Wandering radicalism or purposeful activity? Jesus and the sending of messengers in Mark 6:6-56

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ABSTRACT
This paper critiques the widespread scholarly understanding of the Jesus movement as one of 'wandering radicalism', utilising anthropological research into actual peasant societies. The Sending of Messengers in Mark 6:6-56 is explored in terms of James Scott's theory of 'hidden transcripts' of resistance to domination. The Mission is seen against the background of Exodus typology as a strategic mobilisation of Galilean peasant society with a clear programme in mind. The paper concludes by examining the relation of the Mission to the Journey to Jerusalem and the events which followed as a public breach of the official transcript.

1 INTRODUCTION
Crossan's book, The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant (1991), represents a landmark in the investigation into the Jesus of history, if only because he tries to bring together all the work of his predecessors into a new synthesis. The two central concepts around which his synthesis turns are those of the peasant and the Cynic. Theissen's (1978) influential thesis of the Jesus movement as one of 'wandering radicalism' is taken up in a new form and brought into relation with Q and Cynic philosophers as reconstructed by Downing (1987; 1988), Mack (1988; 1993), Vaage (1994) and others. Jesus becomes a peripatetic, counter-cultural boundary jumper, deliberately flouting all society's norms and encouraging others to do so. Those whom Jesus healed by his magic were sent out as wanderers also, to beg from the community and spread the healing as healed healers. Open table becomes a symbol of a new order of society.

This is clearly an oversimplification and parody of Crossan's work. There is much that I certainly would accept in his position, but I want to focus on his bringing into connection of peasant and Cynic. This seems to me to be bringing together two irreconcilable opposites. Crossan himself seems to be somewhat uncomfortable with what he is doing, as witnessed by the kind of special pleading he makes:
Jesus, however, is establishing a rural rather than an urban mission. Call it, if you will, Jewish and rural Cynicism rather than Greco-Roman and urban Cynicism (Crossan 1991:340).

If Jesus was neither urban nor Greco-Roman, then it does not make any meaningful contribution to the debate over the nature of his life and work to describe him as a Cynic.

Cynic philosophers voluntarily renounce property and family in order to take up the simple life. It was a ‘return to nature’ movement characteristic of urban nostalgia for a vanished rural past. It was individualistic and fundamentally negative, in the sense that its focus was on the rejection and judgment of the current order. Its proponents characteristically would be educated and from the retainer class of the pre-industrial city, although their influence extended to the ruling elite which would not infrequently bankroll their activities. They were allowed to carry on their wandering because they were not perceived as a threat by the ruling elite. They do not represent a movement to overthrow or radically challenge the status quo. They argue for the simple life of nature and puncture the social pretensions of city life, without presenting a genuine alternative. For this reason they were tolerated, even courted, by the ruling elite. They could even take on something of the role of the court jester in medieval society: ‘There is no slander in an allowed fool’ (Shakespeare in Eagleton, via Scott 1990:177).

There is no evidence that such ‘back to nature’ figures emerge from the rural peasantry. Those for whom life is a struggle for survival usually do not have the opportunity to renounce a life of comfort and ease. Indeed, the life of comfort and ease would represent the secret dreams and hopes of the peasant, often projected onto the time when each will get her/his own just deserts.

In a recent article, Hans Dieter Betz (1994:453-476) has ably demonstrated the lack of evidence for the Cynic hypothesis: there is no evidence for the presence of Cynics in Galilean society and the Cynic movement itself is a highly diverse one, which cannot easily be reduced to the kind of stereotype usually given by exponents of this position. Betz concludes that ‘calling the historical Jesus a Cynic would be justified only if he shared modes of conduct, external appearance, forms of speech, and points of doctrine specific and central to Cynicism’ (1994:474). Since no such evidence is available, Betz argues that advocacy of the ‘Cynicism’ of Jesus has a hidden (unconscious) ideological agenda:

Is not the aim of this entire venture to make sure that there was “nothing unique” about him, that he was “not a beginning” of anything, and that his identity simply was “internal to the culture”? Removed from both Judaism and Christianity,
stripped of the traditions, and fitted into the"social role" of a Cynic, the historical Jesus as a phenomenon to be interpreted has simply vanished (1994:460).

This is not dissimilar to the critique of Theissen's wandering radicalism made by Wolfgang Stegemann that, 'the simple, carefree life that even we sometimes dream of manifests to a dangerous degree the traits peculiar to the daydreams of the rich' (1984:148-168, esp 166). He argues that homelessness in the Jesus movement was the result of necessity and not choice.

My own dissatisfaction with the debate as it is emerging is that Crossan's thesis, and a growing consensus, takes for granted that Jesus is a peasant, but does not really explore what it means to be a peasant and what peasants actually do and say. If New Testament scholars are to use this designation 'peasant', then they will have to pay a lot more attention to what social anthropologists say about peasant societies and peasant behaviour. If Jesus is a peasant, then we will need to pay attention to the characteristic accent of peasant discourse and the strategies of peasant action in the face of oppression.

2 THE NATURE OF PEASANT SOCIETY AND RESISTANCE TO DOMINATION

A peasant economy is essentially a system of asymmetric power relations, which enable a dominant class to siphon off and redistribute the surplus of rural producers (Wolf 1966). The ruling elite are dependent on the fund of rent produced in this way to support themselves and their retainers. The ruling elite normally are located in cities, into which the agricultural surplus of the peasants is gathered and redistributed (Sjoberg 1960). The city provides the basis for affirmation and defence of the social boundaries of the ruling elite and the development of a culture and life-style which marks out their difference and claimed superiority over the peasant producers. In other words, central to a peasant society is a functioning system of power and control, without which it would not be possible, despite the claims of the ruling elite that it is natural or divinely ordained. Indeed, such relations of domination are not self-sustaining, but only continue by virtue of continuous efforts at reinforcement, maintenance and adjustment of coercion (Scott 1990:45).

This sketch is important if we are to argue that Jesus was a peasant, because it puts him in the context of contested power relations. Peasants simply were not free to assemble at will, act at will or speak their minds at will. Their activity, movements and language are patrolled by the ruling elite, for whom not only acts which challenge the system are a threat, but even appearances are important in the maintenance of control. The whole area of such power relations has recently been explored in depth by the
anthropologist of peasant societies, James Scott, in a series of publications (1976; 1977a; 1977b; 1989; 1990). Scott has emphasised the ‘slippage’ between the doctrines and practices of the ruling elite, whether religious or political, which he terms the ‘great tradition’, and the understandings and practices of peasant societies, which he terms the ‘little tradition’ (Scott derives these terms from Robert Redfield). Even when both peasants and ruling elite share the same faith, this little tradition exists as ‘a “shadow society” — a pattern of structural stylistic, and normative opposition to the politico-religious tradition of ruling elites’ (1977a:4). Analysis of the material base is not enough to understand the goals of the peasant, and account must be taken of factors of custom, community and values.

Scott develops this thesis further in his evocative book, Domination and the arts of resistance: Hidden transcripts (1990). His studies indicate the limited nature of the discourse permitted to the subordinate classes and study the techniques of resistance they characteristically adopt. The ruling elite control what may be said and done in public: they write the ‘public transcript’ to which both the dominant group and the subordinate group are required to conform. This public transcript expresses the self-justification of the ruling elite and embodies their claim to be doing this in the best interests of the subordinates:

It is designed to be impressive, to affirm and naturalize the power of dominant elites, and to conceal or euphemize the dirty linen of their rule. If however, this flattering self-portrait is to have any rhetorical force among subordinates, it necessarily involves some concession to their presumed interests (Scott 1990:18).

For this reason, it simultaneously offers a sphere of struggle for the oppressed. However, public challenges to this public transcript are suppressed by coercion and fear. Nevertheless, the subordinate classes always express their resistance to domination by developing a ‘hidden transcript’ off-stage to the public transcript.

While subordinates may accept the public transcript strategically in the presence of the dominant group, Scott argues that they are ceaselessly impelled to resist it both in their hidden transcript and in attempts to express their resistance and insert the message of the hidden transcript into the public discourse, without risking retaliation. The very rules of deference created by the dominant classes also provide a defence and cover for resistance, a barrier which they are powerless to penetrate. Thus concealment and code are essential to the resistance of the subordinate:

Thus the peasantry, in the interest of safety and success, has historically preferred to disguise its resistance. If it were a question of control over land, they would prefer squatting to a defiant land invasion; if it were a matter of taxes, they would pre-
fer evasion rather than a tax riot; if it were a question of rights to the product of the land, they would prefer poaching or pilfering to direct appropriation. Only when less dramatic measures failed, when subsistence was threatened, or when there were signs that they could strike with relative safety would the peasantry venture on the path of open, collective defiance. It is for this reason that the official transcript of relations between the dominant and subordinate is filled with formulas of subservience, euphemisms, and uncontested claims to status and legitimacy. On the open stage the serfs or slaves will appear complicitous in creating an appearance of consent and unanimity; the show of discursive affirmations from below will make it seem as if ideological hegemony were secure. The official transcript of power relations is a sphere in which power appears naturalized because that is what elites exert their influence to produce and because it ordinarily serves the immediate interests of subordinates to avoid discrediting these appearances...The goal of slaves and other subordinate groups, as they conduct their ideological and material resistance, is precisely to escape detection; to the extent that they achieve their goal, such activities do not appear in the archives (Scott 1990:86-7).

There is a constant testing of the limits to which resistance may go without exposure or retaliation, and over the definition of the public transcript (cf Scott 1990:193).

At key moments, the public transcript may be challenged or breached, usually in times of social breakdown and confusion, such as existed in first century Palestine (cf Grant 1926; Horsley 1987). This breach will result in swift and unequivocal action to silence the challenger and restore the interpretation of the ruling elite. Any public symbolic challenge to the public text is filled with power and danger: it becomes, in Scott’s words ‘electric’:

A single lapse in conformity can be repaired or excused with negligible consequences for the system of domination. A single act of successful public insubordination, however, pierces the smooth surface of apparent consent, which itself is a visible reminder of underlying power relations...The moment when the dissent of the hidden transcript crosses the threshold to open resistance is always a politically charged occasion (Scott 1990:205-7).

When a subordinate does make such a public challenge to the legitimacy of the dominant text, s/he assumes charismatic legitimacy by speaking on behalf of all:

The role of the heroine [or hero]...is to a large extent scripted in advance offstage by all members of the subordinate group...The powerful emotional valence of the charismatic speech or act for subordinate groups—their sense of elation, joy release—depends, I think, on it finding this resonance within the hidden transcript (Scott 1990:222).

If we argue that Jesus was a peasant, then we need to reckon with this fact that what he could say in public was scripted by the ruling elite. Any
breaches of the public transcript would be ruthlessly dealt with. Jesus was not free to say or do what he liked. How then can we read the Jesus tradition?

To caricature the debate, was Jesus a kind of anti-establishment hippy, with no real social programme beyond getting people back in touch with themselves by dropping out? Such people are usually ‘dropping out’ of the dominant classes rather than the subordinate classes. They may be considered dangerous by the ruling elite, but only in a limited kind of way. They are likely to be left alone. Or did Jesus have some kind of real purpose and programme, subversive of the public transcript? Richard Horsley (1987; 1989) argues that Jesus was concerned with the renewal of local community:

Jesus' actions and prophecies, especially those directed against the ruling institutions of his society, suggest that he was indeed mounting a more serious opposition than a mere protest...The charges brought against him, however apologetically handled by the gospel writers, were in effect true. He had definitely been stirring up the people (Horsley 1987:320).

If Jesus did indeed have such a programmatic intention, how did it confront the public transcript without being eliminated at the outset. How would that relate to accounts of so-called 'wandering' we find in the Synoptic tradition. This paper will focus on the references to the Mission of the Twelve in Mark 6:6-56, which has often been the focus of discussions of 'wandering radicalism'.

3 THE QUESTION OF SOURCES

The question is compounded by the problem of sources. The Mission of the Twelve or Seventy [Two] appears in Mark, and seemingly in Q independently. Crossan (1991:332-341) rightly points to the multiple attestation of this saying, including in his enumeration sayings from the Gospel of Thomas. This suggests, according to his methodology, that the material is ancient and relatively reliable. I would agree that it is likely that some such incident was indeed associated from the beginning with Jesus' ministry and, as such, is important for the reconstruction of the historical Jesus.

Most of the scholars engaged in the field begin with the assumption of the priority of Q. It is further assumed that this must reflect the earliest tradition concerning the ministry of Jesus. My own working hypothesis is that the collection of Q material is relatively late, and that it emerges during and after the Jewish War, probably in Antioch. I have argued (Draper 1991:347-372; 1995:284-312) that the material is first collected by refugees from Palestine who gain admission to the Christian communities in Syria, and who are prophets by virtue of their knowledge of and control of the Jesus tradition. In this Hellenistic environment, it is not unnatural that certain aspects of the
The solidity of the mission of the twelve/seventy [two] in the Jesus tradition would indicate that even so, this at least goes back behind such a period. Yet the position sketched above would question whether the Q version of the Mission is really the earliest. It could also be questioned whether Q itself presents 'Cynic-like' features, or whether these may reflect the redactional activity of Matthew or Luke attempting to adapt the Jesus tradition to Cynicism (Josephus and Philo make similar adaptations to explain Jewish movements to Hellenists). This paper examines the question afresh, taking its starting point from Mark, and the characteristics of the incident as portrayed by that gospel.

4 DISTINCTIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MISSION IN MARK 6:6-56

4.1 The General Structure

What is clear in Mark's version of the Mission of the Twelve, is that they are sent out and they return. The return is not reported in Matthew's account (Mt 10:1-11:1; though note 11:7), which is narratively appropriate, given the emphasis on the continuing role of prophets and apostles in that gospel. The implication is that the mission is a continuing one, reaching out to embrace the communities of Matthew's own day. Luke recounts the return in his account of the Mission of the Twelve, but briefly, changing Mark's reference to a withdrawal into the wilderness into a withdrawal to the town of Bethsaida, again an indicator of the urban orientation of Luke-Acts. In the return of the Seventy [Two] (Lk 10:17-22), there is an extensive account of the miracles performed and a reflection on the meaning of the events. This indicates that the account of the return is present in Q as well as Mark, and that absence of such an account in Matthew is redactional.

Secondly, the sending in Mark is separated from the return by an extended account of the arrest and beheading of John the Baptist by Herod (Mk 6:14-29). Matthew replaces this with a mission of John to Jesus from prison and a reflection on the nature of John and his work in relation to Jesus (Mt 11:2-19). Luke reduces the account to refer simply to the reports reaching Herod and his response of incredulity and interest (Lk 9:7-9). Since the report is not found in Luke's Mission of the Seventy [Two] we must assume that it is absent from Q.

Thirdly, Mark's account has Jesus respond to the return of the disciples by taking them out into the wilderness by boat because they are beset by
comings and goings such that they have no time even to eat (Mk 6:30-32). The link between the return and the withdrawal is quite specific (γωνία), but also ambiguous. The 'ones coming and the ones going' are not explained, but their business is clearly a consequence of the Mission of the Twelve. Despite the withdrawal to the wilderness, or perhaps because of it, people flock out into the wilderness after Jesus, waiting for his arrival by boat there in the wilderness (Mk 6:33-34).

Fourthly, when Jesus sees them, Mark describes him as moved 'because they were like sheep without a shepherd' (Mk 6:34), a probable reference to Numbers 27:17, where Moses asks the Lord to appoint a successor and he is given Joshua/Jesus:

Moses said to the LORD, “Let the LORD, the God of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the congregation, who shall go out before them and come in before them, who shall lead them out and bring them in; that the congregation of the LORD may not be as sheep which have no shepherd." And the LORD said to Moses, “Take Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit, and lay your hand upon him; cause him to stand before Elea'zar the priest and all the congregation, and you shall commission him in their sight. You shall invest him with some of your authority, that all the congregation of the people of Israel may obey ... This would imply that Jesus is seen as 'a prophet like unto Moses' in the tradition of Deuteronomy 18:18. The link and its limitations are explored by Mark explicitly in the Transfiguration, where Moses and Elijah stand beside Jesus in the glory of the Shekinah (Mk 9:2-13). However, the reference to the absence of a shepherd is an implicit refusal of legitimacy to the rulers of Israel, since the tradition of the Old Testament makes the king the shepherd of Israel. Such a challenge is heightened by the preceding reference to Herod and his claim to be βασιλεύς (6:17-29).

Fifthly, the people have no food in the wilderness and Jesus feeds them on miraculous bread and fish (Mk 6:35-44).

Finally, according to Mark (6:45-53), Jesus makes his disciples leave by boat across the sea, leaving him alone to pray up the mountain, but they are unable to make headway against the wind. In the early morning twilight, they see Jesus walking across the water to them and are terrified. Jesus enters the boat, the wind drops and they are astounded because they did not understand the meaning of the miraculous feeding.

The structure we have just outlined seems to be dominated by references to the Exodus, at least in its second half. It also seems as if there is a connection between the mission of the twelve in Mark's account and the Moses/Exodus/Passover themes which follow. The structure can be pursued even further, if a continuation is seen in the Mount of the Transfiguration and the Passover trip to Jerusalem.
4.2 The Staff and the Sandals

It is one of the striking features of Mark's account of the Mission, when compared with Matthew and Luke, that it records Jesus as enjoining the carrying of a staff and use of sandals. This is highlighted because Matthew and Luke record Jesus as forbidding both of these. It has been argued that this prohibition may reflect a deliberate distinction of the Christian wanderers from the Cynic beggars, who would carry staff and wallet for begging and wear sandals. This may be the case. Even so, this would not indicate that such a possible Cynic reference is the earlier one, and may simply reflect a later Hellenistic environment in the redactions of Matthew and Luke, where such a distinction might be necessary. It is usually suggested that the prohibition is the earlier and more radical command and so goes back to the historical Jesus. The assumption is that this harsh command is softened by Mark (and Didache 11:3-6).

However, any investigation of the differences should begin by taking the possibilities of each version seriously to ask what the implications are. It so happens that the requirement to use staff and sandals, common as these things were in travel, had also a strong symbolism in Jewish tradition. They are firmly associated with the Passover. Exodus 12:11 enjoins:

In this manner you shall eat it: your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it in haste. It is the Lord's Passover.

The staff and sandals are a sign of urgent haste and expectation. Jewish writings suggest that the mention of staff (ῥαγίδας and not the common Cynic designation βεκτηρίας) and sandals would have conjured up both the Exodus and the Messiah. A good example would be jKeth. IX, 32b, line 9 and II, 35a, line 9, where R. Jeremiah (T4) talks of his burial thus:

Clothe me in a white robe with a border, clothe me in my socks; put my sandals on my feet and my staff in my hands, and set me aside, so that I shall be prepared when the Messiah comes' (My translation).

So while the use of staff and sandals would be natural enough in a journey, their specific mention seems to link Jesus instructions to the Passover/Exodus. The ambiguity of these as Jewish cultural symbols might make them suitable for use in the ‘hidden transcript’:

By the subtle use of codes one can insinuate into a ritual, a pattern of dress, a song, a story, meanings that are accessible to one intended audience and opaque to

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1 Cf Mekhilta Pis. VII 11 15-20 (on Ex. 12:11), attributed to Eliezer (T1 or 2); Pesikta Rabbati 15:25; Midr. Ps. 12:43 (xix.6).
another audience the actors wish to exclude. Alternatively, the excluded (and in this case, powerful) audience may grasp the seditious message in the performance but find it difficult to react because that sedition is clothed in terms that also can lay claim to a perfectly innocent construction (Scott 1990:158).

It may be that the prohibition on the taking of bread in the wallet, takes up the symbolism of unleavened bread, of leaving the *hametz* (yeast) behind in departing from Egypt. This, at least, would be the implication of Jesus warning to the returned messengers, 'Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod' (Mk 8:15). It provides a bridge between the prohibition of bread for the messengers and the hostility of Herod which is the context of the mission.

The choice of twelve would likewise suggest a reference to the reconstituting of Israel in their desert wanderings. Sanders has indicated that the choice of twelve would, in itself, link Jesus' programme to expectations of renewal of Israel (1985:95-106; cf Draper 1988:41-63). There seems to be no reason to reject this. The symbolic number would imply a summons and gathering in of the scattered people of God, a common eschatological idea, but linked also with the past. The sending two by two does not have such an immediate reference to Exodus themes, though even these pairs are common (Moses and Aaron, Joshua and Caleb, Eldad and Medad, Num 11:26). It is probably expressive of the need for two witnesses to establish the truth of a testimony (Num 35:30; Dt 19:15; Fitzmyer 1985:846). So the two sent by Jesus would verify the truth of the proclamation of the Kingdom. They would also be witnesses to the obedience or disobedience of the people they go to. However, the sending out in small numbers is also important in that they would not be conspicuous and would not draw suspicion on themselves from the authorities.

4.3 Stay in One House

The puzzling detail of the mission that the apostles are not to go from house to house, but stay in whatever house they enter until they leave, may find its symbolic reference also in the Passover. When the door posts are marked with the blood of the lamb, no-one is to go out through the door till the morning (Exodus 11:22). The Angel of Death will pass over the house to strike instead the houses of the Egyptians. According to Mark, if a place refuses to listen or accept the twelve, then they are to shake off the dust of their feet as a sign of judgment against them. Presumably they will be witnesses against them in the coming judgment. On the other hand, the judgment will pass over those houses which accepted the messengers of Jesus on their mission. In the Passover tradition, the meal is to be eaten by the whole family together, as in urgent haste, with staff in hand and sandals on the feet.
This Passover setting seems a far more plausible explanation than a Cynic background, since Cynics refused to stay indoors at all on principle, seeking the 'natural' life of the open air and hardship. Cynics who stayed with a family like this would cease to be Cynics.

4.4 Authority to Do Signs and Wonders

In Mark, the mission of the twelve is validated by the powerful signs against unclean spirits, performed on the authority of Jesus. This is also suggestive of the signs given Moses and Aaron when they go to speak to Pharaoh and also to the people of Israel. The messengers of Jesus/Joshua not only preach repentance but validate their preaching by performing exorcisms and healings. Yet these are not the focus of the report back of the twelve when they return, as they are, for instance in Luke's account of the return of the Seventy [Two] (10:17-24). It may be that the signs and wonders aspect of the Mission is embroidery on the original historical event. It seems that Jewish expectation envisaged the messiah performing signs and wonders like Moses (Bammel 1984:234-235). The Jesus tradition expresses ambiguity over the open performance of signs by Jesus himself, whereas the disciples are here specifically authorised to do signs and wonders. It is interesting that Jesus' refusal to do signs is directed in Mark's Gospel to the ruling elite (Mk 8:11) and not to fellow peasants: 'The Pharisees came and began to argue with him, seeking from him a sign from heaven, to test him. And he sighed deeply in his spirit, and said, "Why does this generation seek a sign? Truly, I say to you, no sign shall be given to this generation".'

The people designated Pharisees, Scribes, as well as Herodians, are not religious leaders in the sense that a modern priest or minister might be of a congregation, but were a part of the ruling elite, charged with patrolling and enforcing adherence to the public transcript. Ritual celebrations, purity laws and tithes were key elements in the whole sub-Asiatic mode of pre-industrial society, related to the actual exercise of power by the royal and temple ruling elite in Palestine in the first century CE. Scott emphasises this symbiosis between religious performance and secular power in South East Asian peasant society:

The official or noble in each case expected deference as well as labor and grain from commoners. In return, he was responsible for political order and the welfare of his subjects. Dependence extended to religious and cultural matters as well, for the role of these elites often included patronizing religious festivals, organizing important rituals, constructing pagodas and temples, and overseeing classical education. Elites were thus not only secular powerholders but, in more general terms, the representatives of the great tradition to the periphery (Scott 1977a:14).
4.5 The Violent Deeds of Herod

The presence of narratives concerning Herod and his response to the Mission of the Twelve is no accident, if we take our peasant model seriously. Any act or gathering of subordinates at their own initiative is potentially subversive and the ruling elite are continually vigilant. A purposeful operation such as is described in Mark would be especially noteworthy. The reference to Herod thus places the Mission in the context of threat and danger. If the implied context of the Mission of the Twelve is the Passover/Exodus, then the reference to Herod's cruelty and execution of John the Baptist takes on a new significance. His brutality and violent acts of repression replace the acts of Pharaoh in the Exodus tradition. It has been suggested by Bammel that John's death is the occasion for the Mission of the Twelve, a response to it (Bammel 1984:225-228). Here Herod represents the repressive power of the state, in a certain sense the target of the new Exodus. His interest in Jesus also highlights the element of danger and urgency in Jesus' activity. The withdrawal to the wilderness is surely related to Herod's sense of threat and insecurity, which precipitated his execution of John and which now finds a new focus in Jesus, whom he perceives to be John the Baptist redivivus.

4.6 The Return and Withdrawal to the Wilderness

It does not seem to have been observed by commentators that the brief account of the return of the twelve in Mark describes Jesus as deliberately responding to the success of the Mission by going into the wilderness/desert (the word is the same in Greek, ἔρημος). The desert is a highly charged symbol in the Jewish tradition, and especially related to resistance to perceived injustice and to hopes of renewal. This is seen clearly in the Dead Sea Scrolls (e.g. 1QS 8:14; 9:19-21) and in the withdrawal of the Essenes physically to the desert. Mark indicates that the motive for Jesus' withdrawal is rest after labour. If we wish to explore behind the surface of the text, then it would be legitimate to ask whether Jesus' withdrawal to the wilderness/desert was deliberately symbolic rather than a holiday which went wrong. Mark also recounts that the people followed as if uninvited. Again, this need not necessarily reflect the original motivation of such a move by Jesus. If the mission of the twelve was intended as a call to a new Passover and a new Exodus, then a withdrawal to the desert would be the logical next step.

Is it not a distinct possibility that one of the messages sent abroad with the twelve was a call to meet Jesus in the desert? The miraculous feeding in the desert would be a sign of Jesus purpose and a call to further action. So the impulse to force Jesus into an open declaration of his pretensions to kingship recorded in John's Gospel may be historical. It would be a natural response,
possibly the work of agents provocateurs:

When the people saw the sign which he had done, they said, "This is indeed the prophet who was to come into the world!" Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself (Jn 6:14-15).

John makes this plan of the crowds the motive for Jesus’ urgent dispatch of the disciples across the sea. Mark’s account gives no motive but expresses haste and compulsion (καὶ εὗθις ἐνέγκασεν τοὺς μαθητὰς αὐτοῦ ἐμβῆναι εἰς πλοίον καὶ προάγειν εἰς τὸ πέραν, 6:45).

4.7 Crossing the Sea
The structure we have been analysing describes two crossings of the sea, once to reach the desert, where the people are waiting, and once after the Feeding in urgent haste. If the whole incident is understood as deliberately symbolic of the Passover/Exodus, then the crossing of the sea is no accident, but again designed as a re-enactment. The miraculous walking of Jesus on the water, while the strong wind blew against the disciples preventing them from making headway, is certainly reminiscent of the strong wind which parted the sea and enabled Moses and the people of Israel to cross the Red Sea (Ex 14:21).

Ernst Bammel (1984:211-240), taking the account in John’s Gospel seriously as a historical source, has plausibly argued that this whole incident of the Feeding and crowd response, followed by flight, is historical and suggests that Jesus, faced by such an unexpected upsurge of messianic expectation, pulled back from it. This also caused a division in the disciples over Jesus’ rejection of Jewish messianism. However, our analysis in this paper suggests that Jesus did not in fact pull back from unexpected success, but in fact controlled the whole process. It would be possible to argue that the Transfiguration represented the Sinai moment of the call of Jesus into the desert and that the deliberate progress to Jerusalem via Jericho which follows was the goal of the whole mission. In terms of Scott’s theory, the cleansing of the Temple would be the first public repudiation by Jesus of the public transcript, an undeniable challenge to the ruling elite. Sanders (1985) is probably right in suggesting both the historicity of the Temple incident and its importance as the reason for the removal of Jesus by the authorities. In Scott’s terms, Jesus also succeeded in making the public challenge without immediate elimination. Only betrayal enabled the ruling elite to crucify him. This moment of ‘charisma’ in itself would constitute Jesus as a folk hero, a role model who reconstitutes the hidden transcript and breaks open the pretence of the public transcript.
4.8 Conclusion

The question which arises from this analysis of the structure of the narrative of Mark 6 would be, 'Is this Mark’s redaction or does it go back behind this to an earlier layer of the tradition?' The presence of the material in much the same order in John and perhaps in Q as well, indicates that Mark took over the sequence from the tradition and preserves the earliest shape of it. At least, Mark, as has been consistently argued since W. Wrede, emphasises the secretive nature of the whole process. If, as we are suggesting, the whole series of incidents were planned and understood in a Passover/Exodus paradigm, then secrecy is not only natural but to be expected. It would be consistent with what we know about peasant movements.

5 THE MISSION OF THE TWELVE AS A SYMBOL OF PEASANT RESISTANCE

The Mission of the Twelve ties up with our perspective of Jesus and his movement as a peasant phenomenon at a number of points. It is clearly a strategy connected with both the public and the hidden transcript, in its choice of Passover/Exodus symbolism. Passover symbolism and ritual is officially sanctioned by the ruling elite. Indeed they based their claim to expropriate the resources of the peasants on the basis of the rituals established by Moses and Aaron in the wilderness and now controlled by the temple establishment in Jerusalem. Herod based his claim to rule on the intermarriage of his Idumean forebears with the Hasmonean temple aristocracy. Passover was the central symbol of the cult on which domination was based and also the source of considerable revenue for the temple and the priesthood, by virtue of the slaughter of the Passover victims and by virtue of their control of the ritual.

Yet enshrined in the heart of the ritual and symbolism of Passover is a liberatory event. God intervenes on behalf of his people in slavery in Egypt. He hears their cry, and acknowledges their oppression, and calls Moses and Aaron to tell Pharaoh to let his people go. By conceding the Passover to the public discourse and basing their legitimacy on this among other Exodus symbols, the ruling elite also conceded a promise to the oppressed. They are governing on behalf of the God who liberates, and the children of Israel should never again be subject to slavery. The hidden transcript of the peasantry clearly built much on this inner meaning of the public symbol. In terms of Scott’s thesis, we could expect the peasants to insert as much as possible of their hidden transcript of resistance into this particular occasion and symbol. Scott suggests that we could measure the extent of the struggle between the power-holders and the subordinate class by comparing the pub-
lic and private transcript: 'By assessing the discrepancy between the hidden transcript and the public transcript we may begin to judge the impact of domination on public discourse' (1990:5).

In the case of the Passover/Exodus in the first century CE, we are indeed able to a limited extent to compare the two transcripts on the basis of historical evidence.

5.1 The official transcript of the Passover

While the Mishnah was probably collected together only in the third century CE, it nevertheless contains traditions which go back to the first century. After the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple, the scribes and Pharisees, who constituted a segment of the retainer class, became the new ruling elite under the Romans. Thus the discourse of the Rabbis represents the new public transcript of the dominant class. Since the scribes and Pharisees represent the essential continuity between the Second Temple and the Rabbis, it is legitimate to suppose that they maintained the essence also of the old public transcript in their regulations. The Mishnaic tractate Pesahim deals with the Passover and the requirements of the public transcript.

It is indicative of the perspective of the power holders, who were served by the scribal retainer class, that there is very little reference to the liberatory nature of the festival. Most of the tractate is taken up with determining when the hametz may or may not be eaten, when and under what circumstances profit may be made out of it. Particularly it explores whether it has been tithed or not and so rendered unclean (2.5-6), how late people must work before the onset of the feast. The rites of slaughter in the temple are extensively explored and whether the sabbath rules override the Passover, purity rules for who may or may not celebrate the feast. Only at the end of these rules is the concession made that the feast celebrates the exodus from Egypt:

In every generation a man must so regard himself as if he came forth himself out of Egypt, for it is written, And thou shalt tell thy son in that day saying, It is because of that which the Lord did for me when I cam forth out of Egypt. Therefore are we bound to give thanks, to praise, to glorify, to honour, to exalt, to extol, and to bless him who wrought all these wonders for our fathers and for us. He brought us out from bondage to freedom, from sorrow to gladness, and from mourning to a Festival-day, and from darkness to great light, and from servitude to redemption; so let us say before him the Hallelujah! (MPes 10.5 [Danby 1933:151]).

Yet even here, the hand of the ruling elite betrays itself, the fear that the subordinate classes will get out of control on this occasion: ‘After the Passover meal they should not disperse to join in revelry’ (MPes 10:8). The
celebration of the memory of freedom must not spill over into expectations of freedom now.

5.2 The hidden transcript of the Passover

The hidden transcript of the peasants is also amply documented by Josephus and in Acts 5:33-39; 21:37-39. Peasant leaders and prophets would take their followers out into the wilderness, re-enact the desert wanderings, cross the Jordan and move symbolically to take possession again of the promised land, as in the trouble at Passover in 4 BCE, and under Cumanus (Horsley & Hanson 1985:135-189; Horsley 1987:90-120). The advice of Gamaliel, which Acts records, is eminently sensible from the point of view of the elite. ‘Wait until these people show their hand and then strike. If you strike now, it will be premature and will only inflame the peasants’. It is an old version of the proverb, ‘Give them enough rope to hang themselves’. In the event, the indecisive bungling of the ruling elite, according to the account in Acts, contributes considerably to the success of the new movement.

Clearly, the Passover/Exodus was a potent vehicle for peasant resistance to domination and exploitation. The legitimation of the ruling elite depended on it but was simultaneously subverted by it. They could only hope to contain and control it in safe channels. It could, at any moment turn ugly, even in Jerusalem itself at the Temple. So it is a classic example of the situation described by Scott, where the public transcript becomes the sphere for a contest over the interpretation of central symbols. Read in this light, the Jesus movement is playing a meaningful game with the authorities, conceding the public transcript but re-constituting its significance. Moreover, Jesus’ activity needs to be seen as part of the response of the Galilean peasantry to innovation on the part of the ruling elite.

The purity rules and regulations promulgated by the Temple in the first century were part of an attempt by the Hasmoneans and their successors to impose control and extract the peasant surplus. Galilee had been ruled directly from Jerusalem for only the briefest of periods under the Hasmoneans, out of a period of nearly a thousand years. There seems to have been resistance in Galilee to tax and tithe and regulation emanating from Jerusalem in Jesus’ time (Freyne 1980:275-297). Resistance by Galilean peasants to the purity regulations (Borg 1984) as recent innovations would fit in well with the documented behaviour of other comparable peasant societies to such impositions by ruling elites, such as the successful tacit resistance of the Malaysian peasantry to the introduction of the Islamic tithe (zakath) by the government after independence (Scott 1989:10-13).
5.3 A return to Mark 6:6-56

This brief contrast of the public and private transcripts surrounding the Passover indicates at least a *prima facie* case for the plausibility of the Markan account of the Sending of the Twelve [Seventy]. The mission of the twelve was intended to be a call to a new Passover, issuing in a new withdrawal into the wilderness, a new desert feeding and a new crossing of the Red Sea, a new Sinai, a new entry into the Promised Land via Jericho, a removal of the oppressive temple system and the introduction of a new social order. Surely the intervention of God on behalf of his suffering people could mean no less than this. This is the inbreaking of the rule of God, which Jesus proclaimed and enacted. The call was validated by signs and wonders and directed by the teaching of Jesus, having 'charismatic' authority and not derived authority like the scribes and the Pharisees and the rest of the ruling elite. Such a peasant Jesus movement would fit with known examples of peasant revolts elsewhere. It begins in secret in the 'hidden transcript' of the little tradition and climaxes in a public breach of the 'public transcript' of the ruling elite, followed by ruthless suppression of the leader and her/his followers. However, the subversive memory of the public breach cannot be suppressed and results in a permanent modification of the little tradition.

Looking at the mission in the light of Scott's analysis, a number of factors enabled the Jesus movement to succeed in its programme. Firstly, Jesus and his key followers are engaged in highly mobile occupations (Scott 1977a:8; 1990:126). Carpenters and fishermen are part of peasant society, but also a little marginal to it. Carpenters and the artisan class generally would be able to move from place to place without suspicion, in a way that peasant producers on the land were not generally able to do. Jesus moved from his small home town of Nazareth to the rather larger town of Capernaum, where he seems to have been based. Fishermen are by definition mobile, crossing and recrossing the sea in search of the fish. Large scale mobility among the landed peasantry would have occasioned immediate suspicion in the elite, but not mobility among fishermen and artisans, especially travelling in small, inconspicuous groups of two.

Secondly, the instruction of Jesus to the Twelve, as they go out on their mission, was to go to a home willing to receive them and stay inside. They were not to go from place to place and, presumably, not to preach in the market place. The home is, according to Scott, the primary location of the hidden transcript. Here, among sympathisers, the Twelve could speak freely beyond the power of the elite to listen or understand. Instructions can be given, plans explained, the call spread wider by those sympathisers on a one to one basis with their neighbours. For the hidden transcript needs as careful a promulgation as the public one, perhaps even more so, given the danger:
The hidden transcript does require a public—even if that public necessarily excludes the dominant. None of the practices and discourses of resistance can exist without tacit or acknowledged coordination and communication within the subordinate group. For that to occur, the subordinate group must carve out for itself social spaces insulated from control and surveillance from above. If we are to understand the process by which resistance is developed and codified, the analysis of the creation of these offstage social spaces becomes a vital task (Scott 1990:118).

The message of Jesus’ envoys also needs to be defended against the possibility of betrayal. Jesus’ instruction to his messengers to ‘shake the dust off their feet’ against those who refused to receive them was more than an empty gesture. It was a potent threat against betrayal to the elite. It reinforced the wall of silence which normally surrounds a peasant class in the face of the elite. In the absence of direct informers, what would the ruling elite have seen happening?: a growing excitement among the populace, rumours of a powerful healer. Herod, at any rate, immediately perceives a threat, even though he was not party to the private discussions in the houses of the peasantry. He sees in Jesus a new John the Baptist, whom he had just imprisoned and executed because he publicly challenged the king. His surveillance of Jesus and his followers would no doubt have increased as the news filtered in.

When the messengers return, Jesus withdraws to the wilderness/desert by boat with all of them together. This utilises the mobility of the fishermen to avoid confrontation with the elite, and creates a social space for a meeting with the wider group of followers and sympathisers beyond the control and hearing of the elite. Frontier and wilderness areas are notoriously difficult for the ruling elite to control, especially in pre-industrial societies. It is no accident that Robin Hoods emerge from the forest to harry and subvert the rule of the Sheriffs of Nottingham. It constitutes physical space on the contested margins of power. The desert in Palestine had always provided refuge for bandits, the defeated or outcast or rebellious. So when the crowds flock to Jesus in the deserted place he chooses, they occupy a relatively safe space for the hidden transcript.

Nevertheless, it would not be unnoticed by the elite. It is no accident that the accounts of the miraculous feeding in the desert is followed by a delegation from the elite asking for a public declaration (or ‘sign’) from Jesus as to his real intentions. It is also no accident that Jesus refuses to answer the elite. His reply is veiled and ambiguous. He uses the terminology of ‘this generation’, with its implications of eschatological judgment, without giving anything concrete for which he could be arrested. Privately, however, he warns his disciples about the intentions of the ruling elite: ‘Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod’ (Mk 8:15). This acknowledges both
the common allegiance of Pharisees and Herod to the ruling elite and also their different interests.

The ambiguous use of the symbolism of the Passover is also a tactical measure. Staff and sandals and no bread is not explicit but suggestive. Feeding people on bread and fish in a deserted area on the shores of the Sea of Galilee is reminiscent of the Exodus but not explicit. Jesus is, at this point, addressing the hidden transcript of the peasants. It is a veiled challenge which cannot easily be punished by the authorities, especially since they were not forewarned that Jesus was going to assemble people in this way. If they had known, they would probably have sent a contingent of troops. Disguise and secrecy is vital to Jesus' purpose at this point, just as the goal of it all would be a public breach of the public transcript in Jerusalem.

6 CONCLUSION

The Mission of the Twelve should not be viewed as the beginning of a process of purposeless wandering or dropping out of the status quo. Rather it is purposeful activity, carefully planned and executed under dangerous and difficult circumstances. Arrest and death were a possibility, even a likelihood, from the very beginning of Jesus' ministry. To be effective, the Jesus movement had to make full use of the hidden transcript of the peasantry and their means of resistance, through disguise and evasion.

WORKS CONSULTED


WANDERING RADICALISM OF PURPOSEFUL ACTIVITY?


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