

# Shadow and Reality

The Philosophical and Religious Background of the Epistle to the Hebrews

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## Synopsis:

### Introduction

#### I. Hebrews and Philonism

- (a) **Allegorism**
  - Growth of a Greek allegorical tradition
  - Philo's allegorism
  - The Melchizedek theme in Hebrews
  - Allegory and typology
- (b) **Use of the Septuagint**
  - Exactness of quotation
  - Text of LXX used
  - Manner of citation
- (c) **Vocabulary**
  - Alleged Alexandrianisms
  - Words common to Hebrews and Philo
- (d) **Thought-Forms**
  - Philosophical presuppositions
  - Platonic Theory of Ideas and Eschatological Emphasis
  - "The living Word of God"
- (e) **Summary**

#### II. Hebrews and Qumran

- (a) **Biblical Exegesis**
  - The *peshet* method of interpretation
  - Peshet* and the exegesis in Heb. 10.37-39
  - The relation of ch. 11 to the exegesis in 10.37-39
  - Ch. 11 and Stephen's speech in Acts 7
  - Qumran use of O.T. quotation apart from the commentaries
  - Introductory formulae in Qumran literature
  - Possible use of *testimonia* in Qumran and Hebrews
- (b) **Attitude to Sacrifices, Temple and Priesthood**
  - Testimony of Philo and Josephus
  - Qumran emphasis on "superior purifications" and on "spiritual sacrifices"
  - Emphasis of Hebrews on the imperfection of the *cultus*
  - Temple or Tabernacle. The pilgrim people
  - Qumran and the corruption of the Jerusalem priesthood
  - Hebrews and the imperfection of the priesthood
  - Cullmann's hypothesis – John (Hebrews), Stephen, Qumran
  - Spicq's hypothesis – Hebrews, Apollos, John the Baptist, the Hellenists, Qumran
- (c) **Messianic Expectations**
  - The Messiahs of Aaron and Israel
  - The Melchizekian Messiah – priest and king
  - The concept of royal priesthood
- (d) **The New Covenant**
  - New Covenant and eschatology at Qumran
  - The basis of the New Covenant in Hebrews
- (e) **Summary**

### III. Hebrews and Early Christianity

- (a) **The Primitive Tradition**  
 Synoptic tradition – “temptations”, purification of the Temple, the rent veil of the Temple,  
 suffering “outside the gate”  
 Relation to the apostolic *kerygma*  
 Relation to primitive eschatology
- (b) **Paulinism**  
 Divergences of detail and theological emphasis  
 Correspondences in Christology  
 Further parallels
- (c) **Lucan Writings**  
 Styles of Luke-Acts and Hebrews  
 Westcott’s and Jones’ lists of words in common  
 Significant parallels  
 Minor details indicating a similarity of fact or detail  
 Emphasis on the ascension
- (d) **The Johannine Literature**  
 The concept of Law  
 The humanity and divinity of Jesus  
 The prologues to the Fourth Gospel and to Hebrews
- (e) **Summary**

### Conclusion

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Note:

- (1) French works are always quoted in English translation.
- (2) Philo and Eusebius of Caesarea are usually quoted from the translation in the Loeb Classical Library edition (Heinemann, London), standard annotations being used.
- (3) The Dead Sea Scrolls are usually quoted in T.T. Gaster’s translation. References to the Scrolls, however, have been cast in the form at present generally accepted by scholars.
- (4) Apart from normal abbreviations, attention is drawn to the use of the following –
  - LXX – Septuagint
  - Vg. – Vulgate
  - lit. – literal (translation)

The following abbreviations are made for journals –

- ET – *Expository Times*
- HJ – *Hibbert Journal*
- HTR – *Harvard Theological Review*
- JTS – *Journal of Theological Studies* (New Series)
- NTS – *New Testament Studies*
- RQ – *Révue de Qumrân*
- SJT – *Scottish Journal of Theology*

## Introduction

Eusebius of Caesarea has preserved Origen's statement on the subject of the authorship of Hebrews – "If any church holds this epistle as Paul's, let it be commended for this also. For not without reason have the men of old time handed it down as Paul's. But who wrote this epistle, in truth God knows" (*H.E.* VI. xxv. 13-14). Despite the many attempts to find the author of the Epistle, these latter words continue to represent the state of our knowledge.

However, it is not the present purpose to indulge in speculation concerning authorship, but to give attention to what is more basic and profitable than such speculation – *viz.* the philosophical and religious background of the Epistle.

The interest in the background of the Epistle was only aroused when the Pauline authorship became widely disputed. The first strong reaction was towards seeing the Epistle as predominantly Philonic. This movement reached its peak at the end of the nineteenth century in a complete denial of any Paulinism and an interpretation of the Epistle in terms of philosophical influences outside the New Testament.

With the discovery of the Qumran literature, however, considerable interest has been focused on the possible relationship of some of the New Testament writings to this literature. Now, it must be clearly stated at this point that a number of writers have seized the opportunity to attempt by ill-considered arguments to debunk the distinctiveness of the Christian message, stating that Christianity is merely a development of Essenism. Other writers have looked for Qumran connections as a kind of "latest fashion" in New Testament studies. Probably, however, conclusions of this kind of study should at this stage be more cautiously tentative, and, while each comparison should receive its due weight, a broader background of thought rather than specific dependence seems to be indicated.

An unfortunate result of the quest for the background of the Epistle has been the tendency noted above to consider it in terms of outside influences. There are some indications that this tendency may be passing, yet even in more recent considerations of Qumranian background the connections of the Epistle with the main-stream of early Christian thought are easily overlooked. Thus, to cite one notable example, the reaction against Pauline authorship has been taken to an unwarranted extreme with the emphasis on differences and little attention to resemblances.

It is the conviction of the present writer that the Epistle is to be seen *par excellence* as a Christian writing, and that its basic background is therefore the thought and experience of the early Christian church. This general judgement says nothing of cultural milieu and nothing of particular affinities within early Christianity. Nevertheless, to fail to appreciate this fact would be to miss that element in the Epistle which is key to its understanding.

The method pursued here has of necessity involved selection, both in the general areas considered and in the particular points reviewed. The aim has been to present sufficient material under each head to see where the evidence seems to point. To this end the present writer has sought to be fair and critical to all points of view including his own, preferring a solution which is cautious and tentative to one which tailors the evidence to fit some simple solution.

Three general areas seem to warrant consideration – Philonism, the Qumran literature and early Christianity. It is not suggested by this three-fold division that these areas are mutually exclusive, but that current studies indicate that all of these have bearing on the subject in hand.