

Hypocrisy? What's *That*?

The End of "Hypocrisy"

In many of his encounters with the religious establishment of the day, Jesus was exposing hypocrisy. Mostly, it was members of the Pharisee party who were shown to be acting contrary to their declared principles, and so "pharasaism", in our culture, generally means hypocritical (yes, I know it's now thought that, in most cases, the *actual* Pharisees were not of the spiritually-degenerate sort found in the Gospels).

Today, if Jesus was here, exposing peoples' determination to act contrary to their own judgements on others, he'd be faced with a shrug and a reply of "So?" – because (have you noticed?) it's now quite "cool" to condemn others, while benefitting from what they have done and represent, and not at all shameful. I noticed this regarding several condemnations of the behaviour and practices of the "Occupy" movement: The protesters condemn global capitalism and all its products, but still drink coffee-shop coffee, use cell phones, and erect tents bought from big high street chains (though often, it is said, they go home to suburbia to sleep); but the few commentators who point out these facts are brushed aside, ridiculed, almost: Why shouldn't they do these things? Just because you condemn Western means of production, markets, finance, and all that supports it, does that mean you can't enjoy its benefits? – certainly, this is the way that many of the so-called "chattering classes" - media people, and "opinion formers" – look at it.

This thinking is the product, of course, of society's loss of a moral framework, the absence of ideas of wrong and right that are fixed in absolutes, rather than the shape-shifting flexible world of post-modern relativism; and it is also the product of the great concern with *self*: the sole "good" of considering oneself first, and only.

Of course, in the past there were plenty of people whose behaviour and choices flew totally in the face of their supposed moral/ethical/ideological identity (think of the long-established practice of creating socialist/trade union *peers* – the founders of the Labour Party would surely be struck dumb to learn that their descends might accept seats in the House of *Lords*); but the critics of such people would never have been ridiculed, and their targets could never have answered with a shrug. In our society, for Jesus, exposing the duplicity of the many pharisees would not have cut it.

November 2011