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# Pharisees, scribes and Sadducees in Palestinian society: a sociological approach

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He notes that traditionally Muslims have viewed the Christian scriptures as corrupt and Christians have viewed the Muslim scriptures as derivative. In contrast, Kaltner wishes to focus on the interrelated meanings in the two scriptures apart from polemics regarding their origins and development. Unfortunately, the book ends rather abruptly without a conclusion, though there are helpful subject and scripture indexes.

It is difficult to pinpoint the audience for this book. It is probably too difficult for the uninitiated layperson but not satisfying for the scholar. For the layperson the introduction is too short and no guidance is given as to appropriate English translations of the Qur'an (the author employs his own translations of Qur'anic passages but relies on the New Revised Standard Version for biblical quotations). For the scholar not enough scholarship is cited and the book does not deal adequately with the seeming use of extra-biblical (that is, pseudepigraphical, apocryphal, and rabbinic) material in the Qur'an. However, the reviewer has successfully presented material out of this book to Christian lay audiences at retreat centers and in church groups and gatherings; as long as the presenter has some solid background knowledge of Islam, the book can be used by pastors, teachers, and others in various church and educational settings. As for scholars, they should be intrigued by Kaltner's notion of "intercanonical criticism" and see in it another useful tool in the exegetical toolbox and for interfaith understanding.

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### **Pharisees, Scribes and Sadducees in Palestinian Society**

Anthony J. Saldarini

Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001

325 pages, \$46.25 Softcover

Saldarini, who has also written on Jesus, Matthew, and rabbinic sources, here assesses the role of first-century Jewish groups using a functionalist, sociological approach (based on G. Lenski's *Power and Privilege: A Theory of Social Stratification*). This book is accessible to a general audience.

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In the first of three sections (3-75), Saldarini positions Pharisees, scribes, and Sadducees within the sociological makeup of Palestinian society, using the categories of class, status, and power. He argues that the Pharisees formed part of the retainer class (below the ruler and the governing class; above the merchant and priestly classes, who in turn were above the lower classes), while the Sadducees formed part of the governing class. The retainer class consisted of soldiers, educators, religious functionaries, entertainers, and skilled artisans, who were dependent on the others for economic support and power. The Scribes, in turn, are perceived as literate individuals drawn from many parts of society who filled many social roles depending on their status, from small village scribes to wealthy attendants to rulers.

The second section (79-237) examines the literary sources that shed light on the role of these Jewish groups. These include Josephus, the New Testament, and Rabbinic sources, although the latter are only incidentally important. Josephus' main concern throughout his writings is with the stability of a group. Thus, his evaluation of these groups was generally positive since he saw them as basically a force for order. He also describes briefly the views of the three groups on the afterlife and relations between God and humans.

The New Testament's Pharisees, as is well known, are depicted more contentiously. All four Gospels view the Pharisees in competition with Jesus. Matthew and Mark mainly portray them in conflict over Sabbath observance and purity, rather than theological issues, and Matthew's depiction is more negative. Saldarini notes that John's Gospel presents a more ominous picture of the Pharisees, associating them with those who intend harm to Jesus. Meanwhile, the Scribes and the Sadducees remain ghostly figures in all our sources. Saldarini argues that evidence from all of the sources points to the Pharisees and Sadducees being schools of thought rather than sects, as they have often been described.

The third section (241-308) offers valuable comparative source analyses. Josephus, for instance, is almost exclusively concerned with the Pharisees. His Pharisees are a political interest group who strove to influence the direction and leadership of society: they held a particular interpretation of Jewish tradition and distinct views on how Judaism should be lived.

Readers will not find here a radical new perspective. Nevertheless, Saldarini's book offers dependable, thoughtful analyses that will be



particularly interesting to those concerned with the diversity of religious life in the first century, and with setting early Christianity in its Jewish matrix.

Amanda R. Witmer  
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## **Jesus as a Figure in History: How Modern Historians View the Man from Galilee**

Mark Allan Powell

Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1998

238 pages, \$33.95 Softcover

During the past decade, scholarship on the historical Jesus has seen a remarkable resurgence. Confident in their methodologies and conclusions, spotlighted in the secular media, scholars such as Robert Funk and John Dominic Crossan have generated new light — and no little controversy — regarding the historical figure of Jesus.

In *Jesus as a Figure in History* Mark Allan Powell provides an excellent and useful guide through the field of contemporary scholarship on the historical Jesus. Some of the scholars in this field are people of Christian faith, while others are not. What they share is the assumption that the methods of normal historical enquiry are to be used in order to discover reliable data about the figure of Jesus. Where these scholars differ is in which methods they espouse and in their understanding of what is historically reliable; the result is a series of more or less divergent pictures of Jesus in comparison with the Jesus of the church's tradition. In effect, Powell's book is also a study in the strengths and weaknesses of the assumptions and methodologies evident in current scholarship on the historical Jesus.

The two initial chapters trace the history of the quest for the historical Jesus, survey the primary sources, and describe the criteria which have been developed in the field. Chapter 3 looks at brief "snapshots" of the historical Jesus, i.e., aspects of Jesus' career (rather than wholesale portraits) which have been emphasized by certain recent scholars: Richard A. Horsley (Jesus as social prophet), Geza Vermes (Jesus as charismatic Jew), Morton Smith (Jesus as magician), Ben Witherington