

# Jesus the Peasant

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*Scattered across the countryside one may observe certain wild animals, male and female, dark, livid and burnt by the sun, attached to the earth which they dig and turn over with invincible stubbornness. However, they have something like an articulated voice and when they stand up they reveal a human face. Indeed, they are human beings. . . . Thanks to them the other human beings need not sow, labour and harvest in order to live. That is why they ought not to lack the bread which they have sown.*

—Jean la Bruyère, French moralist of late seventeenth century

*We want everybody to work, as we work. There should no longer be either rich or poor. All should have bread for themselves and for their children. We should all be equal. I have five small children and only one little room, where we have to eat and sleep and do everything, while so many lords (signori) have ten or twelve rooms, entire palaces. . . . It will be enough to put all in common and to share with justice what is produced.*

—Unnamed peasant woman from Piana dei Greci, province of Palermo, speaking to a north Italian journalist during an 1893 peasant uprising

*The voices that speak to us from antiquity are overwhelmingly those of the cultured few, the elites. The modern voices that carry on their tale are overwhelmingly those of white, middle-class, European and North American males. These men can, and do, laud imperialistic, authoritarian slave societies. The scholarship of antiquity is often removed from the real world, hygienically free of value judgments. Of the value judgments, that is, of the voiceless masses, the 95% who knew how “the other half” lived in antiquity. The peasants form no part of the literate world on which most reconstructions of ancient history focus. Indeed, the peasants—the pagani—did not even form part of the lowly Christian (town dweller’s) world. They are almost lost to historical view, because of their illiteracy and localism.*

—Thomas F. Carney, *The Shape of the Past*, xiv, 231n123

## I. THE PROBLEM OF THE HISTORICAL JESUS, STRATUM AND ATTESTATION

*Trying to find the actual Jesus is like trying, in atomic physics, to locate a submicroscopic particle and determine its charge. The particle cannot be seen directly, but on a photographic plate we see the lines left by the trajectories of larger particles it put in motion. By tracing these trajectories back to their common origin, and by calculating the force necessary to make the particles move as they did, we can locate and describe the invisible cause. Admittedly, history is more complex than physics; the lines connecting the original figure to the developed legends cannot be traced with mathematical accuracy; the intervention of unknown factors has to be allowed for. Consequently, results can never claim more than probability; but "probability," as Bishop Butler said, "is the very guide of life."*

—Morton Smith<sup>1</sup>

We have for Jesus, a first-century Mediterranean Jewish peasant, four biographies by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, individuals all directly or indirectly connected with him, at least according to tradition, and all composing within say seventy-five years after his death. That is as good or even better than we have for the contemporary Roman emperor, Tiberius, for whom we have biographies by Velleius Paterculus, Tacitus, Suetonius, and Dio Cassius, only the first of whom was directly connected with him, the others composing from seventy-five to two hundred years after his death. Why then with such ample documentation is there such a thing as the problem of the historical Jesus?

It is at heart precisely that four-fold record, even if there were no other external documents whatsoever, that constitutes the historical problem. If you read those four texts one after another from start to finish, you get a generally persuasive impression of unity, harmony, and agreement. But if you read them in parallel columns, focusing on this or that unit and comparing it across two, three, or four versions, it is disagreement rather than agreement which strikes you most forcibly. By even the middle of the second century, pagan opponents such as Celsus and Christian apologists such as Marcion or Tatian were well aware of those discrepancies. Their solution was to reduce that plurality to unity in one of the two obvious ways: either eliminate all gospels save one (the solution of Marcion) or laminate all of them into a single narrative (the solution of Tatian).

Over the last two hundred years, however, comparative work on the gospels has slowly but surely established certain conclusions. First, gospels are found not only inside but also outside the New Testament itself. Second,

1. Morton Smith, *Jesus the Magician* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), 6.

the four intracanonical gospels result from neither a total collection nor a random sampling of all those available. Rather they were selected and others rejected for reasons not only of content but even of form. Third, *original*, *developed*, and *created* Jesus materials are found alike within both intracanonical and extracanonical sources. Fourth, differences and discrepancies between accounts and versions are not due primarily to vagaries of memory or divergences in emphasis but rather to quite deliberate theological interpretations of Jesus. Finally, what those first Jesus-followers experienced, even after his execution, as the continuing power of Jesus gave them a creative freedom we would never have dared postulate were it not forced upon us by the evidence. For example, even when Matthew and Luke are using Mark as a source for what Jesus said or did or what others said or did to Jesus, they are unnervingly free in their own individual accounts, even within ancient tolerances about omission and addition, about change, correction, and especially creation.

Thus the Jesus tradition contains three major layers or strata: an *original* stratum retaining at least the essential core of words and deeds, events and happenings from the life of the historical Jesus; a *developed* stratum, changing the data for new situations, novel problems, and unforeseen circumstances; and a *created* stratum, not only composing new sayings and new stories but above all composing larger complexes, textual juxtapositions, and narrative sequences which changed their contents by those very framings. My interest here is in that *original* layer, in the immediate situation of the historical Jesus, but I reject absolutely any pejorative language for those other two strata. I have no presumption whatsoever that those latter layers are illicit, invalid, useless, or detrimental. Jesus left behind him thinkers not memorizers, disciples not repeaters, people not parrots.

How does one search back through those sedimented layers to find what Jesus actually said and did, and especially how does one do so with some scholarly integrity and some methodological validity? How does one avoid in other words digging into the vast mound of the Jesus tradition to affirm as *original* whatever pleases one's own predispositions and to discard as *developed* or *created* whatever does not?

In starkest summary my method presumes the conjunction of two processes. One process studies the Christian textual foreground through three successively superimposed stages: inventory, stratigraphy, and attestation. *Inventory* means giving a complete listing of all sources and documents, intracanonical and extracanonical, to be used. *Stratigraphy* means arranging them in a chronological sequence according to their dates. *Attestation* means assessing how many independent attestations we have for each unit. For example, the solemn entry of Jesus into Jerusalem is now found in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. That is not, unfortunately, a four-fold independent attestation since it is most likely that all the others

are taken from Mark. I have for that unit, therefore, only a single attestation from Mark in a stratum dating to the early seventies of the common era. My methodological discipline is to concentrate on multiple independent attestations from the first stratum, that is from materials dating between 30 and 60 C.E. I base nothing on single attestation even though *theoretically* such units might well be original—for example, “The Good Samaritan” or “The Prodigal Son,” parables found only in Luke. But such units must be precluded *methodologically* until a later stage of the investigation. Biblical injunction and journalistic ethic demand multiple independent witnesses. So does my method.

However, the second process is equally important. This takes the Jewish social background and asks: where in the Mediterranean world of the first common era century is that original stratum to be located? My hypothesis places Jesus among the illiterate peasantry of a colonial country within an agrarian empire, and it applies cross-cultural and comparative (if you prefer, multicultural) anthropology to describe the expected parameters of such a situation. I employ again three successively superimposed models: peasantry, resistance, radicalism.

The first model, *peasantry*, is based on Gerhard E. Lenski’s *Power and Privilege*, and its model for an agrarian society characterized by the iron plow and abysmal social inequality separating the upper classes from the lower classes.<sup>2</sup>

The second model, *resistance*, comes from Bryan R. Wilson’s *Magic and the Millennium*.<sup>3</sup> He proposes a seven-fold typology of resistance to colonialism, but as his title suggests, he especially emphasizes two of these reactions: *Thaumaturgists* with their magic and *Revolutionists* with their millennium. It is in the former category that I locate the earliest Jesus-tradition, and I read it against this commentary from Wilson:

New thaumaturgical movements represent a deviant religious response—a

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2. Gerhard E. Lenski, *Power and Privilege: A Theory of Social Stratification* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966). The vast majority of the lower classes was composed of peasants, about two-thirds on average of whose produce was taken to support the upper classes. I place Jesus in this class, leaving open whether he was a peasant farmer or a peasant artisan. Only Mark says he was a carpenter, so I do not build on that information. In any case, as Lenski emphasized, “in most agrarian societies, the artisan class was originally recruited from the ranks of the dispossessed peasantry and their noninheriting sons and was continually replenished from these sources.” In other words peasant artisans ranked below peasant farmers.

3. Bryan R. Wilson, *Magic and the Millennium: A Sociological Study of Religious Movements of Protest among Tribal and Third-World Peoples* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973).

sectarian religious response—largely because of the newness of their ritual procedures and organizational forms. They become a protest against traditional religious practice—itsself high thaumaturgical—because they pit new measures, and (often) new conceptions of social nexus, against the old. As a “protest” such new movements are muted comments on the inadequacy of previous procedures rather than an articulate condemnation. Their practice, however, is often enough to make evident at least a temporary rejection of older procedures, and of those who control them. . . . Thaumaturgical belief is not only the pristine religious orientation, it is also more persistent than millennialism. The many little failures of magic are less disturbing to believers than the one big periodic failure of the millennium, and are more easily explained away.<sup>4</sup>

The third and most important model, *radicalism*, is deeply indebted to the articles and books of James C. Scott, from *The Moral Economy of the Peasant* in 1976 through *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* in 1990.<sup>5</sup> His work is based on field work among the contemporary Southeast Asian peasantry. Such groups are the essential antidote to any elitist presumption that peasantry means inanity and illiteracy means stupidity. Peasants, he argues, oppose their exploitation not only with unusual and climactic revolts but with usual and continual resistance on the material, symbolical, and ideological level. And indeed since their external behavior is so often forcibly constrained, it is on the internal ideological level that protest persists most profoundly.

I quote from Scott at some length now lest my later comments about Jesus’ egalitarianism be taken as crudely projecting a contemporary democratic idealism anachronistically back onto the performance of the historical Jesus. I emphasize most strongly that radical egalitarianism can stem at its deepest level from peasant society as such. According to Scott:

The popular religion and culture of peasants in a complex society are not only a syncretized, domesticated, and localized variant of larger systems of thought and doctrine. They contain almost inevitably the seeds of an alternative symbolic universe—a universe which in turn makes the social world in which peasants live less than completely inevitable. Much of this radical

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4. *Ibid.*, 192, 492-93.

5. See James C. Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Subsistence and Rebellion in Southeast Asia* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1976); “Patronage or Exploitation?” in *Patrons and Clients in Mediterranean Societies*, eds. Ernest Gellner and John Waterbury (London: Duckworth, 1977), 21-39; “Protest and Profanation: Agrarian Revolt and the Little Tradition,” *Theory and Society* 4 (1977): 1-38, 211-46; *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985); and *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990).

symbolism can only be explained as a cultural reaction to the situation of the peasantry *as a class*. In fact, this symbolic opposition represents the closest thing to class consciousness in pre-industrial agrarian societies. It is as if those who find themselves at the bottom of the social heap develop cultural forms which promise them dignity, respect, and economic comfort which they lack in the world as it is. A real pattern of exploitation dialectically produces its own symbolic mirror image within folk culture.<sup>6</sup>

This quotation is from a fascinating analysis which moves from Europe to Southeast Asia, noting the "little" tradition's common reaction to such disparate "great" traditions as Christianity, Buddhism, and Islam and arguing very persuasively that peasant culture and religion is actually an anticulture which qualifies alike both the religious and political elites oppressing it. It is in fact a reflexive and reactive inversion of the pattern of exploitation common to the peasantry *as such*.

"The radical vision to which I refer," Scott continues,

is strikingly uniform despite the enormous variations in peasant cultures and the different great traditions of which they partake. . . . At the risk of overgeneralizing, it is possible to describe some common features of this reflexive symbolism. It nearly always implies a society of brotherhood in which there will be no rich and poor, in which no distinctions of rank and status (save those between believers and non-believers) will exist. Where religious institutions are experienced as justifying inequities, the abolition of rank and status may well include the elimination of religious hierarchy in favor of communities of equal believers. Property is typically, though not always, to be held in common and shared. All unjust claims to taxes, rents, and tribute are to be nullified. The envisioned utopia may also include a self-yielding and abundant nature as well as radically transformed human nature in which greed, envy, and hatred will disappear. While the earthly utopia is thus an anticipation of the future, it often harks back to a mythic Eden from which mankind has fallen away.<sup>7</sup>

## II. THE PROGRAM OF THE HISTORICAL JESUS

*The body is a model which can stand for any bounded system. Its boundaries can represent any boundaries which are threatened or precarious. The body is a complex structure. The functions of its different parts and their relations afford a source of symbols for other complex structures. We cannot possibly interpret rituals concerning excreta, breast milk, saliva, and the rest unless we are prepared to see in the body a symbol of society, and to*

6. Scott, "Protest and Profanation," 224.

7. *Ibid.*, 225-26.

*see the powers and dangers credited to social structure reproduced in small on the human body.*

—Mary Douglas<sup>8</sup>

*In all societies, both simple and complex, eating is the primary way of initiating and maintaining human relationships. . . . [O]nce the anthropologist finds out where, when, and with whom the food is eaten, just about everything else can be inferred about the relations among the society's members. . . . [T]o know what, where, how, when, and with whom people eat is to know the character of their society.*

—Peter Farb and George Armelagos<sup>9</sup>

*Patients suffer "illnesses"; physicians diagnose and treat "diseases." . . . [I]llnesses are experiences of devalued changes in states of being and in social function; diseases, in the scientific paradigm of modern medicine, are abnormalities in the structure and function of body organs and systems. . . . The very limitations of their technology kept indigenous healers more responsive to the extra-biological aspects of illness, for it was chiefly those aspects they could manipulate. Our success in dealing with certain disease problems breeds the ideological error that a technical fix is the potential solution to all. It would be absurd to suggest that we should forego the power of Western medicine in deference to shamanism. It is essential to enquire how we can expand our horizons to incorporate an understanding of illness as a psychological event. Indeed, our worship of restricted and incomplete disease models can be viewed as a kind of ritual or magical practice in itself.*

—Leon Eisenberg<sup>10</sup>

The aphorisms and parables of the historical Jesus often bespeak a radical egalitarianism, but were they accompanied by any social program? Was it all an act of ecstatic imagination and rhapsodic vision, or did it also contain policies, plans, and procedures for communal implementation? My affirmative answer is based on three independent sources, two of which date from the earliest stratum of the Jesus tradition:

When you go into any land and walk about in the districts, if they receive

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8. Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966), 115.

9. Peter Farb and George Armelagos, *Consuming Passions: The Anthropology of Eating* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1980), 4, 211.

10. Leon Eisenberg, "Disease and Illness: Distinctions Between Professional and Popular Ideas of Sickness," *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry* (1977): 11.

you, eat what they will set before you, and heal the sick among them (Gospel of Thomas 14:2).

Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and salute no one on the road. Whatever house you enter, first say, "Peace be to this house!" And if a son of peace is there, your peace shall rest upon him; but if not, it shall return to you. And remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they provide, for the laborer deserves his wages; do not go from house to house. Whenever you enter a town and they receive you, eat what is set before you; heal the sick in it and say to them, "The kingdom of God has come near to you." But whenever you enter a town and they do not receive you, go into its streets and say, "Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off against you; nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God has come near" (Synoptic Sayings Gospel [Q] in Luke 10:4-11 = Matthew 10:8-14).

He charge them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; but to wear sandals and not put on two tunics. And he said to them, "Where you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. And if any place will not receive you and they refuse to hear you, when you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet for a testimony against them." So they went out and preached that men should repent. And they cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many that were sick and healed them (Mark 6:8-13 = Matthew 10:8-10a, 11 = Luke 9:2-6).

Jesus called his practice and program the presence of the Kingdom or better the Rule of God, but that expression must be interpreted primarily in the light of those actions. It did not mean for Jesus, as it could for others, the imminent apocalyptic intervention of God to set right a world taken over by evil and injustice. It meant the presence of God's kingdom here and now in the reciprocity of open eating and open healing, in lives—that is of radical egalitarianism on both the socio-economic (eating) and the religious-political (healing) levels.

### *Eating*

All three sources indicate that we are not just dealing with almsgiving but with an open table. Multicultural anthropology uses the term *commensality* for those decisions about what we eat, where we eat, when we eat, and above all with whom we eat as forming a miniature map of our social distinctions and hierarchies. But Jesus in rejection of this cartography of discrimination, advocates instead an open commensality. The missionaries do not carry a bag because they do not beg for alms or food or clothing or anything else. They share a miracle and a Kingdom, and they receive in return a table and a house. Here I think is the heart of the original Jesus movement: a shared egalitarianism of spiritual and material resources



where materiality and spirituality, facticity and symbolism cannot be separated. The mission we are talking about is not, like Paul's, a dramatic thrust along major trade routes to urban centers hundreds of miles apart. Yet it concerns the longest journey in the Greco-Roman world, maybe in any world, the step across the threshold of a peasant stranger's home.

Shared home and common meal must be understood, as this section's second epigraph indicates, against the cross-cultural anthropology of food and commensality. But I cannot emphasize one point too strongly: commensality is not almsgiving, almsgiving is not commensality. Generous almsgiving may even be conscience's last great refuge against the terror of open commensality. For Jesus, however, commensality was not just a strategy for supporting the mission. That could have been done by alms, wages, charges, or fees of some sort. It could have been done, for instance, by simple begging in good Cynic fashion. Commensality was rather a strategy for building or rebuilding peasant community on radically different principles from those of honor and shame, patronage and clientage. It was based on an egalitarian sharing of spiritual (healing) and material (eating) power at the most grass-roots level. And for the reason, dress and equipment appearance was just as important as house and table response.

### *Healing*

Open eating and open healing are reciprocally linked in all three sources. I understand healing, as this section's third epigraph indicates, within the basic distinction made in cross-cultural medical anthropology and modern comparative ethnomedicine between doctors who *cure disease* and those others who, under whatever name, *heal illness*. I presume, for example, as fundamentally correct the superb study by Arthur Kleinman entitled *Patients and Healers in the Contest of Culture*.<sup>11</sup> One example, based on John Pilch's article on "Biblical Leprosy and Body Symbolism,"<sup>12</sup> will help to explain and apply that key difference between biomedicine's *curing of disease* seen as a biological or psychological malfunction within an isolated body and ethnomedicine's *healing of illness* seen as a social and cultural interpretation within a shared community.

The story about Jesus and the leper (found, for example, in Mark 1:40-45) comes to us already suffused with intense theological damage control, insisting that Jesus conformed strictly to the legal requirements

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11. Arthur Kleinman, *Patients and Healers in the Contest of Culture: An Exploration of the Borderland between Anthropology, Medicine, and Psychiatry* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1980).

12. John Pilch, "Biblical Leprosy and Body Symbolism," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 11 (1981): 108-13.

while what he was actually doing of course was negating their validity. If read in biomedical terms, this story claims that Jesus cured the disease later named after Gerhard Hansen, who discovered the bacillus *myobacterium leprae* in 1968, a disease probably brought from India to Palestine by Alexander's veterans and known in the Greco-Roman world as *elephas*.

However, read in ethnomedical terms a very different process is revealed. Recall this section's first epigraph and the interaction between society and body as macrocosm and microcosm, between as it were the body politic and the politic body proposed by Mary Douglas. For example, legislators seeking to protect a society's status endangered by imperial engulfment will not only legislate very carefully about macrocosmic orifices and surfaces, margins and boundaries, but equally closely about their microcosmic equivalents. Thus in Leviticus 13-15 there is legislation deciding pure/impure, clean/unclean, or more simply in/out, applying these distinctions to both potential bodily orifices (in Lev. 13-14) and permanent bodily orifices (in Lev. 15). Such boundary protection is clearly easier in the latter case, where there are clear and permanent orifices to watch in both females and males.

But what if one could not tell orifice from surface? What if surfaces began to rot, spot, and degenerate into semiorifice. The Hebrew and Greek terms for that phenomenon in Leviticus 13-14 we quite mistakenly translate as our modern *leprosy*. This term is applied to skin in 13:1-46, clothes in 13:47-59, and house walls in 14:33-53. We might translate the term as scaliness, mildew, rot, flakiness. But whatever the term this condition attacks the three standard separating boundaries of skin, clothes, wall. And a person with boundaries so afflicted is isolated and quarantined from the community pending official cure and reinstatement. Whatever the actual *disease*, the *illness* was in the separation from family and village, a fate close to death in the ancient Mediterranean world of dyadic face-to-face culture, where one took one's identity from the eyes of others.

Such an *illness* Jesus healed. The *disease* as such was not cured. He healed the illness by refusing to accept the official quarantine, by refusing to stay separate from the sick person, by touching him and thereby confronting others with a challenge and a choice. By so doing of course, he was making extremely subversive claims about who defined the community, who patrolled its boundaries, who controlled its entries and exits—in other words who was in charge. As Arthur Kleinman reminds us: "In traditional societies . . . health care systems may be the major mechanism for social control."<sup>13</sup>

Jesus and his followers healed illness. In my opinion they never cured disease except when and if it happened indirectly through that former and

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13. Kleinman, 41.

much more important process. And when such actions got Jesus into very serious trouble, it was certainly not, as the authorities would have understood very clearly, for practicing medicine without a license.

### *Itinerancy*

Finally, in the Jesus movement, the healers make house calls. Healing is shared freely in the only way that is truly free for a peasant: it comes to you. Ever since the ground-breaking studies of Gerd Theissen in the early seventies,<sup>14</sup> the itinerant radicalism of Jesus and of the original Jesus movement has been a major topic of discussion and controversy. Itinerant radicalism means that one's itinerancy or even vagrancy is a programmatic part of one's radical message. But is itinerancy a simple functional necessity of mission or does it actually have a radical sociosymbolic meaning? It may seem that itinerancy or vagrancy sends a message of no fixed abode, of being atopic wanderers within an alien world. But such a message is far better sent by staying in one place, where everybody knows who you are, and living like Diogenes in a barrel.

So how was the Jesus movement's itinerancy programmatically radical? My answer relies on recent work about patronage, brokerage, and clientage within Mediterranean culture in general and the Roman Empire in particular. According to John Davis in his book *The People of the Mediterranean*, these processes are "the bedrock of political life in most of those mediterranean communities which anthropologists have studied."<sup>15</sup> The itinerancy of Jesus' movement was radical because it was a symbolic repudiation of that hierarchical system which was the celestial and terrestrial, heavenly and earthly, supernatural and natural heartbeat of the Roman world. For Jesus, God was not a patron for whom he was the broker and his followers the clients. Neither Jesus nor his followers were supposed to settle down in one place and establish there a brokered presence. And as healers we would expect them to stay in one place, to establish around them a group of followers, and to have people come to them. Instead they go out to people and have as it were to start anew each morning. If Jesus was a well-known magician, healer, or miracle-worker, first his immediate family and next his village would expect to benefit from and partake in the handling of that fame and those gifts. Any Mediterranean peasant would

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14. Gerd Theissen, "Itinerant Radicalism: The Tradition of Jesus Sayings from the Perspective of the Sociology of Literature," *Radical Religion* 2 (1975 [from 1973]): 84-93; *Sociology of Early Palestinian Christianity*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978 [from 1977]).

15. John Davis, *The People of the Mediterranean: An Essay in Comparative Social Anthropology* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), 146-47.

expect an expanding ripple of patronage, brokerage, and clientage to go out from Jesus through his family and his village to the outside world. But Jesus refused to stay either in his family's home at Nazareth or Peter's home at Capernaum because only itinerancy could symbolize unbrokered egalitarianism available openly and freely to all alike.

### *Dress*

These first three elements of eating, healing, and itinerancy occur alike in all three of my prime sources. Dress or dress code occurs in only two and is therefore less secure as a defining characteristic of Jesus' program. However, dress seems so closely linked to those more secure themes that, at least in working hypothesis, I consider it also as part of Jesus' original program.

For economy's sake, I focus here on only one prohibition from that dress code: they are not to carry a *bag* or what we might term a knapsack. In most cases the dress code for Jesus' followers agreed with that of Greco-Roman Cynics, but the Cynics in contrast did carry such a *bag*—as a symbol that all they needed could be carried on their hip.

Cynics were urban missionaries who preached to ordinary people in marketplace and temple courtyard a radically counter-cultural lifestyle attacking not just Greco-Roman society but civilization itself. They were followers of Diogenes of Sinope, who lived from about 400 to about 320 B.C.E. Their title "cynic" came from *kyon*, the Greek word for dog, originally a derogatory term for the provocative shamelessness with which Diogenes deliberately flouted basic human codes of propriety and decency, custom and convention. In other words the Cynics preached by their dress and lifestyle as much as by their ideology and philosophy. And ordinary people who might miss their theoretical arguments could hardly miss their symbolic provocations.

Within the context provided by such provocative behavior, the symbolic dress and equipment of Jesus' missionaries, who carried *no bag* in contrast to the Cynics who ostentatiously carried only a bag, emphasized not their self sufficiency but their interactive dependency. Such symbolic dress thus confirmed and emphasized the heart of Jesus' program, the reciprocity of eating and healing.

### III. CONCLUSION

Both focus and space preclude a wider discussion of other forms and reforms which made first-century Judaism such a magnificently variegated tapestry across the early Roman Empire. Such limits also precluded full consideration of all those types and styles of Christianity which arose from,

around, and after Jesus himself. I do not presume that Christianity was a crude betrayal of Jesus, although such accusations are always tempting in their provocativeness. I think that Christianity, then, now, and always, must be in dialectic with the historical Jesus and that betrayal only occurs when such interaction is too prudently avoided or too completely refused.

Finally I ponder how things moved in only three centuries from the open commensality of Jesus' practice and program among the peasants of Lower Galilee to the Christian bishops banqueting with the Emperor Constantine at the conclusion of the Council of Nicea. I end with a parable which might help somewhat to explain the speed and line of that development. It is Oscar Wilde's "The Disciple" taken from Richard Ellman's 1988 biography of Wilde:

When Narcissus died, the flowers of the field were desolate and asked the river for some drops of water to weep for him. "Oh!" answered the river, "if all my drops of water were tears, I should not have enough to weep for Narcissus myself. I love him." "Oh!" replied the flowers of the field, "how could you not have loved Narcissus? He was beautiful." "Was he beautiful?" said the river. "And who should know better than you? [replied the flowers.] Each day, leaning over your bank, he beheld his beauty in your waters." "If I loved him," replied the river, "it was because, when he leaned over my waters, I saw the reflection of my waters in his eyes."