it cannot have been less than several thousand, maybe three to four thousand, because the Christians seem to have formed from eight to ten per cent of the total

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 5, 3 (§§120-124).

⁸⁸ Acts 22:4; 26:10-11.

population of Jerusalem in those days. Such a sudden change in the population as was caused by the emigration and flight of the Christian Hellenists, necessarily affected a great many other people, for it must have caused a considerable disarrangement of business in general throughout the city. This was the trouble that Jonathan had started and for which Vitellius came to Jerusalem. It was more than enough reason for the Pharisean rabbis, who were always antagonists of the Sadducean high priests, on their part to invite Vitellius to depose Jonathan. Ruthless as he was, Jonathan may have shown this quality also in his dealings with them. Finally, the Pharisees of those days, being in sympathy with the Aramean Christians, and having been duped by Jonathan in the procedure against Stephen, could hardly have failed to put in a word against Jonathan when their envoys met the legate. Our repeated reference to their sympathy with the Christians is no exaggeration, seeing that by this time there were Pharisees who were members of the Church (Acts 15:5), and that St. Paul could easily call up the Pharisean faction of the Synedrium to his aid against the chief priests (Acts 23:6-7). Thus all that Josephus tells us about the visit of Vitellius to Jerusalem, and all that the Acts of the Apostles report about the persecution can be so dovetailed that one part explains the other. And above all, Jonathan proved a true son of Annas, the arch-enemy of Jesus; the hatred of Annas had been inherited by Jonathan.

Vitellius replaced Jonathan by his brother Theophilus. This fact also fits perfectly into the history as drawn above. All the other sons of Annas are known only by their Semitic names—Eleazar, whom Valerius Gratus made high priest in A.D. 16, Jonathan, Matthias, Annas junior; we shall hear more of all of them. That Theophilus was called by his Greek name, and that his Semitic name is not known to us, is a sure sign that he was favorably disposed towards Hellenist Jews; this gave a certain guarantee that he would stop the persecution of the Hellenist Christians, who up to then were all Jews.

MATTHIAS (A.D. 42-43/4)

Of equally great interest to us is the persecution which felled the Apostle James, the brother of St. John the Evangelist, and nearly made the Pope himself, Simon Peter, a martyr (Acts 12). This time

it was a question of wiping out the remaining Aramean part of the Christian Church, and the idea was to strike the shepherds so as to scatter the sheep. It looked like a complement to the persecution of 36/37, in which the enemies of the Church, certainly much against their desires, had had to stop short of the Apostles and their Aramean following; now, some five years later, the half-done work was to be completed.

This comprehensive view of the persecutions implies that they had the same origin, being parts of one great plan. Acts, however, does not seem to share this opinion, as it charges King Agrippa I alone with the responsibility for the persecution of the Apostles. Hence it is necessary to find out whether or not the persecution of the Apostles reported in the twelfth chapter of Acts had its origin exclusively in the wish and whim of Agrippa I. The answer, with great probability, is in the negative. Let us see what the facts tell us.

Agrippa, before he became king, was the classical example of a loose liver and adventurer; one has only to read the story of his earlier years in the *Antiquitates Judaicae* of Flavius Josephus.³⁹ Given his character, Agrippa fitted admirably into the suite of Caius Caligula (A.D. 37-41), whose favor he enjoyed. Apart from a sojourn in Palestine of about a year, A.D. 38-39, he was always with Caligula, until this Emperor was murdered. When Claudius became Emperor, Agrippa by a clever turn exhibited himself as a friend of the new Caesar;⁴⁰ he was rewarded with considerable territories.⁴¹ But henceforth he could no longer breathe freely in the Roman atmosphere; he had been an intimate of Caius, whose memory now was proscribed; he must have had enemies in plenty, and must have known what the consequences would be—before long he would be a dead man. That is why in A.D. 41, as soon as the sea was open to navigation, he left Rome for good and settled down in his new kingdom of Palestine.

For the subsequent years (about three and a half) of Agrippa's domination, Josephus is full of praise: "He liked to dwell in Jerusalem, and that continuously; he observed the traditions of the forefathers without blemish; he adhered to all the rites of purification, and did not let a day pass without assisting at the sacrifice prescribed by the

³⁹ *Ant.*, XVIII, 6, 1-7 (§§143-204).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, XIX, 4, 1-2 (§§236-45).

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 5, 1 (§§274-75): Judea, Samaria, Abilene.

Law."⁴² Since Josephus was a Pharisee, and in favor with Agrippa's son, Herod Agrippa II, we forgive him this adulation and follow common sense, which tells us that Agrippa had not turned into a saint. Nor does the text mean that he henceforth always lived in Jerusalem, but only that he lived there with preference, and that his sojourns in that city were, as a rule, of comparatively long duration. For Josephus himself mentions various events that found the king in Caesarea, Beyrouth, Tiberias. Nor could it be otherwise. A man of Agrippa's past cannot suddenly have found pleasure in the fetters of narrow-minded Pharisaic regulations. He may have observed the part of them that concerned his exterior life, as long as he was in the City; but he must have felt a craving for "fresh air" and sated it in pagan surroundings. When outside of Judea, he dispensed himself from the Jewish law, as is proved by the edifices which he constructed abroad. In Beyrouth, he built a theater, public baths, porticoes, and an amphitheater, at the inauguration of which he was present, and had 1400 men fighting for their lives to the delight of the pagan onlookers.⁴³

Agrippa's zeal for Judaism, then, was far from being genuine; it was nothing else than a means for furthering his politics; and to these we have to turn now. E. Schürer says that Agrippa's Pharisaic and national attitude caused him even to loosen his bonds of submission to Rome.⁴⁴ But in reality things lay the other way. Because his relations with Rome, much against his desires, had become precarious, Agrippa became national and Jewish in his behavior. He saw danger threatening from Rome, and therefore from the outset of his politics he prepared for the worst, which could only mean an attack on him from Rome, and this through Syria, when it came at all. The first thing to do was to make his domain a reliable stronghold by winning the sympathy and whole-hearted allegiance of its populace, particularly of the influential classes; the second thing was to make Jerusalem impregnable, and to find allies. The series of events as Josephus records them, fairly follows this line.

Before going into details, we should mention a point which had nothing to do with this political scheme. When Agrippa visited Pales-

⁴² *Ibid.*, 7, 3 (§331).

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 7, 5 (§§335-37).

⁴⁴ Emil Schürer, *Geschichte des jüdischen Volkes*, (4th ed.), I, 556.

tine in A.D. 38, he was not yet king of Judea and Jerusalem and could not interfere in the question, who was to be high priest. But when he arrived in A.D. 41 he had full royal power, and at once deposed Theophilus, the son of Annas, and made Simon Kantheras of the House of Boëthos high priest.⁴⁵ The main reason may have been his need for money. It may be that he was not yet high up in inner Jewish political affairs. At any rate, as soon as his own political scheme began to take shape, he changed back to the most powerful among the highpriestly families, that of Annas, as we shall see.

In order to win the favor of the Jewish people, and in particular of the Pharisees, Agrippa began to live like an orthodox Jew. How much he succeeded in making himself popular with them, can be seen by the very favorable opinion which Flavius Josephus, and in general also the Talmud, have of him.⁴⁶ Thus the most powerful party of the Synedrium became his ally. The ancients or elders of the city were mostly people with landed property and houses in Jerusalem. He won them over to himself by abolishing a house rent.⁴⁷ Lastly he had also to make the powerful chief priests his friends, and here is the point where his persecution of the Church comes in. As far as we can judge, a man like Agrippa personally was completely indifferent as to the existence and tenets of the Christian Church; at the most, he despised that sect. But in the course of the year 41, the first of his domination, he made himself acquainted with conditions in Jerusalem. He could not overlook the power of the House of Annas, or fail to consider what could be done in order to win favor with the chief priests and with the House of Annas in particular. He arranged his plans according to his information. Jonathan had only been able to bring to nought the Hellenist group of that sect; the Aramean part had been protected by the Pharisees who had also previously thwarted Caiaphas' intentions. Now Agrippa, or his advisers, saw a chance to make up for this defeat of the Sadducees, and thereby to tie them to his chariot: he would re-install Jonathan, who was so well versed in ruthless persecution, whose prestige had been impaired by his premature dismissal and would be restored by his re-installation. This would be a good way to oblige the House

⁴⁵ *Ant.*, XIX, 6, 2 (§297).

⁴⁶ Cf. Billerbeck, *op. cit.*, II, 709-10.

⁴⁷ *Ant.*, XIX, 6, 3 (§299).

of Annas. Then with the assistance of Jonathan, Agrippa would crush the Church of Jesus, and thus not only mightily please the sons of Annas, but all the chief priests; he would make them his friends, and find their moral and financial support.

"Now Agrippa," says Josephus, "took again the dignity of high priest from Simon Kantheras, and wanted to transfer it to Jonathan, the son of Annas, declaring that he was more worthy of it."⁴⁸ This happened in the course of the year 42. Josephus says nothing of Simon Kantheras as having made a mistake. If the reason which he alleges for the change is not only of his own making, but a remark of the king, it is not to be taken seriously, because everybody must have seen the real purpose of the change. But Jonathan declined the new call to the dignity: "God does not consider me at all worthy of the high priesthood. It is enough for me to have worn the sacred vestment once; for at the time when I put it on, I was more worthy than now where I am supposed again to dress in it."⁴⁹ An awfully pious answer from the lips of a Sadducee. Probably it is nothing else than an invention of Josephus, who likes to dress up ugly political things in a spiritual cloak. The reason for Jonathan's refusal must be found elsewhere. It lay with the Pharisees whose opposition had accelerated his downfall; they would at once be on their guard as soon as he again became high priest, and would counteract any enterprise he might undertake in favor of the Sadducees. To occupy the post of high priest under such auspices was not inviting. So he declined, but knowing about the plans of the king, and being a resourceful man, he recommended his brother as a suitable man for the post and the job. And so Agrippa set up Matthias, another son of Annas, as high priest.

Now the time to launch the persecution had come. With Matthias as high priest the co-operation of the Jewish authorities was secured. This may have been regarded as necessary; without it an attack against the Church, on which the people looked with favor, might have alienated the crowd from the king, whereas if Agrippa worked through the high priest, this result could be avoided. Besides, quick and energetic action was not likely to be met by efficient opposition from the Pharisees; their admiration for the king would make them slow to resist in a matter which was not properly their own. Moreover,

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 4 (§313).

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, (§§314-16).

they would then not set up a reaction among the people, so that the crowd could easily be made interested in a bloody spectacle. To shield the high priest against the Pharisees, the action was to be carried out as a process of the crown. The persecution began, probably some days before the Passover, with the execution of James, which was like a rehearsal to see whether all factors functioned properly. When Agrippa "saw that this pleased the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also" (Acts 12:2). This was to be the main blow against the Church, for Peter was known to be her head. A miracle of God prevented the king from carrying out his plan, and Matthias from sating his inherited hatred against the Christians. Our answer, then, to the question concerning the responsibility for the persecution is this: Formally it was launched in the name and at the initiative of the king. But to Agrippa it was merely a means to a political end, quite in keeping with his irreligiousness. The responsibility and guilt also lay with those who had suggested that means to him, and with the high priest Matthias, the son of Annas, by whose co-operation the persecution was carried out.

Its frustration was a blow to the king, but did not decisively influence his politics. He had already secured for himself the allegiance of the people and of the ruling classes, and had, in the meantime, proceeded to make Jerusalem an impregnable fortress. The mighty foundations of the Third Wall, which he intended to build for this purpose, were never finished because of the speedy intervention of the legate of Syria,⁵⁰ who also frustrated Agrippa's attempt at a coalition with the princes to the north.⁵¹ All in all, then, Agrippa's scheme failed, and he remained the vassal of Rome, whom only a premature death saved from the fate which he dreaded, and which probably would have been his lot.

But we have to return to his last year. In his third year as king of Judea (A.D. 43-44), "Agrippa again took away the high priesthood from Matthias and made instead Eleonaios, the son of Kantheras (of the House of Boëthos) high priest."⁵² Josephus, as often in similar matters, does not give the reasons. Matthias no doubt had done all in his power to repair the prestige of his family, and to make the persecution a success. But the disappearance of Peter had put him

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 7, 2 (§§326-27). ⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 8, 1 (§§338-41). ⁵² *Ibid.*, (§342).

in a delicate position. The king was greatly annoyed. He had "intended after the Passover to bring [Simon Peter] out to the people" (Acts 12:4), that is, to make the trial a show. It stands to reason that the spectacle had been duly announced throughout the city; Agrippa and Matthias had chosen the Passover in order to have as many spectators as possible present. As Matthias had become high priest in A.D. 42, this feast was the Passover of A.D. 43. All was so arranged as to flatter the vainglory of the king and serve his general politics. All the greater was his disappointment at being deprived so unexpectedly of what he had enjoyed in anticipation. "He examined the guards and ordered their execution" (Acts 12:19); that was his first reaction. But the nameless soldiers could not pass as scapegoats; their death did not prevent the affair from becoming public knowledge. And so it was intelligible that he also deposed Matthias. He only waited for some months to give him a chance to search for Peter up and down the country. Hence, Josephus, who seems to put the dismissal of Matthias at the end of the third year of Agrippa, probably is correct.

The Acts, moreover, give the impression that with the disappearance of Simon Peter the persecution came to a sudden end. Agrippa, indeed, seems to have been so chagrined that he immediately turned his back on Jerusalem and went to Caesarea to restore his strained nerves in congenial pagan surroundings: "He went down from Judea to Caesarea where he made his abode," says Acts (12:19). He apparently returned no more to Jerusalem.⁵³ He started living outside the pale of Jewish convention, for which he was publicly attacked in the city, but to no avail; he did not return to Jerusalem or to his hypocritical Jewish life. After the fall of Matthias, the chief rival of the House of Annas, the House of Boëthos, got the upper hand.

ANNAS JUNIOR (A.D. 62)

We are not here concerned with the high priest before whom St. Paul was brought, about A.D. 58 (Acts 22:30); for there was no persecution of the Church, nor had the initiative for St. Paul's arrest and trial come from the high priest. For all we know, one Ananias, the son

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 7, 4—8, 2 (§§332-51), a passage not unfavorable to this conclusion.

of Nedebaios, was then high priest (from 47 to 59?). By giving order to the jailer to silence the prisoner by blows upon the mouth, he illustrated the statement of Flavius Josephus that the high priests of those days were of a rude disposition and uncouth even in dealing with their own kind.⁵⁴

We are more concerned with the events of the year 62. They are not reported by the Acts, but by Josephus, and this at some length. His description illustrates and confirms the main results of our study. He writes: "[Ananos, i.e., Annas] convoked the Synedrium for a judgment, and had a relative⁵⁵ of Jesus who is called the Christ, whose name was James, with some other people, dragged in; he made the accusation against them of transgressions against the Law, and had them stoned to death."⁵⁶ It was after the death of the procurator, Porcius Festus, in A.D. 62.⁵⁷ For some months there was no procurator; the news of the death of Festus had first to reach Rome; first, the chancery had to find a suitable successor whom the Emperor had to nominate, and this man then had to sail to Palestine. Consequently we have here another interruption in the series of the governors of the country. At the very beginning of this lordless period, King Herod Agrippa II deposed the high priest Josepos Kabi, Simon's son, of the House of Kamith, whom he had made high priest a short time before, and set up as high priest Ananos junior, a son—presumably the youngest—of Ananos, or Annas, senior. Josephus' report of this change suggests that the vacancy of the procuratorial see had something to do with it. It seems unlikely that Herod Agrippa had any desire for a political stroke; he was too subservient towards the Roman overlords. He rather succumbed to intrigues on the part of the House of Annas, which saw a unique chance to settle certain affairs. Ananos is here described by the Jewish historian as "of a violent disposition and extremely ruthless"; he belonged to the sect of the Sadducees, who, as Josephus remarks elsewhere, "in judging are more cruel than

⁵⁴ *Bell. jud.*, II, 8, 14 (§166).

⁵⁵ In oriental sources the word "brother" always had, and still has, the meaning "relative," unless the context makes clear that it means what our languages express by "brother."

⁵⁶ *Ant.*, XX, 9, 1 (§200).

⁵⁷ Cf. U. Holzmeister, S.J., *Historia Aetatis Novi Testamenti* (ed. 2^a, 1938), pp. 142-48; 158 f.

all the other Jews.”⁵⁸ Of the achievements of Ananos he mentions none except the persecution of the Christians. Ananos considered it his foremost task to strike at the Church, employing the method which his brother Matthias had used against her—that of killing the shepherds. Considering the rising unrest in his country and the daily increasing enmity against Rome, one would have thought that other tasks were more urgent than to wipe out the Church. But political wisdom obviously was not the strong point of Ananos; the traditional hatred of his family against the Christians prevailed over everything else. “Being such a man, Ananos thought that by the death of Festus, [his successor] Albinus having not yet arrived, the conditions were favorable” for his enterprise.⁵⁹ It was all according to the old formula: whenever for the moment Rome’s power was not efficient, violence at once became rampant.

The main victim of the persecution was James, a relative of Jesus, probably not one of the Twelve,⁶⁰ but the monarchic bishop of Jerusalem, to whom the Apostles had entrusted the mother-church even before A.D. 43. Besides, there were other people, presumably all prominent members of the Christian community, whom Ananos put to death. It was a disaster from which the Church of Jerusalem could not recover; she died practically with James. Looking on the whole period since the days of Annas senior, we may say that, in A.D. 62, the hatred of the House of Annas had reached its goal: no Messiah Jesus and no Church of Jesus any longer threatened its wealth and social position. But it was a victory in appearance rather than in reality. True, the Church in Palestine was gone, but it flourished elsewhere, throughout the Roman Empire and far beyond its frontiers. Moreover, the House of Annas was not allowed to enjoy this victory for long. Jesus, whom they had brought to the cross, was already on the point of coming to give judgment on all His enemies. In A.D. 67, the Zealots, as mentioned above, excluded all the ordinary sacerdotal families, consequently also the House of Annas, from the high priesthood, and thus deprived Matthias, the son of Theophilus of that House, of his position and income. In the following year the

⁵⁸ *Ant., loc. cit.*, (§199).

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, (§200).

⁶⁰ Cf. P. Gächter, S.J., *Introductio in Novum Testamentum* (Innsbruck, 1938), pp. 228–31.

ferocious Idumeans slew Ananos junior with many other nobles, and for three days left their bodies "naked, meat for dogs and other beasts," in a public square.⁶¹ Two more years, and the Temple was no more, nor did the world hear any more of the House of Annas or of any other highpriestly family.

Josephus also mentions here the immediate consequences of the persecution within the Jewish community. "[Annas' procedure] exasperated those very people who had the reputation of being the most decent and most observant of the Law in the whole population [i.e., the Pharisean rabbis]. And so they secretly sent a deputation to the king [Herod Agrippa II] with the request to order Ananos to desist from such actions, for [they said that] what he had done up to then had been wrong. A certain number of them even went out to meet Albinus [the new procurator] on his journey from Alexandria. They informed him how much against the law it had been that Ananos without his consent had convoked the supreme penal court.⁶² Albinus agreed with them, and full of wrath wrote a menacing letter to Ananos, saying that he would bring him to book. At that, the king [Herod Agrippa] took the high priesthood away from him, after he had been in power only three months, and raised Jesus, the son of Damnaios, to that dignity."⁶³ Herod probably would not have done it on his own account, not because he had had anything to do with the persecution, for that would have been in contradiction with his mind as described in Acts (25:13-32), but because he felt obliged to Ananos for the sum for which he had purchased the dignity and hoped for more "gifts." The sources say nothing about it, but for Orientals, ancient and modern, that is a matter of course.

This intercession of the Pharisees on behalf of the Christians in an affair which did not concern them at all cannot be explained without supposing that they felt a remarkable sympathy for the Christian Church. This instance also confirms what we have said about similar steps of the Pharisees on former occasions. At the trial of Jesus they had sided with the high priest—not all of them, and certainly

⁶¹ *Bell. jud.*, IV, 5, 2 (§§316-17; 324).

⁶² *καθίσαι συνέδριον* here cannot mean, "to convoke the Synedrium," but requires the meaning, "to convoke a penal court, and this, *effectu secuto*: i.e., its death sentence was carried out. Only thus could the deputation argue before Albinus.

⁶³ *Ant.*, XX, 9, 1, (§§201-203).

not all to the same degree, many only halfheartedly. We also may take for granted that the death and resurrection of Jesus did not fail to make an impression upon the better ones among them. So their attitude on that occasion is not exclusive of a different attitude taken later towards the Church of Jesus, particularly as their sympathy with her went parallel to their opposition against the Sadducean chief priests. The struggle of the House of Annas against the Church and the sympathy of the Pharisees toward her and their intercession on her behalf are a striking proof of the great importance which the Church had in the public life of Jerusalem.

In this connection a word must be added concerning the historian Flavius Josephus.

If we had only his writings to follow, little or nothing could be said about the Church. In fact, he mentions her only at the trial of James, whereas he simply ignores the events recorded in Acts. This is perfectly in keeping with his mentality. In his biography he boasts of being a descendant of Maccabean kings and high priests, and not only does he exhibit a high veneration for the institution of the high priesthood, but betrays himself time and again as a partisan of the illegitimate high priests. Hence he paints them with as beautiful colors as possible—see his report of the reinstatement of Jonathan; and where for all his good will such colors could not be put on, he passes in silence over their meanness often enough, particularly when the reader expects to learn something of the reasons why a high priest was dismissed. With this tendency Josephus combines another, which he has in common with the Pharisees after the destruction of the Temple, namely, a deep-rooted antipathy against the Christians. That is why he ignores them, and why he extols their persecutors, Jonathan, Annas senior, and even Annas junior. The blame which, as we have seen, Josephus heaps on Annas junior, is more than balanced by the high praise which he lavishes on him in other passages, calling him, among other things, “a venerable man of the greatest decency.”⁶⁴

We have finished our survey. The last high priest of the House of Annas was Matthias, the son of Theophilus (A.D. 65–67). As there were hardly any Christians left, he had no chance of doing them harm.

⁶⁴ *Bell. jud.*, IV, 5, 2, (§319).

Apart from him and his father, Theophilus (A.D. 37–41), we have found that as often as a bloody persecution broke out against the Church of Jesus, a member of the House of Annas happened to be high priest; and, vice versa, as often as one of that House was high priest, a bloody persecution was set on foot against the Christians. Is this a mere coincidence? Certainly not. This parallelism requires a causal connection: the persecutions invariably had their chief reason in the enmity and hatred of the high priests of the House of Annas.

<i>Year</i>	<i>High Priest</i>	<i>Persecution</i>
A.D. 33	Annas senior	Crucifixion of Jesus Christ
33(34)	Caiaphas, his son-in-law	First trial of the Apostles
34	Caiaphas	Second trial of the Apostles (their murder thwarted)
36/37	Jonathan, son of Annas	Murder of St. Stephen, etc.
43	Matthias, son of Annas	Murder of St. James (Apostle) etc.
62	Ananos junior, son of Annas	Murder of St. James (Bishop) etc.

Thus we are entitled to call the House of Annas with its chief the protagonists against Jesus and His Church.