

**Leif E. Vaage: Moving Targets – Q, Itinerancy & Early Christian History**  
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25 April 2008 DRAFT FOR DISCUSSION – Not to be cited without permission (lest ye wish to have unexpected visitors knocking at thy door just before nightfall)

### **1. Introduction**

The topic of ‘Q’ is interesting – or should be – primarily as a question; which is to say, it represents an opportunity to question not a few assured results and standard operating assumptions on the basis of which modern biblical scholars and historians of religion otherwise do their early Christian business. Some of the ways in which this is true are well-known or, at least, routinely rehearsed. These include the issues: Can we call Q a bona fide early Christian gospel? Did it have a passion narrative? Does it refer to Jesus’ death and/or resurrection? What is the nature of the relationship between John and Jesus in this document? Can we speak of a multi-stage composition-history for Q? And if so, in which key did it begin? Was apocalyptic (prophetic) eschatology the motherboard of invention or was it sapiential (secular) reasoning?

Even in these regards, however, it is striking how the effect of scholarly conversation about Q has been steadily to erode any interrogative difference it might make. Thus, for example, in addition to the constant carping about the hypothetical nature of Q (to which I shall shortly return), the debate about Q’s status as a gospel fails to ask why Q would need to be a gospel in order to be taken seriously. The lack of a passion narrative in Q does not prevent most scholars from insisting that its author(s) must have known about Jesus’ death. Likewise, although there is no explicit reference to either Jesus’ death or his resurrection in the document, scholars continue to speak nonetheless about some kind of ‘post-mortem vindication’ for him here. If John and Jesus are deemed to be more equal to one another in Q than elsewhere in early Christian writing, this is still supposed to tell us something important primarily about Jesus (rather than, say, about John). Wisdom and apocalyptic (prophetic) eschatology remain the dominant (canonical) categories of description, even if and when their relative sequence and respective characters are hotly disputed.

The topic of Q has thus become more and more a matter of quibbling about specific details and generic definitions within the usual scholarly narrative of Christian origins. In a word, Q has been normalized as a proper subject for scholarly inquiry and discussion by ceasing to quarrel with any major conviction or conclusion about what we know historically (including theologically) regarding earliest Christianity. This is also true, I contend, for more rigorously sociological or socio-historical approaches.

This is too high a price to pay, in my opinion, at least for continuing to be interested in the topic of Q. Precisely because it is a hypothetical text – which is to say the one that necessarily emerges in the wake of accepting the Two Document Hypothesis as the best solution to the Synoptic Problem, Q is interesting only because of what it reveals about the field of Early Christian History responsible for its discovery. If Q turns out to tell us nothing that we didn’t already know, merely sponsoring more scholarly business as usual, then it’s hardly worth the trouble it takes to talk about it; although

much of the scholarly conversation to date appears to be more about damage control than it has been about inquiry and revision in response to surprise and bewilderment.<sup>1</sup>

This paper takes the topic of Q generally and specifically the issue of itinerancy as a telling case in point to raise questions about the discipline of Early Christian History. Gerd Theissen's inaugural work on *Wanderradikalismus* and the critique of it with its various offspring by William Arnal serve as a further focus. My overriding concern, however, is how these discussions generally fail to imagine or, worse, routinely exclude certain possibilities from the realm of historical reality. The issue of itinerancy in Q registers one of these possibilities, and for this reason I raise it here anew.

If I am successful in demonstrating cause for reconsideration of the topic, a seminar devoted to the larger question of religion and travel in Mediterranean antiquity would receive therewith a cautionary tale, since I hope to show that there is a bias in our scholarship-to-date against the inchoate shifting, tentative circumnavigation, and frequently desperate adventures which mark (ancient) social life at the margins of so-called normal reality.

## **2. Itinerancy, Q and William Arnal: *Jesus and the Village Scribes***

William Arnal likely does not see himself as a scholar doing damage control where Q (or any other area of Early Christian History) is concerned. In fact, I am fairly certain that Arnal has sought to make as much trouble as possible for prevailing scholarly accounts of Christian origins. Indeed, this is the reason why I find it worthwhile discussing his failure in *Jesus and the Village Scribes: Galilean Conflicts and the Setting of Q* to read with perspicacity Gerd Theissen's original proposal of *Wanderradikalismus* as the *Sitz im Leben* of the earliest synoptic tradition.

At issue here is not defending (or deriding) the traditional (biblical) scholarly narratives of Christian origins – both Arnal and I agree that we are not persuaded by them as historiography – but, rather, discerning and deciding what the other options are. Arnal appears to be convinced that, at least regarding Q, the trope of “itinerancy” has no future or even a meaningful past. I will argue differently.

In this essay, just to be clear, I do not pretend to address any number of issues undoubtedly of greater importance to Arnal in *Jesus and the Village Scribes* such as the socioeconomics of Roman Galilee or the requirements and procedures for a thoroughly social – or sociological – description of Christian origins, including the possibility of explaining why the project of Q was “doomed to failure.”<sup>2</sup> With Arnal, I take it for granted that all early Christian experience, including the original purveyors of Q, was imbedded in a social context; that scholarly description of this context should be as

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. A.J. Droge, “Cynics or Luddites? Excavating Q Studies,” *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* (forthcoming).

<sup>2</sup> See William E. Arnal, *Jesus and the Village Scribes: Galilean Conflicts and the Setting of Q* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), p. 200: “Such a program, a kind of nativistic renewal movement with a strong Luddite dimension ... was doomed to failure on two obvious grounds”; also p. 203. Cf. Thomas Pynchon, “Is It O.K. To Be A Luddite?” *The New York Times Book Review*, October 28, 1984: <http://www.nytimes.com/books/97/05/18/reviews/pynchon-luddite.html>. In my opinion, Pynchon's “defense” of Luddism vis-à-vis the literary tradition of the Serious Novel suggests a more interesting possibility for scholarly re-description of Christian origins (including Q) vis-à-vis the scientific tradition of Serious History than either Arnal's “realistic” sociology or Droge's redoing of “the Enlightenment critique of religion” – a possibility to be pursued elsewhere!

comprehensive and mundane as possible; and that the ultimate or enduring significance of the subject(s) in question is not a foregone conclusion. My interest in Q and itinerancy does not intend to call into question any of these assumptions.

First, then, let us be clear about the various things that have been wrong in the proposal of Q and itinerancy to date. Arnal lays low a fair swath of scrub-scholarship before him, beginning his harvest-purge of sociological silliness with the discovery of the *Didache* in 1873 and Adolf von Harnack's influential interpretation of it. Key aspects of Arnal's critique (which certainly apply to Harnack's notion of itinerant apostles and prophets in the *Didache* but do not derive from it since, in a word, these describe the *Zeitgeist* of Germany and Europe at the end of the nineteenth century) concern:

- i) the Colonial understanding of travel as mission (or mission as the self-evident rationale for travel);
- ii) the Romantic ideal of the pristine primitive; and
- iii) the Protestant suspicion of ordinary social structure as inherently disappointing, even when it is deemed to be an inevitable – because ostensibly necessary – domestication of the *Ur-genius* of freedom.

Arnal then claims that “this conception of radical itinerants [derived from a reading of the *Didache*] has been progressively retrojected further and further back into the dim recesses of the originary moments of the Christian movement.”<sup>3</sup> Gerd Theissen's 1973 proposal of *Wanderradikalismus* as the *Sitz im Leben* of the earliest synoptic tradition would be both a conduit and a catalyst for the on-going development of this legacy.

Although Arnal does “not think it would be much of an exaggeration to say that, within the field of Christian origins (an important caveat), Theissen is the eminent sociological theorist of our time,”<sup>4</sup> Theissen's work is said to be flawed, among other things, by “his ethical or ‘principled’ understanding of poverty and deprivation.”<sup>5</sup> There is also the “uncritical appropriation of texts noted by Stegemann.”<sup>6</sup> In view is the way in which the stock category of oral tradition from classical – Rudolph Bultmann's – form-criticism functions as a warrant for Theissen to ignore the distinct literary settings cum redactional histories in which his evidence is found; just as “many of the [other] categories Theissen seems to take for granted depend on older form-critical descriptions of early Christian settings – mission, church, a sharp distinction between Palestinian and Hellenistic environments, and the like – that must be abandoned as anachronistic or at the very least largely inapplicable to Q's specific setting.”<sup>7</sup> Thus far, I agree – with the caveat that the issue of Theissen's “ethical or ‘principled’ understanding of poverty and deprivation” finally proves impossible to disentangle from the disputed notion of itinerancy.

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<sup>3</sup> See Arnal, *Jesus and the Village Scribes*, p. 23.

<sup>4</sup> See Arnal, *Jesus and the Village Scribes*, p. 27.

<sup>5</sup> See Arnal, *Jesus and the Village Scribes*, p. 4.

<sup>6</sup> See Arnal, *Jesus and the Village Scribes*, p. 50; further, Wolfgang Stegemann, “Vagabond Radicalism in Early Christianity?: A Historical and Theological Discussion of a Thesis Proposed by Gerd Theissen,” in Willy Schottroff and Wolfgang Stegemann, eds., *God of the Lowly: Socio-Historical Interpretations of the Bible*, trans. M.J. O'Connell (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1984): 148-68.

<sup>7</sup> See Arnal, *Jesus and the Village Scribes*, p. 50.

Last but not least, there is Theissen's "structural-functionalist" model of Palestinian society (rightly criticized but hardly replaced by Richard A. Horsley). *Pace* Theissen's own claim to be developing a conflict model of society, Arnal writes that Theissen's sociology "necessarily prioritizes integration as the primary and explanatory social goal."<sup>8</sup> Indeed, I would argue that this sociological model is the reason why Theissen comes to emphasize more and more, especially in his 1977 *Soziologie der Jesusbewegung*, the idea of "sedentary sympathizers" as the self-evident counterpart to the "radical itinerants" without presenting additional (*viz.* any) evidence (from Q) for their erstwhile existence.<sup>9</sup>

No such complementary social alter-ego is required – it is not an integral feature of the basic proposal – in Theissen's 1973 article, "Wanderradikalismus."<sup>10</sup> I take this to be not the result of an oversight but indicative of a certain fault-line lying between the two ideas, namely, "radical itinerants" and "sedentary sympathizers." In fact, despite certain continuities that join to one another the two main iterations of Theissen's thesis of early Christian itinerancy, the 1977 book *Soziologie der Jesusbewegung* does not represent, in my judgment, essentially an extension or elaboration of the 1973 article.<sup>11</sup>

The 1973 article, "Wanderradikalismus," remains rooted, I would contend, in Theissen's exegetical inquiry as a form-critic; the 1977 book, by contrast, aims to explain the results of this inquiry sociologically.<sup>12</sup> The original proposal of itinerancy, in other words, registers a responsive reader's perplex – What can such discourse concretely mean? – before sponsoring a general theory of earliest Christian experience.

Here I begin to disagree with Arnal who claims: "As [Theissen's] preponderant focus on the itinerants themselves suggests, the real basis for adducing these sedentary

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<sup>8</sup> See Arnal, *Jesus and the Village Scribes*, p. 27.

<sup>9</sup> The *Didache* may play a more important role in Theissen's historical imagination in 1977 than it did in 1973.

<sup>10</sup> See Gerd Theissen, "The Wandering Radicals: Light Shed by the Sociology of Literature on the Early Transmission of Jesus Sayings," in *Social Reality and the Early Christians: Theology, Ethics, and the World of the New Testament*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992): 33-59, pp. 37-46. So-called "sympathizers" are mentioned only in passing and without import for the larger argument on p. 50. On p. 51 a rather different scenario of support for the radical itinerants is proposed, in which basically a common plight – being "outsiders" or "living on the fringes of society" and being "socially and religiously the down-and-outs" – is the primary reason for extending mutual aid. On p. 52, notably, "form criticism" is named as the author of this insight.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Arnal, *Jesus and the Village Scribes*, p. 24: "His [1977] book takes the same thesis [as in 1973] and expounds it in considerably more detail, filling in holes, expanding on suggestions, and generally presenting his views more fully and more convincingly than had been the case in the 1973 article ...." It is not clear to me whether Arnal recognizes, or would accept, the fault line I see running through Theissen's different versions of earliest Palestinian Christianity. This fault line is the unresolved tension between Theissen the (professional) form-critic and Theissen the (unprofessional) sociologist. Said otherwise, Theissen's exegetical sensibilities, on the one hand, take him into extraordinary possibilities which, on the other hand, his explanatory models render merely standard deviations. Rightly to be resisted with Arnal and other scholars is Theissen's explanatory model: namely, his structural-functionalist sociology. Still largely unexplored, however, by Arnal (and others – including, it seems to me, by Theissen himself) are the extraordinary possibilities disclosed through Theissen's exegetical work.

<sup>12</sup> Theissen's emerging sociological interest is already apparent in the 1973 article. I am not suggesting, therefore, that we make a Manichean distinction between the "good" 1973 "exegetical" article and the "evil" 1977 "sociological" book. I am insisting, however, that there is a significant difference between the two works, specifically regarding how they come to speak of itinerancy. And I am registering my own dissatisfaction with Theissen's sociological explanation of his exegetical findings.

supporters is their logical necessity to the itinerancy hypothesis: both as provision for the economic needs of the itinerants and as a pipeline to the written, organized, and obviously settled brand of Christianity that represents the immediate setting of all of our surviving records.”<sup>13</sup> Arnal betrays his own sociological *Vorverständnis* – in itself neither improper nor self-evident – by citing as “the real basis” for the assumption of sedentary supporters both “provision for the economic needs of the itinerants” and “the written, organized, and obviously settled brand of Christianity that represents the immediate setting of all of our surviving records” – including Q. Most debatable to my mind is the implication that the notion of itinerancy somehow must stumble and whither in the face of the social facts of economic need and, most especially, writing.

The fact that Q is written becomes, for Arnal, a crucial argument against the possibility of itinerants ever being responsible for the text.<sup>14</sup> Arnal invokes “the conundrum of why and how such texts [as Q] might have been composed *by itinerants* in the first place” and proceeds directly to ask:

Are itinerants literate? If so, what does this tell us about their original social location? Do itinerants, who claim to have given up all wealth and social connections, carry around just enough money in their nonexistent purses (so Q 10:4) to buy paper and hire scribes? The hypothesizing of so many written sources supposedly produced by the itinerants suggests that the grand unified itinerancy theory, at least in its more recent and comprehensive manifestations, is not as well thought through as it might be. In addition, it is worth speculating that this attribution of certain documents to itinerants themselves might actually be an indication that the itinerancy thesis is in fact wrong.<sup>15</sup>

This line of questioning is later overstated in an assertion of (non-) assumption:

We are no longer able to assume that Q specifically, or the sayings tradition in general, represents a deposit of mixed oral lore, communicated by largely illiterate yokels or by a bucolic, if disaffected, peasantry. Nor can we assume, in the face of such evidence of rhetorical deliberation [as Q is supposed to evince], that the material preserved in Q is an unselfconscious and transparent reflection of the behavior of the people who did the preserving. This incertitude might in fact suggest, at least on its face, that Q’s rhetoric of uprootedness is precisely that: rhetoric.

At the least, the question implies that more sophisticated literary studies of Q will stand at odds with the assumptions of Theissen[’s sociology], rather than as a supplement to them; that the recognition of the literary and even intellectual character of the document, possibly right from its inception, will militate against

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<sup>13</sup> See Arnal, *Jesus and the Village Scribes*, p.26. Again, the “logical necessity” of “these sedentary supporters” for Theissen does not derive, in my opinion, from “the itinerancy hypothesis” itself but, rather, from the explanatory model which governs Theissen’s sociological explanation of this behaviour.

<sup>14</sup> Was all travel-writing in antiquity always done only after the fact, viz. imaginatively or under “first-class” conditions? In the case of Dio Chrysostom, specifically during his “Cynic phase,” scholars to date have not typically doubted that he still wrote the discourses attributed to him.

<sup>15</sup> See Arnal, *Jesus and the Village Scribes*, p. 45.

the assumption that rural beggars formed the original nucleus of the Q community.<sup>16</sup>

Arnal's initial question is an apt one: "Are itinerants literate?" Given Theissen's already-criticized opportunistic use of the form-critical category of oral tradition as a free-for-all exegetical framework within which to posit his radical itinerants, it is evident that, for Theissen, the answer obviously would be no (or: Who knows? Who cares?). For Arnal, however, such an answer is a sign of methodological confusion.

Little or no methodological framework is established [by Theissen] for working with any kind of precision from the itinerancy hypothesis to the texts in which it purportedly is manifested. That is, Theissen never bothers to articulate a firm theory of the relationship between literary texts and their social contexts, between the production of the written word and the concrete social realities in which it is produced. ... Moreover, the argument from the texts is somewhat circular. An initial insight, itinerancy, determines the fashion in which radical-sounding synoptic material of various types will be read. Such a reading, of course, then provides the evidence for the postulated itinerants in the first place. The texts, in other words, ... do not evince itinerancy until one has assumed itinerancy. ... This kind of tautology is in many cases inevitable when our primary sources for reconstructing a social world are literary. Still, by starting with some kind of conceptual clarity about the relation of ideology to social location and indicating from evidence extraneous to the texts at issue what the salient details of that social location might have been, we can reduce this circularity considerably.<sup>17</sup>

Nonetheless, when it comes time for Arnal himself to determine "the identity of [Q's] purveyors" he appears stuck in the same circularity as Theissen, at least when Arnal writes:

The only evidence we possess for who these individuals might have been comes from the document itself: its presupposed world of experience and its own essential complexion. The latter consideration especially suggests purveyors who at the very least were literate: Q was indeed a written document.<sup>18</sup>

None of this, moreover, really addresses the initial question: "Are itinerants literate?" Why would they not be? Arnal apparently does not exclude the possibility that they could be, since he immediately asks: "If so, what does this tell us about their original social location?"<sup>19</sup>

At this point, I discern (unlike Arnal) a lurking problem: namely, the latent ideology, or ethnocentrism, of modern scholarly notions of literacy. What does it mean to be literate? How does one display this cultural capacity? And what does it disclose about the person who displays it? If I state these questions in the present tense, it is because, in

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<sup>16</sup> See Arnal, *Jesus and the Village Scribes*, p. 68.

<sup>17</sup> See Arnal, *Jesus and the Village Scribes*, p. 69.

<sup>18</sup> See Arnal, *Jesus and the Village Scribes*, p. 168.

<sup>19</sup> See Arnal, *Jesus and the Village Scribes*, p. 45.

my opinion, controlling such a conversation will be as much our own contemporary – North Atlantic, Protestant, postindustrial, late-capitalist – assumptions about reading and writing as whatever there may be to learn about these activities in antiquity.<sup>20</sup> Minimally, the ethnography of reading (and writing) makes clear that what such activities signify, including what they are, is never, cross-culturally, a statement of the obvious.<sup>21</sup>

Even so, take the comparable case of the early Christian apostle Paul. In 2 Corinthians 11:11 he acknowledges himself to be  $\text{i)diw/thv tw| = lo/gw|}$  – i.e. rhetorically untrained, which is to say functionally “illiterate” – in response to the undeniable evidence when he spoke in person that his ability with language was next-to-null (see 2Cor 10:10:  $\text{o( lo/gov e)couqenhme/nov}$ ; cf., further, 1Cor 2:4). That someone else (i.e. a “secretary”) actually wrote “his” letters for him is explicitly stated on one notable occasion (Rom 16:22) and frequently implied otherwise. These biographical facts, however, do not prevent most scholars from taking the discourse of the Pauline letters as evidence for the life and thought of the itinerant apostle at the same time that whatever signs of sophistication there may be in these writings is routinely rehearsed.<sup>22</sup>

Arnal reduces the question, mockingly, to a problem of supplies: “Do itinerants, who claim to have given up all wealth and social connections, carry around just enough money in their nonexistent purses (so Q 10:4) to buy paper and hire scribes?” In fact, this is not an earnest question – as if the only way a text might be produced in antiquity was after “buying” and “hiring.”<sup>23</sup> This becomes even clearer in Arnal’s subsequent description of the itinerants reputedly responsible for Q as “largely illiterate yokels” and “a bucolic, if disaffected, peasantry,” since I doubt that Arnal means to imply that being

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<sup>20</sup> See, e.g., William V. Harris, *Ancient Literacy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 3-24, esp. pp. 3, 4-5, 11-17 (where [p. 11] investigations of “the growth of literacy in early-modern and modern Europe” are deemed to be particularly instructive), 21-22: “The available statistics concerning literacy in early-modern and modern times are of considerable importance for our inquiry. Like most social statistics, they are of limited reliability. To obtain accurate statistics about literacy requires, among other things, a sensible definition of what it is and an army of conscientious census-takers. In recent times the United States has lacked both of these prerequisites, and consequently no one knows how many Americans are illiterate; it is very clear that the number is far higher than the Bureau of the Census has imagined; the only dispute can be about the size of the error. The figures in Table 1 are a sample of the illiteracy rates of various countries and regions in which early-modern conditions [versus the United States?] have prevailed. In considering them we should take into account not only the backwardness [!] of the places in question, but also their modernity (printing, school systems, and so on) [vis-à-vis the United States?] with respect to the world of the Greeks and Romans. Such figures indicate not that the ancients were necessarily less literate than the Moroccans or Tunisians of the mid-twentieth century, but that the onus of proof is upon any scholar who asserts otherwise” – on the assumption that we all agree with Harris’ ethnocentric frame-of-reference.

<sup>21</sup> See, e.g., Jonathan Boyarin, ed., *The Ethnography of Reading* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). Cf. also J. Parry and M. Bloch, eds., *Money and the Morality of Exchange* (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

<sup>22</sup> My purpose here is merely to point out how the fact of “writing” tells us very little socio-historically, if only because of all the variables its actual production could enshrine. Otherwise, I think that it is an entirely open question, ripe for critical exploration, how properly to read the *corpus paulinum* historically, i.e. in light of the manuscript evidence and bearing in mind what this evidence suggests about its original authorship(s).

<sup>23</sup> At least, it is difficult for me not to find the latent logic of our own market economy embedded in Arnal’s historical imagination at this point. Not to mention the fact that ‘Q’ itself is a text extant only through a series of decidedly modern scholarly deductions based upon the comparative possibilities occasioned by the invention of the printing press and the library collections of manuscripts created through colonial travel.

“largely illiterate” necessarily means being a “yokel” (while “bucolic” semantically is equivalent to “peasantry” and therefore beside the point except for the rhetorical effect of redundancy). Arnal asks a good and appropriate question: “Are itinerants literate?” but then fails to take himself seriously (enough) on this point.

In this regard, the legacy of ancient Cynicism is instructive. The analogy of ancient Cynicism effectively entered the contemporary scholarly discussion of Q through Theissen’s reference in 1973 to “numerous itinerant Cynic philosophers and preachers” in the first and second centuries C.E. as the third step “from analogy” in his three-part argument for *Wanderradikalismus* as the *Sitz im Leben* of the earliest synoptic tradition.<sup>24</sup> For Theissen the Cynic “analogy” is limited to “ethics based on the renunciation of home and country, family ties, and possessions.”<sup>25</sup>

Notably, in the Cynic analogy the meaning of itinerancy would not be travel (or charismatic leadership of a given social group). Renunciation of home and country in the case of the Cynics means either exile or deliberate dissociation from conventional family life. In their regard what Theissen calls itinerancy might better be recalled as a type of asceticism or, if you will, intentional social vagrancy. In any case, registered through their social practice of renunciation of home and country was a decided deracination – whether chosen or by default seems not to have been the crucial consideration – inherent to a social stance of *contemptus mundi*.<sup>26</sup>

For this reason, the Cynics are said by Theissen to practice and to promote a similar dispossession to the kind he posits for earliest Palestinian Christianity, which then is supposed to “underpin our thesis” at the level of historical verisimilitude.<sup>27</sup> Subsequent scholarly debate has been obsessed precisely with this issue, namely, the historical verisimilitude of the analogy and, implicitly, denying the possibility of intentional social vagrancy as being, in any way, shape, or form, the matrix of the earliest Christian tradition. I will say more about this second issue shortly.

Unobserved in this debate – also by Arnal – is the fact of Cynic literature. By “Cynic literature” I mean, specifically, those writings different Cynics themselves are

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<sup>24</sup> In fact, 10 years before Theissen’s 1973 article (first given as a lecture on 25 November 1972) Georg Kretschmar already made such a comparison between the Cynics and his early *Wanderasketen* (in a lecture on 26 September 1962). See Georg Kretschmar, “Ein Beitrag zur Frage nach dem Ursprung frühchristlicher Askese,” *ZTK* 61 (1964): 27-67, pp. 35-36; also Paul Hoffmann, *Studien zur Theologie der Logienquelle*, 3rd ed. (NTAbh 8; Münster: Aschendorff, 1982; orig. pub. 1972).

<sup>25</sup> See Theissen, “Wandering Radicals,” p. 44.

<sup>26</sup> For *contemptus mundi* as a category to describe such a stance, see Vincent L. Wimbush, “*Contemptus Mundi*: The Social Power of an Ancient Rhetoric and Worldview,” *USQR* 47/1-2 (1993): 1-13; idem, “*Contemptus Mundi* – Redux: The Politics of an Ancient Rhetoric and Worldview,” in Cynthia L. Rigby, ed., *Power, Powerlessness, and the Divine: New Inquiries in Bible and Theology* (Studies in Theological Education; Atlanta, GA: Scholars, 1997): 263-80. For the history of the concept as such, see Robert Bultot, *La Doctrine du mépris du monde* (Louvain: Nauwelaerts, 1963-4); idem, “Les Philosophes du paganisme. Docteurs et exemples du *contemptus mundi* pour la morale médiévale,” in Stephan Kuttner and Alphonso M. Stickler, eds., *Mélanges G. Fransen*, 2 vols. (Studia gratiana 19-20; Rome: Ateneo Salesiano, 1976): 1.101-22; Jean Delumeau, *Le péché et la peur: La culpabilisation en Occident (XIIIe – XVIIIe siècles)* (Paris: Fayard, 1983), esp. pp. 15-33. A notable example is the mediaeval satirical poem edited by Ronald E. Pepin, *Scorn for the World: Bernard of Cluny’s De Contemptu Mundi* (Mediaeval Texts and Studies 8; East Lansing, MI: Colleagues, 1991).

<sup>27</sup> See Theissen, “Wandering Radicals,” p. 43.

supposed to have written.<sup>28</sup> At least three new literary genres were said to have been invented by as many Cynics: namely, meliambic verse by Cercidas of Megalopolis,<sup>29</sup> the form of satire – *spoudaiogeleion* – denominated “Mennipean” due to Mennipus of

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<sup>28</sup> Diogenes Laertius (Book VI) suggests that virtually all the early Cynics whose lives he recounts were writers: namely, Antisthenes, Diogenes of Sinope, Monimus, Onesicratus, Crates of Thebes, Metrocles, Hipparchia, Mennipus, and Menedemus. For Antisthenes, see Marie-Odile Goulet-Cazé, "L'Ajax et L'Ulysse d'Antisthène," in [*SOPHIES MAIETORES*]: *Chercheurs de sagesse. Hommage a Jean Pépin* (Serie Antiquité 131; Paris: 1992). For Diogenes, see E. Orth, "Ein Fragment des Kynikers Diogenes," *Philologische Wochenschrift* 44/46 (1926): 843-47; Aldo Bartalucci, "Una Probabile Ricostruzione dell'Eracle di Diogene di Sinope," *Studi Classici e Orientali* 19-20 (1970-1971): 109-22; Tiziano Dorandi, "Due Note Ercolanesi [I. Le 'Politai' di Diogene Cinico e Zenone Stoico nell' Index Stoicorum Herculaneis (PHerc. 1018 IV)]," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 45 (1982): 47-52; idem, "La *Politeia* de Diogène de Sinope et quelques remarques sur sa pensée politique," in Marie-Odile Goulet-Cazé and Richard Goulet, eds., *Le Cynisme ancien et ses prolongements: Actes du colloque international du CNRS (Paris, 22-25 juillet 1991)* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1993): 57-68. For Onesicratus, see Truesdell S. Brown, *Onesicritus: A Study in Hellenistic Historiography* (University of California Publications in History, 39; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1949; repr. Chicago: Ares, 1981); P. Pedech, *Historiens Compagnons d'Alexandre: Callisthenes, Onesicrite, Nearque, Ptolemee, Aristobule* (Collection d'Etudes Anciennes; Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1984); R.C. Vofchuk, "Los informes de Onesicrito, cronista de Alejandro Magno, sobre la India," *Boletín de la asociación española de orientistas [Burgos/Aldecoa]* 22 (1986): 189-202; also G. Murray, "Theopompus, or the Cynic as Historian," in *Greek Studies* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1946), pp. 149-70. For Crates, see Hiller, "Zu den Fragmente des Kynikers Krates," *Jahrbücher für klassische Philologie [Leipzig]* 133 (1886): 249-52; Karl Schmidt of Elbing, *De Herodico Cratetes* (Elbing: Riedel, 1886); G. Pianko, "Krates z Teb, Cynik i Parodysta," *Meander* 9 (1954): 203-29; V. Pöschl, "Krates, Horaz und Pinturicchio," *Acta Antiqua [Akademiae Scientiarum Hungaricae; Budapest: Akademiai Kirdo]* 30 (1987): 267-73; Elizabeth Asmis, "Crates on Poetic Criticism," *Phoenix* 19/2 (1992): 138-69. For Mennipus, see below, n. 29. For Menedemus, see W. Cronert, *Kolotes and Menedemos: Texte und Untersuchungen zur Philosophen und Literaturgeschichte* (Studien zur Palaeographie und Papyruskunde 6; Leipzig: 1906). For other Cynics, see P. Vallette, "Phénix de Colophon et la poésie cynique," *Revue de Philologie, d'Histoire et de Littérature Anciennes* (1913): 162-82 (cf. below, n. 29); Jan Fredrick Kindstrand, *Bion of Borysthenes: A Collection of Fragments with Introduction and Commentary* (Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Uppsalensis/Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1976); E.N. O'Neil, *Teles [The Cynic Teacher]* (Missoula, MT: Scholars, 1977); M. Billerbeck, *Der Kyniker Demetrius: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der frühkaiserzeitlichen Popularphilosophie* (Philosophia Antiqua 36; Leiden: Brill, 1979); Jürgen Hammerstädt, [*Goeton phora*]: *Die Orakelkritik des Kynikers Oenomaus* (Beiträge zur klassischen Philologie 188; Frankfurt am Main: Athenaem, 1988); idem, "Le Cynisme littéraire à l'époque impériale," in Goulet-Cazé and Goulet, eds., *Le Cynisme ancien et ses prolongements*: 399-418; also Abraham J. Malherbe, ed., *The Cynic Epistles: A Study Edition* (Missoula, MT: Scholars, 1977).

<sup>29</sup> See D. Dudley, *History of Cynicism from Diogenes to the 6th cent. A.D.* (London: Methuen, 1937), p. 83; further, M. Lenchantin de Gubernatis, "De Horatio Cercidae Imitatore," *Boll. di Filol. Classica* 19 (1912): 52-56; L. Deubner, "Kerkidas bei Gregor von Nazianz," *Hermes* 54 (1919): 438-41; M. Gigante, "Cercida, Filodemo e Orazio," *Riv. di Filo. e d'Istr. Class.* N.S. 33 (1955): 286-93; Q. Cataudella, "[Kerkidas ho ultatos] (Gregorio Nazianzeno, "De Virtute" 598)," in *Convivium Dominicum: Studi sull'Eucaristia nei Padri della Chiesa Antica e Miscellanea Patristica* (Catania: Centro di Studi sull'antico Cristianesimo, 1959): 277-86; E. Livrea, *Studi Cercidei (P.Oxy. 1082)* (Papyrologische Texte und Abhandlungen 37; Bonn: Habelt, 1986); Javier Campos Daroca and Juan Luis Lopez Cruces, "Cércidas sobre la creación poética: (Mel. III Livrea)," *Emerita: Revista de linguística y filología clásica [Madrid]* 60 (1992): 21-29; Liana Lomiento, *Cercidas: testimonia et fragmenta = Cercida: introduzione, testimonianze, testo critico, traduzione e commento* (Rome: Gruppo Editoriale internazionale, 1993); Juan Luis Lopez Cruces, *Les Meliambes de Cercidas de Megalopolis: politique et tradition littéraire* (Classical and Byzantine Monographs 32; Amsterdam: Wakkert, 1995).

Gadara,<sup>30</sup> and the literary “garland” by Meleager, also of Gadara (then of Tyre, finally of Cos).<sup>31</sup> Even if not every single writing which was ascribed to one or another Cynic should turn out to be indubitably written by that person (see, e.g., the so-called Cynic epistles) there is still too large a textual corpus transmitted under the aegis of ancient Cynicism simply to conclude a priori that the Cynics never actually wrote anything. Furthermore, to assume that those who did “weren’t really” Cynics, or that the Cynics who wrote “really weren’t” that socially abstemious, would be to put the scholarly cart (of conclusion) before the horse (of inquiry).

Finally, returning to the specific case of Q, how much “evidence of rhetorical deliberation,” to use Arnal’s language, does it actually provide, if the text alone finally must furnish the profile of the individuals responsible for its original purveyance? There is no doubt about the scholarly production of “more sophisticated literary studies of Q” and that the material preserved in Q is not simply “an unselfconscious and transparent reflection of the behavior of the people who did the preserving.” But why think that “the recognition of the literary and even intellectual character of the document, possibly right from its inception, will militate against the assumption that rural beggars formed the original nucleus of the Q community”?

In fact, everything depends at this point on the perception of – to cite just a few examples from Arnal’s own characterization of the discourse in Q – “the organization and arrangement of material in the form of carefully constructed arguments,” an “intellectually sophisticated, suavisely oriented construction, and the careful composition of Q1 within the parameters of a known ancient literary genre,” “numerous signs of careful composition and deliberate rhetorical technique, including chreiai and elaborated chreiai,” and “increasing comfort with the use of literary traditions, [and] an increasing tendency to textual exegesis.”<sup>32</sup>

Let me simply state that I am not persuaded of the sociological significance ascribed by Arnal to this description. It must be the task of another essay to explain why I think that, yet again, the analytical practice of – literary – comparison has been confused in the name of “genre” with genealogical – socio-historical – claims about origin.<sup>33</sup> To

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<sup>30</sup> See Johann Franz Ley, *De vita scriptisque Menippi Cynici et de satira M. Terentii Varronis Menippea*. (Köln am Rhein: Bachem, 1843); Erices Wasmansdorff, *Luciani scripta ea quae ad Menippum spectant, inter se comparantur et diiudicantur* (Ienae: Ratii, 1874); R. Helm, *Lucian and Menipp* (Leipzig/Berlin: Teubner, 1906; repr. Olms: Hildesheim, 1967); Barbara P. McCarthy, *Lucian and Menippus* (Yale Classical Studies 4; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1934); Q. Catadella, “Un Frammento di Menippo di Gadara?” *Sileno* 1 (1975): 143-54; J.C. Relihan, “Menippus the Cynic in the Greek Anthology,” *Syllecta Classica* [University of Iowa] 1 (1989): 55-61; idem, “Menippus, the Cur from Crete,” *Prometheus* 16 (1990): 217-24.

<sup>31</sup> See Carl Radinger, *Meleagros von Gadara: Eine litteraturgeschichtliche Skizze* (Innsbruck: Wagner, 1895); E. Ermatinger, *Meleagros von Gadara, ein Dichter der griechischen Décadence* (Hamburg: Verlagsanstalt, 1898); P. Capra, “La Poesia di Meleagro,” *Annali della Facoltà di Lettere, Filosofia e Magistero della Università di Cagliari* 12 (1942): 59-103; Alan Cameron, “The Garlands of Meleager and Philip,” *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 9 (1968): 323-49; idem, *The Greek Anthology: From Meleager to Planudes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); D. de Venuto, “Alcuni aspetti della tecnica letteraria di Meleagro,” *Rivista di cultura classica e medioevale* 10 (1968): 287-98; Jerry Clack, ed. *Meleager: The Poems* (Wauconda, IL: Bolchazy-Carducci, 1992).

<sup>32</sup> See Arnal, *Jesus and the Village Scribes*, pp. 168-69.

<sup>33</sup> I disagree with John S. Kloppenborg’s premise that “a homological relationship exists between the symbolic world of the social group and the formal and material characteristics of its documents,” specifically “the unspoken assumptions which are at work in the selection of one literary genre over another, the consciousness of the social catchment of the group implicit in the use of a particular mode and

take but the first example Arnal gives of the putatively literary work that the document Q would display:

Ronald Piper's work on the argumentative clusters that comprise much of the hortatory, sapiential material of Q1 (including Q 6:27-36, 37-42, 43-45; 11:9-13; 12:4-7 and 22-31), has revealed a consistent compositional pattern, which is complex, painstakingly structured, and repetitive: "Characteristic of these collections too is the pattern of progressing from general to specific application, the location of the interpretative key at the conclusion of the argument, the use of (usually multiple) rhetorical questions at the centre of the collection, the change in imagery as the argument progresses, and the dominance of the appeal to experience and reason."<sup>34</sup>

When I read this, I am reminded of the surprise expressed by Monsieur Jourdain in Molière's *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* upon discovering in conversation with the Philosophy Master regarding the universal distinction between verse and prose: "For more than forty years I have been speaking prose without knowing anything about it, and I am much obliged to you for having taught me that."

Monsieur Jourdain then requests help from the Philosophy Master to put into a note to a lady of great quality: "'Beautiful marchioness, your lovely eyes make me die of love,' but I want that put in a gallant manner and be nicely turned." The effort to improve upon the initial statement ends with the following exchange between Monsieur Jourdain and the Philosophy Master.

MONSIEUR JOURDAIN: But, of all those ways, which is the best?

PHILOSOPHY MASTER: The way you said it: "Beautiful marchioness, your lovely eyes make me die of love."

MONSIEUR JOURDAIN: I never studied, and yet I made the whole thing up at the first try. I thank you with all my heart, and I ask you to come tomorrow early.

PHILOSOPHY MASTER: I shall not fail to do so. (He leaves).

To my mind, the fact that Q displays certain patterns of persuasion attests little more than that its author(s) spoke prose and had a point to make.<sup>35</sup> In other words, to

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level of rhetoric, and the many unexpressed but 'self-evident' premises at work in the formulation of explicit arguments." See John S. Kloppenborg, "Literary Convention, Self-Evidence and the Social History of the Q People," *Semeia* 55 (1991): 77-102, esp. pp. 79-81 (whence the two citations). The "sapiential" character of Q's rhetoric as described by Kloppenborg in *The Formation of Q: Trajectories in Ancient Wisdom Collections* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987) certainly renders it a more mundane discourse or less charismatic than the kind of "prophetic" utterance which otherwise has been assumed by many scholars to be the "mother" of early Christian pronouncement (see, e.g., the influential essay by Ernst Käsemann, "Die Anfänge christlicher Theologie," *ZTK* 57 [1960]: 162-85; also idem, "Zum Thema der urchristlichen Apokalyptik," *ZTK* 59 [1962]: 257-84). Kloppenborg's literary profile of Q is hardly sufficient, however, to determine the social subjectivity originally responsible for its production – not least because one of the more salient and pervasive social assumptions of the comparative literary corpus used by Kloppenborg to discern Q's sapiential nature is precisely not found in Q, namely, speech *in loco parentis*.

<sup>34</sup> See Arnal, *Jesus and the Village Scribes*, p. 168.

<sup>35</sup> It may be that here I overstate my case but I wish to underscore how little, in my opinion, debating the question of literary "genre" tells us about the social subjects who come to utterance or are recalled in a text

restate Piper's "consistent compositional pattern," to go from the general to the specific, to put the punch line at the end and not at the beginning, to ask rhetorical questions in the middle, to switch metaphors in mid-stream, to appeal to experience and to reason, only takes us into the realm of professional erudition, whether in antiquity or today, if we (falsely) think that most people otherwise were and are inherently incapable of ratiocination and effective communication.

While I have no disagreement with the descriptive results of Piper's analysis, which basically shows that the discourse of Q is not without artifice – that it is less prophetic dithyramb and more didactic exhortation – I fail to find, here as elsewhere, an actual argument "against the assumption that rural beggars formed the original nucleus of the Q community." It is evident to me that neither Piper nor Arnal as well as the other scholars cited by Arnal – Alan Kirk, John S. Kloppenborg, Burton L. Mack and Vernon Robbins – in support of Arnal's view of the rhetoric of Q as "intellectually sophisticated, suavisly oriented" think that Q was or likely could have been produced by "rural beggars."<sup>36</sup> My question is: why are "beggars" *eo ipso* excluded from the field of early Christian cultural and discursive production? Is it simply because beggars are presumed to be inevitably illiterate, because Q obviously is a written text, and writing obviously belongs only to someone who never begs?

In this regard, Arnal joins a monotone choir of modern scholarly voices, all intoning the industry-standard mantra about the more- (or less-) than-literal intention of early Christian language – whether in Q or elsewhere, which *prima facie* speaks in favour of indigence and its "shifty" social face. Q's radical rhetoric – it is rhetoric, to be sure, but not for this reason lacking reference to actual social behaviour – ultimately becomes, for Arnal as for others before him, simply one more "head-trip," as though such deep and deliberate dissociation from so-called normal social reality were by (sociological) definition impossible to enact.<sup>37</sup>

Take, for example, Arnal's reading of the so-called Mission Speech in Q 10:2-16 and, specifically, the section of it that describes the "workers" (10:2, 7) or "sheep" (10:3) moving from place to place, house to house (10:4-6). Discussion of this text is so fraught with a broad array of exegetical decisions that a thorough review is simply beyond the confines of this essay. My purpose, however, is merely to underscore the interpretative effect of the methodological and theoretical claims made by Arnal, which already were discussed above.

Arnal acknowledges: "Of course, the main impetus for associating Q with any form of itinerancy, at any stage of its development or of the development of its traditions,

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like Q. To my mind, literary "genre" does not describe, typically, how texts are generated (i.e. written) but, rather, how they are received (i.e. read); it is a taxonomic category, not a mechanism of production.

<sup>36</sup> In my opinion, "intellectually sophisticated" and "suavisly oriented" are not synonymous or two sides of a single coin.

<sup>37</sup> See Arnal, *Jesus and the Village Scribes*, pp. 183-193. A similar scenario attends the question of early Christian ascetical literature. The fact that much of it was written by "non-practitioners" or at least less-than-fully-engaged early Christian ascetics (see, e.g., Athanasius' *Life of Anthony* or the various works of John Climacus, John Chrysostom, Gregory of Nyssa, Jerome, John Cassian, to name but a few of the better known and historically influential "ascetical" authors) does not mean that no one actually did what they describe and elaborate rhetorically.

is the Mission Charge of Q 10:2-16.”<sup>38</sup> Following John S. Kloppenborg, Arnal interprets this text as reflecting the work of village- or town-based scribes:

it is quite conceivable that the instructions given in 10:2-12 (and 10:16) do indeed pertain to mission but not as it is ordinarily conceived. They may refer, specifically, to a class of scribal figures with a distinct ideological agenda (embodied, largely, in Q1), attempting to disseminate that agenda as fully as possible among their fellow administrators in neighboring villages. This is not itinerancy but rather a constructive local agenda involving short trips. The prohibitions against carrying purse, knapsack, sandals and staff not only reflect the very short distances involved but may also be intended to eliminate the appearance of travel and to normalize the activity being undertaken. Such figures, then, as they enter a village to approach a fellow village scribe ... or village administrator ... do not take on the appearance of a traveling stranger but rather an acceptable local functionary. That is, the decision not to don Cynic equipment is made to avoid the appearance of beggary that might attach to a stranger, not to radicalize that appearance (and practice) even further.<sup>39</sup>

Strangely, having critiqued the ideology of itinerancy in the discourse of modern biblical scholarship, when Arnal finally comes to read the text that he acknowledges stands at the centre of every discussion of itinerancy in Q (10:2-16), Arnal continues to speak of “travel,” albeit now limited to “short trips,” and, surprise, surprise, a certain kind of mission “but not as it is ordinarily conceived.” Furthermore, these “travelers” are imagined by Arnal (on the basis of an uneven comparison of the Mission Speech in Q with similar instructions in the Mishnah and Tosephta) to be on “official” business; at least, the hospitality described in Q is supposed “to have an official character.”<sup>40</sup>

What is different here vis-à-vis both Harnack’s and Theissen’s scenario of itinerancy? Basically, there is no early Christian “church” (instead of charismatic apostles, prophets and teachers, we now follow secular – local, Israelite, working-stiff – scribes around the Galilean countryside) and, versus Theissen, there is no “real” renunciation of home, family, or possessions. Otherwise, the social profile of the movement-on-the-ground remains remarkably similar: namely, programmatic “travel” (albeit reduced in distance) for “official” purposes, whereby “the messengers are addressing themselves to the village or town as a corporate entity rather than to the individual households that comprise it. In other words, a mission of individuals to individuals is not in view.”<sup>41</sup>

It is as though the net effect, if not the main purpose, of Arnal’s critique of itinerancy, at least regarding Theissen’s original proposal, was simply but tellingly to

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<sup>38</sup> See Arnal, *Jesus and the Village Scribes*, p. 177.

<sup>39</sup> See Arnal, *Jesus and the Village Scribes*, p. 95; further, pp. 178-183.

<sup>40</sup> See Arnal, *Jesus and the Village Scribes*, p. 178.

<sup>41</sup> See Arnal, *Jesus and the Village Scribes*, p. 180. Were either or both of these activities acknowledged in Q – namely, seeking “hospitality” house by house and/or “a mission of individuals to individuals” – the dreaded Cynic analogy might once again stand knocking at the scholar’s door.

remove from it every aspect of intentional indigence (as well as, of course, any anticipation of later “church” life).<sup>42</sup>

### 3. Georg Kretschmar, Gerd Theissen, Peter Brown ...

The discovery of the *Didache* and its early interpretation by Harnack may be important for Theissen’s subsequent sociological explanation as well as for the reception-history of his original proposal of *Wanderradikalismus* but this is not its origin.<sup>43</sup> Arnal is therefore mistaken, insofar as he implies – which it seems to me that he does – that “[t]his trend in scholarship” whereby “this conception of radical itinerants [derived from Harnack’s interpretation of the *Didache*] has been progressively retrojected further and further back into the dim recesses of the originary moments of the Christian movement” and finally “culminated in the work of Gerd Theissen during the 1970s, a corpus that in its turn has served as a bedrock for the development of further itinerancy hypotheses.”<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> In the second half of his 1973 article, Theissen, too, begins to back-pedal on the topic of beggary, even as it plainly stands in view. See Theissen, “Wandering Radicals,” p. 47: “The prohibition of bag and staff was probably intended to avoid the least shadow of an impression that the Christian missionaries were these [Cynic] beggars, or were like them. ... Anyone who demonstratively displays his poverty ... could easily be misunderstood. ... It is clear that the early Christian itinerant charismatics were forbidden to employ the usual beggar’s practices. But they were also forbidden to make any planned provision for the future”; p. 48: “This is certainly not begging in the normal sense. It is an elevated kind of begging, for which the problem of livelihood is only marginal, since ‘the beggar’ is confident that this problem will solve itself, so to speak, according to the motto: ‘Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well’ (Matt. 6:33). It is not just by chance that among the Jesus sayings we find what is really a piece of beggar’s lore: ‘Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you’ (Luke 11:9ff. par)”; p. 49: “The wandering charismatics will often have gone hungry because no one would take them in. They were often hunted away like vagabonds without any rights”; p. 50: “But it is not difficult to imagine what the majority thought about them – men without a home or a proper job, who upset other people by preaching the imminent end of the world, and who in their mind’s eye already saw the places where they were rejected and found no support go up in flames”; p. 51: “We may perhaps ask whether all the abuse was groundless? Were the wandering charismatics not to all intents and purposes indistinguishable from other vagabonds of dubious reputation? ... What subjectively seemed to be religiously justified freedom from the basic social ties could from outside look like work-shy vagrancy.” Cf. Karl Kautsky, *Der Ursprung des Christentums: Eine historische Untersuchung*, 11<sup>th</sup> ed. (Stuttgart: 1921), pp. 404-405: “scroungers and conspirators.” By intentional I mean “willful” in Nietzsche’s sense of *amor fati* (namely, the willingness to undergo an Eternal Recurrence of all things suffered in one’s life) and only in this sense voluntary. Unless I mean: “actively embodied social discrepancy” or “singular state of systemic interruption”?

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Jonathan A. Draper, “Wandering Charismatics and Scholarly Circularities,” in Richard A. Horsley with Jonathan A. Draper, *Whoever Hears You Hears Me: Prophets, Performance, and Tradition in Q* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999): 29-45, esp. pp. 35-36. Draper is mistaken, however, when he refers to Theissen’s thesis and “his principal source, the *Didache*” (p. 37).

<sup>44</sup> See Arnal, *Jesus and the Village Scribes*, p. 23. Cf. Draper, “Wandering Charismatics and Scholarly Circularities,” p. 34, who makes a similar claim that “its roots [namely, those of Theissen’s model] reach deeply into the history-of-religions theory of emerging Christianity developed by Adolf von Harnack on the basis of the *Didache*, which has become an unrecognized consensus in New Testament scholarship.” In the paragraph that follows this statement, however, Draper observes how more than one aspect of Harnack’s reading of the *Didache* actually reflects constitutive features of “German Protestant thinking” and specifically “Lutheran theology.” In other words, Harnack reiterates rather than invents the socio-theological vocabulary he deploys when reading the *Didache*. Draper claims (p. 30) that “Max Weber’s theory of charismatic leadership as an explanation of new religious movements, which goes unmentioned” by Theissen, is actually fundamental (albeit in oversimplified form) to Theissen’s thesis of wandering charismatics. In turn, Draper argues (p. 34) that “Weber’s thesis of the routinization of charisma is in some

Theissen tells us in 1973 whence his notion of itinerancy first came: “This thesis is a development of G. Kretschmar’s ideas in ‘Ein Beitrag zur Frage nach dem Ursprung frühchristlicher Askese,’ *ZThK* 61 [1964]: 27-67.”<sup>45</sup> The *Didache* and Harnack’s reading of the text only enter into Theissen’s discussion here as secondary corroboration of an insight first gained elsewhere.<sup>46</sup> The only reference in Kretschmar’s article to any work by Harnack is: “A.v. Harnack, *Die pseudoklementinischen Briefe de virginitate und die Entstehung des Mönchtums* (SAB XXI), 1891.”<sup>47</sup> While Kretschmar refers to the *Didache* repeatedly, it is never a crucial, or even important, component of his argument.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, Harnack’s reading of the *Didache* is never invoked by Kretschmar.<sup>49</sup>

Why does this matter? In a word: because for Kretschmar the notion of “Wanderpropheten” is synonymous with “Wanderasketentum.” The point of departure for Kretschmar’s analysis is early third-century Syrian asceticism and the issue of its origin. The latter cannot be explained, says Kretschmar, as due to the Hellenistic (versus Palestinian) environment and its widespread dualism between body and soul, which otherwise supposedly would explain the development of ascetical practices and “Stimmungen” in Christianity after the New Testament. In the end Kretschmar writes:

Alfred Adam hatte durch eine sprachgeschichtliche Untersuchung zu zeigen versucht, dass sich die Eigenart des syrischen Mönchtums daraus ergebe, dass diese Asketen sich als die wahren Nachfolger Jesu verstanden. Unabhängig von seinen Aufstellungen im einzelnen läuft unsere Untersuchung doch auf das gleiche Ergebnis hinaus; jedenfalls soweit es sich um den Traditionsstrang handelt, mit dem wir uns vor allem beschäftigt haben, der Geschichte des Wanderasketentums. Es geht zurück auf den Stand charismatischer Propheten und Lehrer, die als Missionare im palästinensisch-syrischen Judentum wirkten und die dort noch innerhalb des jüdischen Volksverbandes lebenden Anhänger des

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respects a sophisticated restatement of the concept of *Frühkatholizismus*,” which is to say one of the constitutive features of German Protestant thinking – which, nonetheless, Weber is supposed to have derived specifically from Harnack (pp. 34, 45) although Draper acknowledges (p. 34 n. 16): “The absence of footnotes in the original work [by Weber], which was in any case only a first draft, makes the identification of the work(s) of Harnack that Weber is using difficult.” In 1973, Theissen (“Wandering Radicals,” p. 56 n. 67 and p. 58) actually refers twice to Ernst Troeltsch, *Die Soziallehren der christlichen Kirchen und Gruppen: Gesammelte Schriften I* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1912) and, specifically, his triad of “sects, institutionalized church, and what he calls ‘spiritualism.’” This strikes me, however, as merely another variation of the same German Protestant thinking responsible for the concept of *Frühkatholizismus* and its correlate categories. Thus whatever the specific influence of Harnack’s reading of the *Didache* may be, it is not the main reason why Theissen, too, thinks that in the beginning there was an irruption of evangelical “spirit” – call it charisma, sect, enthusiasm, word as gospel, prophecy – followed by the unrelenting demands of the “flesh” – call them routinization, institutionalized church, order, structure as law, worldly wisdom.

<sup>45</sup> See Theissen, “Wandering Radicals,” p. 40 n. 20. Theissen also refers to Hoffmann, *Studien zur Logienquelle*, pp. 312-34, and a conversation with Rev. H. Frost.

<sup>46</sup> See Theissen, “Wandering Radicals,” pp. 38, 41, 42 n. 26, 45, 49, 51, 53, 54.

<sup>47</sup> See Kretschmar, “Ein Beitrag,” p. 33 n. 16.

<sup>48</sup> See Kretschmar, “Ein Beitrag,” p. 36: “Denn alles was wir dort ([*Didache*] c. 11-15) über Wanderapostel, Wanderpropheten und Wanderlehrer hören, *entspricht weitgehend dem gewonnenen Bild*, nur dass uns diese Männer hier aus der Perspektive der Christen in den Dörfern und Städten begegnen” (emphasis mine).

<sup>49</sup> Though it may always influence his historical imagination surreptitiously through other scholarship on the *Didache*, to which Kretschmar refers.

Messias Jesus betreuten. Sie verstanden ihre eigene Lebensweise nicht nur aus den apokalyptischen Wehen der Gegenwart und nicht nur im Rückgriff auf die Propheten des Alten Testaments, die in neutestamentlicher Zeit als Verfolgte, Heilige und Märtyrer galten, sondern vor allem als Nachfolge Jesu in Analogie zur Wanderschaft der Jünger mit Jesus einst und konnten dadurch festhalten, dass der Ruf zur Nachfolge die gesetzmässigen Ordnungen durchbricht. Wenn man das Askese nennen wollte, dann wäre sie tatsächlich mit Peterson ein unaufgebbarer Bestandteil des christlichen Glaubens.<sup>50</sup>

Kretschmar's essay is not a sociological account of earliest Palestinian (Syrian) Christianity. Under the aegis of an historical question – the origin of early Christian asceticism – the driving concern is evidently theological: “Was heisst Nachfolge heute?” Underway toward a vindication of Matthew's gospel of “perfection” as equal to “Paulus als die heilsame Unruhe der Kirche,”<sup>51</sup> there are numerous aspects of Kretschmar's essay which are either dated (e.g., regarding Qumran) or seriously flawed (e.g., acceptance of Ernst Käsemann's influential notion of early Christian prophecy). As was the case with Copernicus, the heliocentric universe that Kretschmar here deduces, in which the apostolic planet of Syrian asceticism moves around a suspended centre, is disclosed within not a little astrology.

This fact should not distract us from the topic of interest here, which is the correlation made by Kretschmar between asceticism and itinerancy, since it suggests that the latter category, at least vis-à-vis Syrian Christianity, would principally concern, in Arnal's terminology, a decided ethos of “uprootedness.” It was a social stance of deliberate and embodied disengagement from the conventional social world which the term “itinerancy” essentially describes, at least for Kretschmar. Fundamentally at issue is neither purposeful travel nor the organized exercise of any sort of ecclesial office.<sup>52</sup> Rather, it was an “all-out” effort to enter, in the wake of Jesus, the “other-worldly” reality known as the kingdom of God. Kretschmar also calls this project, again, the pursuit of perfection, following the Gospel of Matthew, or discipleship, following the theological traditions of the Reformation. I would consider it sufficient simply to keep the equation between itinerancy and asceticism.<sup>53</sup>

In Theissen's 1973 essay on *Wanderradikalismus*, it is precisely this ascetical aspect of itinerancy, already articulated by Kretschmar, which is emphasized under the aegis of renunciation of home, family, and possessions. In 1973, Theissen stands out, in my opinion, as a notable exception to the general rule in contemporary biblical scholarship, insofar as he proves willing to take the “anti-social” language of the gospels

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<sup>50</sup> See Kretschmar, “Ein Beitrag,” pp. 64-65.

<sup>51</sup> See Kretschmar, “Ein Beitrag,” p. 67.

<sup>52</sup> For Kretschmar, this would be precisely the perspective of the Didache but not the self-understanding of the wandering ascetics, whatever social role(s) they may have played in the life of the – for Kretschmar, not yet distinctively “Christian” – communities with which these persons had contact. See Kretschmar, “Ein Beitrag,” p. 61.

<sup>53</sup> Thus to speak about “itinerancy” in Q would mean, following Kretschmar, to imagine it as, in one way or another, a Palestinian/Galilean antecedent of subsequent Syrian asceticism.

at face-value, for this reason noting how improbable (viz. impossible) such counsel would have been vis-à-vis ordinary “settled” life in antiquity.<sup>54</sup>

Informing this perception is, principally, an awareness of the inadequacy of the usual “house-church-worship” scenario underlying traditional form-criticism (although Theissen continues, as already noted, to rehearse many aspects of this scenario.) In the name of itinerancy Theissen seeks, in 1973, to elaborate the possibility, basically represented by the so-called “hard-sayings” in the synoptic tradition, that there was in earliest Christianity more than one way of enacting – and not just ideologically but also economically or ‘ethically’ – the legacy or social memory of Jesus. In other words, something other than a Pauline congregation must be assumed in order to account for the (oral) transmission of sayings and other dominical materials which, in the more conventional setting, when read matter-of-factly would be patently a recipe for self-destruction. I think that Theissen made a good point.

In Peter Brown’s book, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*, the traditionally itinerant character of Syrian and other early Christian ascetics through at least the fifth century C.E. is repeatedly noted and underscored. Brown never suggests that we should understand the texts attesting such itinerancy as merely rhetorical tropes, although Brown displays a notable sensitivity to the rhetorical constructions of early Christian asceticism. To be sure, this fact alone hardly disproves the possibility of Arnal’s rhetorical reading of the language of itinerancy in Q. But it also makes clear, insofar as Q (via Matthew) belongs to the history of Syrian Christianity (which it obviously does geographically, being Galilean in origin, as Arnal also argues), that the language of itinerancy had a future in this region, not merely as a critical fantasy but as a visible practice of social divestiture.<sup>55</sup>

The question which Kretschmar first posed and Theissen initially answered affirmatively (with, as already noted, a problematical palette of other presuppositions) is: Can the itinerant traditions of early third-century and later Syrian asceticism be traced back into the second and first centuries of early Christianity in the same region? And if so, does Q belong to this history? It would be supremely unhistorical to rule out of court such an inquiry on principle, be this methodological or otherwise, however much the different ideological investments of modern biblical scholarship on Christian origins may have rendered use of the term “itinerancy” fraught with anachronism. To declare as simply “unrealistic” such a possibility is to ignore the historical fact that there was a time and place (namely, the period of Syrian asceticism, which Brown chronicles) in which men and women did, indeed, go for a prolonged “walk-about” in search of a better reality than the one currently on offer through the dominant culture(s) of their day.

None of this, of course, yet makes the case for itinerancy in Q. That requires an exegetical argument – likely, the length of a book. What I have tried to show here is simply the condition of the possibility of such an argument. It remains, I think, an interesting question to be pursued. Arnal’s attempted exorcism of the category from

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<sup>54</sup> Exegetically, the description is accurate, in my opinion, however problematical Theissen’s own sociological explanation of it then becomes.

<sup>55</sup> See Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press), pp. 88, 100, 196-7 (Pseudo-Clement, *Ad Virgines*; *Kephalaia* 76), 202, 244, 323, 327, 331-2 (begging), 333 (Messalians), 335-6 (“holy fools”: *Liber Graduum* 16.7:401/402), 401; cf. pp. 42-44 (where Brown apparently follows Theissen).

scholarship on Q and Christian origins has the merit of every strenuous diet addressing a body obese with self-indulgence and lacking rigour; but, like most such diets, it also threatens to disregard, if not erode, a vital practice. Arnal's zeal to throw out the intellectual bath-water has also discarded the baby of an insight sitting in it.

#### **4. Rectifying "Itinerancy" (with Q and Early Christian History)**

What is wrong with the category of "itinerancy," at least in the history of scholarship on Q, has been precisely its connotation of travel. Whenever the *Didache* has been on the brain together with German Protestant/Lutheran schemata such as Ernst Käsemann's notion of early Christian prophecy, the idea of charismatic leadership as the particular office or *metier* of these travelers has deepened the distress. Under these conditions, the term "itinerancy" has been taken to imply a range and style of personal mobility and authority, which renders the concept all too liable to the sort of anachronistic Romanticism – by which I mean precisely the nineteenth-century European variety – William Arnal neatly pillories in *Jesus and the Village Scribes*.

Ideologically at stake in this tradition of interpretation, at least in the German environment where it first developed, is, I suggest, an early-to-post modern political debate about "institutional" – be it royal, ecclesiastical, Catholic – versus "charismatic" – be it Protestant, secular, individual – power. In this cultural context, the scholarly description of the original purveyors of Q, the first followers of Jesus and/or the historical Jesus himself as "itinerant" served to interrupt a perceived desire on the part of "institutional" power to claim such foundational figures as underwriting contemporary church structures and practices or other forms of conventional cultural authority. *Wander-radikalismus* or *-propheten* or -whatever would represent a certain original "freedom" vis-à-vis such authority (even though none of the scholarly advocates of itinerancy in earliest Christianity, including Theissen, has actually been able or willing to imagine its erstwhile practitioners as all that free or un-inscribed within a larger social script).

For various reasons, this debate no longer is compelling; at least, I am not pursuing it here. Remembering it, however, should serve as a salutary corrective to scholarly use of the category of "travel," insofar as such a notion yet remains tied to a decidedly modern (European/North American) sense of the encompassing social world and its basic options for social difference and slippage, including entertainment and appropriation. Minimally, I suggest, and precisely because of the decidedly modern cultural scripts that Arnal has shown to be so often embedded in the language of itinerancy, that the lexicon of "travel" employed by the CSBS Seminar devoted to this theme be expanded to include as equally modes of social movement cum "religion" in antiquity such practices of displacement as flight, expulsion, exile and – last but not least – vagrancy or mendicancy.<sup>56</sup>

It may be, however, that the word "itinerancy" itself is, sadly, irredeemable or unable to be rectified as a category of description. Certainly sobering is the example of Arnal's own earnest and energetic effort to extricate himself and other coreligionists of the Enlightened Academy of Materialist Sociology from the ideological entanglements of previous scholarly discourse on early Christian itinerancy, only to end up enfolded once again within the most dubious of its assumptions, namely, that the signs of a habitual

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<sup>56</sup> Cf. Philip A. Harland, "Pausing at the Intersection of Religion and Travel in Antiquity" (13 May 2005).

mobility or migratory manner in Q are indicative of purposeful travel – a.k.a. a mission of some sort – with official business to conduct upon arrival.

For my own part in this essay, I am finally taking up, in some sense, an issue I first posed – alas, to myself alone, since I never discussed it subsequently – in the subtitle of my doctoral dissertation, “Q: The Ethos and Ethics of an Itinerant Intelligence.” At the time, with the expression “itinerant intelligence” I meant to suggest or, better, not to lose track of my own interest in the possibility of elaborating a different style of intellection – one more elastic and nubile than the long-standing but essentially monochrome model of Science, Reason, Truth, or History *qua* Reality. The appeal of the Cynic analogy to Q – beyond the evident and beguiling discomfort it created for not a few biblical scholars – derived for me from the way in which ancient Cynicism seemed to provide such an alternate model of attentive thought with apt pronouncement.

In this essay, it is specifically the political (socio-economic) valence of this possibility which I have been stressing. But as the discussion of ancient literacy and Cynic literature above makes clear, the “poetic” or epistemological and rhetorical component of the question remains with me. Indeed, the basic issue for me in the debate about itinerancy in Q could be stated as a version of the question: “Can the subaltern speak?”<sup>57</sup> My contention is: They can and do, even in antiquity, also in the synoptic tradition, but to hear them we will need to be prepared to wander a while in unfamiliar territory and not presume already to know what could realistically happen there.

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<sup>57</sup> Cf. Theissen, “Wandering Radicals,” pp. 51-52.

**Abstract:** Gerd Theissen’s 1973 proposal of “itinerant radicals” as purveyors of the earliest Jesus traditions has not proven persuasive over time – and with good reason. Most recently, William Arnal in his book *Jesus and the Village Scribes: Galilean Conflicts and the Setting in Q* has sought to demonstrate everything that is indefensible and/or anachronistic about such an understanding. In doing so, however, a baby of an insight, or fledgling expansion of the sociological *imaginaire* within which Christian origins are described, has been thrown out with all the scholarly bathwater. After reviewing the various stages in the debate about “itinerancy” and Q, I shall attempt to explain why such a category as “itinerancy” (or: indigent; or: migrant) in the lexicon of ancient “travel” is both necessary and fruitful for historical narratives of earliest Christianity and the ancient Mediterranean world.