

Jesus and the pharisees: an interpretation of compassion and holiness essay sampl...

[Sociology](#), [Communication](#)



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Smith: The Pharisees, Jesus, holiness and compassion

As noted by Smith, “ Politically, the position of the Jews during Jesus’ time was desperate” (321). Among the four Jewish sects, the Pharisees were the most adamant, if not organized, about revitalizing their status, and that of Judaism, under Roman rule. Like the Essenes and Zealots, the Pharisees sought the intervention of Yahweh to turn their fortunes.

Their approach was to adhere to a strict interpretation of the holiness code under Mosaic law. As they saw it, recognizing Yahweh’s majestic holiness was the pathway to the revitalization of Judaism. In positioning Jesus within the historical context, it is important to emphasize what the other sects had considered. The Sadducees, for example, assimilated into the Hellenistic culture. The Essenes were more pessimistic and essentially resorted to living their lives piously on communes removed from society. The Zealots took a military approach that had catastrophic consequences. The Pharisees outlook was comparable to Jesus; a peaceful and integrated approach to revitalization. The fundamental difference, notes Smith, was interpretation noting that “ The Pharisees stressed Yahweh’s holiness, while Jesus stressed Yahweh’s compassion” (321).

Yet this interpretation led to a fundamental divide. Utilizing God's words of the Hebrews as "a nation of priests," and that they "shall be holy," (Smith 322) was a reflection of the Jews as God's chosen people. As noted, Jesus' interpretation was of Yahweh's compassion. As such, the belief of the superiority of the Jews in God's eyes was divisive and lacking in compassion. From this position, Jesus recognized all as God's children. Jesus engaged with those the Pharisees perceived as unclean, defiled, profane, Gentile and sinner, as they interpreted from the holiness code. Smith describes Jesus as a "social prophet," challenging the existing conventions to which the Pharisees subscribed.

If we return to the fundamental difference between the Pharisees and Jesus, it was regarding holiness and compassion. As a point of clarity, Smith notes that, "the issue was not God's compassion; it was whether the social system that the holiness code in its outworkings had structured was compassionate" (323). This difference of interpretation was what led the Pharisees to charge Jesus with treason. The tumult prompted the Roman authorities to arrest Jesus, and subsequently execute him by crucifixion.

Novak: The World's Wisdom

Jesus' position to Let the Sinless Cast the First Stone, is a poignant example that judgement should always be pointed inwards. In relation to the holiness code to which the Pharisees subscribed to unequivocally, it reveals contradictions that arguably go to the root of their interpretation of the Mosaic code. Holding the belief that they were the chosen people gave a false sense of superiority to the Pharisees. The fact that they were the

determiners of one's cleanliness, or virtuousness as it relates to sin, was short-sighted in the context of compassion to which Jesus proselytized. Jesus' response to the crowd who aim to enforce Moses' law as it relates to adultery unveiled their own faults. Admonishing them for suggesting they were morally superior, or holier than the accused woman, Jesus reveals that in practice, the holiness code has its own shortcomings in relation to his teachings of compassion (Novak 243).

Works Cited:

Novak, Philip, and Philip Novak. *The world's wisdom: Sacred texts of the world's religions*. San Francisco: Harper, 1994. Print.

Smith, Huston. *The world's religions*. New York: Harper, 1991. Print.