The historical Jesus and the sayings tradition: comments on current research

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ABSTRACT
This contribution raises some questions concerning the North American debate about the historical Jesus. Firstly, the methodological problem of how to go beyond the multiple pictures of Jesus we have in the sources to the historical person himself, will be discussed. The relationship between text and reality is not simply a matter that can be solved by distinguishing between 'originality' and later interpretation. Secondly, some aspects of the work of J D Crossan will be discussed. It is neither clear that multiple attestation as used by Crossan is a criterion for authenticity nor that all the writings he refers to are independent. Finally it will be argued that the early Christian writings are not to be taken as storages of authentic words of Jesus but as sources for diversity. It is therefore questionable whether the so called 'Third Quest for the historical Jesus' is a plausible approach to describe the beginnings of Christianity.

1 INTRODUCTION
The quest for the historical Jesus is a peculiar phenomenon in New Testament research. The aim is not in the first instance exegetical analysis and the historical classification of writings but the question of the historical events lying behind the texts. The starting point of investigation, therefore, is the differentiation between retention of words, deeds, and events and later interpretation or modification of them under new circumstances (cf Crossan 1991:xxxi). The writings concerned, of course, did not make such a distinction. Thus, a situation exists which must be dealt with. If the goal is not interpretation of the texts themselves, all the elements which are considered to be attempts at interpreting the historical material have to be stripped away. The question, however, is to which extent it is possible to have access to purely historical data behind their interpretation in the sources. It will be shown in this paper that we are confronted with a methodological problem that cannot be solved by separating a historical phenomenon from the various portraits we gain by analysing the texts.

Following the conventional approach two questions emerge. First, it should be asked what the presuppositions of such a way of dealing with the texts are, for its appropriateness is heavily disputed in scholarship and far from being clear. The underlying problem was first raised by Hermann
Samuel Reimarus, whose 'Fragments' were published posthumously by Gott­
hold Ephraim Lessing. This problem can be described as the question of the relationship between the work and the preaching of Jesus of Nazareth and the nature of their reception in early Christian texts. As is well known, Reimarus already distinguished the 'Jesus of history' from the 'Christ of faith' by looking for the former at expense of the latter. On the other hand, David Friedrich Strauß and Rudolf Bultmann endeavoured to bridge that gulf by referring to a 'Christ myth' at expense of the historical person. Every scholar who asks for the historical Jesus has to answer the question either explicitly or implicitly about how to determine the relationship between history and interpretation. It is obvious that the contemporary Jesus debate (at least in some parts) follows the path of Reimarus and not of Strauß and Bultmann. The portraits of Jesus in the Gospels consequently are explained as theological interpretations which have to be overcome to recover 'who Jesus really was'. It, however, remains necessary to explain why historically the early followers could speak of Jesus as the Redeemer and why they depicted his preaching as eschatological. Otherwise the impasse remains in which one dismisses as 'less historical' or even 'unhistorical' what was of decisive importance to the first Christians.

This observation leads to my second point. If we take into account the specific character of early Christian writings—canonical as well as extracanonical—it is a serious question whether they permit a reconstruction of what is called 'the historical Jesus'. A decision about that depends on whether one can build methodologically safe bridges to go from the picture of primitive Christianity that is gained by analysing the sources to the historical Jesus without plunging into Lessing's 'ugly ditch of history'. Here the methodological questions of how to deal with the Jesus tradition and how to determine the relationships between the different writings arise. I suspect that the quest for the historical Jesus—because of the character of these writings and because of the history of primitive Christianity that can be written on the basis of these sources—equals the search for the origin of particular colours used for a painting of Rembrandt. Even if the origin (or at least the probable origin) of a colour could be discovered it would say nothing about the painting itself. So, even if it were likely that one or another saying stemmed from Jesus himself that still does not answer the question on how to interpret this piece of tradition in isolation from its context in the Gospels. It is, thus, questionable whether one can depict a portrait of Jesus on the basis of some probably old or at best 'original' sayings.

This article consists of four parts. In a first section I shall, in picking up these introductory remarks, look at recent research on Jesus in North America. In a second section the plausibility of methodological approaches
will be scrutinised and in a third part I shall give an exegetical example, referring to the mission instructions in Q, Mark and the Gospel of Thomas. Finally, by way of summary, I shall return to the above mentioned questions.

2 JESUS IN NORTH AMERICA: CRITICAL REMARKS CONCERNING THE PRESENT DEBATE

During the last ten or fifteen years the quest for the historical Jesus has gained in significance. The reasons for that can be seen in the American Q research as well as in the intensive study of the manuscripts from Nag Hammadi. In both fields special circles of American scholarship have developed very influential and provocative theses which also affect several of the new Jesus portraits. In Q research the book of Kloppenborg (1987) plays an important role and serves as basis for a consensus amongst some scholars in distinguishing different layers in Q. The earliest layer is called 'sapiential'. It cannot be discussed in detail here, but it will become clear that such a claim is not without problems. The Nag Hammadi manuscripts have brought to light numerous sayings of Jesus, which supplement the synoptic tradition considerably. Of special importance are the Gospel of Thomas and the Dialogue Gospels which are regarded as independent trajectories of the Jesus tradition. Several studies have enriched the discussion about these early Christian writings.

These facts do not quite explain the renewed interest in the quest for the historical Jesus. It is characteristic of the new North American Jesus debate that the correlation between the historical person Jesus of Nazareth and the character of the early Christian writings is not discussed in appropriate detail, as a manifestation of the methodological problem of text and reality. Instead some of the new publications concentrate on a picture of Jesus behind the Gospels by separating earlier layers from later interpretations (Crossan 1991:xxxi; Funk 1993:2-8). The aim is to recover 'The Jesus of History' behind 'The Christ of Faith' (Funk 1993:5) as it was in the 19th century.

It is doubtlessly important not to neglect the dimension of history while depicting the importance of Jesus for Christian faith. This was a legitimate claim of the 'New Quest for the historical Jesus' which was inaugurated by Käsemann (1953). But it is a different question whether the events texts refer to can be discovered by looking for isolated fragments and putting them in a new context. It is, for example, by no means plausible that the claim for a 'sapiential Jesus', who should stand behind the portraits of the Gospels, is more legitimate historically than when we accept the delineations we have as appropriate descriptions of his life, preaching and fate. Every approach to the historical Jesus behind the Gospels has to explain how these writings could have come into being as the earliest descriptions of this person. To drive a
wedge between 'Jesus' and 'Christ' is not without problems because it presupposes that we can have a more appropriate approach to Jesus than the early Christian writings themselves had.

The specific contribution of a newly inaugurated quest for Jesus could, therefore, rather show that the approach of Bultmann has to be reformulated by taking seriously that quite a few early Christian writings referred to the life, preaching and fate of Jesus in order to describe the beginnings of Christianity. According to Bultmann the decisive meaning of Jesus as the basis for Christian faith is formulated in the first instance in what he calls the 'kerygma' and cannot be found in the activity of the historical Jesus. A fresh approach to the history of primitive Christianity should instead be based on investigation of the multiple sources in their specific historical context. This can hardly be done by searching through these sources for more or less 'original' words of Jesus and then interpreting them in a general cultural context.

A second point should be mentioned here. In the very instructive summary that Schweitzer formulated, concluding his impressive representation of the 'Life of Jesus Research' from Reimarus up to the end of the 19th century (Schweitzer 1906:620-630), the point is made that a scholarly perspective on Jesus is influenced by the socialisation of the scholar concerned and that this should be taken into account when asking for a portrait of Jesus. This insight is taken up by Georgi (1992), who develops it further in a recent article by referring to the relationship between the sociocultural and ideological development of the society and the 'Life of Jesus Theology' not only since Reimarus but also in medieval times. The specific relevance concerning the quest for the historical Jesus lies not so much in the reference to the unavoidable historical constraints for all looking into the past, for one cannot deny the value and legitimacy of historiography since Herodotus. However, all preoccupation with the past has to take the character of its sources seriously to avoid unhistorical judgements. With regard to the quest for the historical Jesus we have to consider that one cannot escape the fact that the very reason for transmitting his preaching—according to the sources themselves—is the conviction that he is the Son of God, the living One, the coming Son of man and so on. Irrespective whether these convictions are founded within a post-Easter kerygma or whether they are regarded—what seems to be more probable—as phenomena with multiple features from which some are reaching into pre-Easter tradition, they have influenced the process of transmission. Historical research should consequently ask for its own hermeneutical presuppositions when dealing with these texts to avoid the danger of constructing a 'Jesus' who is not 'historical' but rather a mirror of its own ideological view.
Regarding these insights it seems all the more astonishing that in some circles of contemporary North American scholarship one speaks of a new consensus which is characterised by the abrogation of the picture of an eschatologically dominated preaching of Jesus as put forward by Johannes Weiβ and Albert Schweitzer (cf Borg 1991:1-2). Apart from the fact that this characterisation does not apply to all Jesus portraits discussed by Borg (for instance the approaches of Horsley and Sanders depict Jesus in agreement with the prophetic movement of Israel), one is especially surprised that there is no reflection about the fact that the new tendency towards a sapiential Jesus—which, as should well be noticed, is not meant as a hermeneutical application of the early Jesus tradition under new conditions, but as a historical reconstruction of the message of Jesus from the texts—corresponds, as Koester (1994:539-540) aptly notes, to a certain degree to the political view of that scholarly community. According to the sources, however, the view of a sapiential, non-eschatological preaching of Jesus is to be regarded as a construct that has no real basis in the concerned writings (including Q) and is therefore highly disputable.

For the discussion on the historical Jesus the following consequences result. The concern for the person of the historical Jesus should probably be shifted to a quest to find out how the rays of the phenomenon Jesus, his preaching and fate, are refracted in the different early Christian writings. This seems the only historically appropriate manner in dealing with these texts, which should not be searched for 'authentic' words of Jesus. Consequently it could be asked whether a portrait of Jesus as an isolated phenomenon that dispenses with early Christian views is not only useless to serve as basis for Christian theology (cf Hahn 1975:268-269; 1982:102-105; 1994:165-166), but also questionable with regard to its dealing with the sources. An approach that does not aim at a description of the history of early Christian theology also has to take into account that the phenomenon that is asked for is contained in the sources (apart from the few non-Christian ones) in a specific way which can be characterised as the life in a new era that has begun with Jesus of Nazareth. In this perspective his life and fate is depicted as an extraordinary event in history that has caused new rules and founded a new community. This view has influenced the portraits of Jesus and cannot be ignored in dealing with these texts. As was mentioned above it seems, thus, problematic to refract isolated sayings or parables from them when it implies dismissing their interpretative context for a portrait of Jesus at the same time (cf Schweizer 1995:22-25).

On the other hand, it is not an alternative to restrict the quest to the received Jesus in the transmission of the post-Easter kerygma as reconstructed from the pre-Pauline tradition. As is well known, Bultmann deemed it not
necessary for theological purposes to expand the quest for the historical Jesus beyond this kerygma. Pauline as well as Johannine theology should demonstrate this (1967:450). Problematic in Bultmann's approach, however, is in the first instance his categories of 'kerygma' and 'theology'. The former is, according to him, characterised by the 'Christ myth' that arose in the Hellenistic area of early Christianity and is summarised in texts like Romans 3:24 and Philippians 2:6-11 (Bultmann 1921:372; 1953:66-186), while the latter can first be found in the Pauline letters which took up the 'theological motives' of the former, brought them to 'clarity of thought' and put forward the decisive questions up to the point of decision (1953:188). This approach seems problematic because of his unifying view of the sources. It could be asked whether Bultmann's evaluation of early Christian writings under the dominance of the Pauline or Johannine kerygma is not an approach with categories which do not arise out of historical investigation of the sources themselves but instead have other presuppositions. From a historical point of view, however, it seems hardly convincing to prefer the Pauline or Johannine view on Jesus to that of Q, Mark or the Gospel of Thomas. They have contributions in their own right even if they emphasise other aspects than Paul and John.

Further, it could be argued against Bultmann that he goes too far, driving a wedge between Jesus and the early community and thereby separating the traditions from his preaching. As was already objected by Schürmann (1960), there is not only discontinuity between the preaching of Jesus and the reception of it by the early community, we have rather to reckon with perhaps quite a level of continuity in the transmission of the words of Jesus. This does not answer the question on how to determine the historicity of events reported in the texts. Obviously it was not the purpose of the authors to deliver the words of Jesus in a way which we would call 'authentic'. What we find should rather be described as the formulation of the view of Jesus as the eschatological decisive person by picking up and carrying on his preaching. This leads to the question whether we can put this relationship between reception and new formulation into sharper focus.

3 THE MULTIPLE ATTTESTED JESUS: REFLECTIONS ON METHODOLOGY IN DEALING WITH THE JESUS TRADITION

From these general observations we now turn to the question of an appropriate methodology for analysing the Jesus tradition. It is less important—and in the end several cases left undecided—whether one ascribes a saying to Jesus himself or to the early community. Of greater importance is the question of how to determine the mutual relationships between the different early Christian views and their answers to the ongoing relevance of Jesus also in post-Easter times. It is evident that one concept—for instance
that of the Markan εὐαγγέλιον that starts with Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom of God that has come near or that of Q's exalted Son of Man who speaks through his messengers—cannot have priority at the expense of the others. But how can one find criteria to evaluate each approach with regard to the Jesus tradition incorporated in it?

First we should look at the present debate again. As an example we take the approach of Crossan. In several of his books the two features of contemporary North American Jesus research mentioned above—namely the inclusion of a multitude of extracanonical writings and the rejection of the eschatological character of the preaching of Jesus—are combined programmatically also in his methodology. The basis of Crossan's methodology was developed in his earlier books (1973a; 1983), especially in the latter one, in which he seeks to find criteria for dealing with the Jesus tradition. His methodology can be described as an advanced version of the form critical approach in dealing with the synoptic tradition. Similar to Bultmann, Crossan seeks to identify trajectories by comparing different versions of a parable or a saying. This should enable him to discover an early core behind the several versions of a piece of tradition. For example, by analysing the parables Crossan compares the different versions (including those from GTh) and then describes the so called 'earliest version'. Similarly, in respect of the sayings he asks for a 'core' which lies behind the recoverable versions and can be seen as the historical cause of the reception in different layers of tradition.

This methodology for describing the process of how the Jesus tradition has developed has several problems. It presupposes that the ways of isolated parts of the tradition can be recovered up to the oral phase of transmission. Although Crossan rejects the possibility of determining the wording of a saying in the oral phase and therefore replaces literary critical observations by the quest for an 'ipsissima structura', he obviously shares the conviction of the classical definition of the relationship between form criticism and redaction criticism. Thereby he does not consider sufficiently the fact that a reconstructed core structure behind different versions of a saying is a fictional construct that never existed in oral or written form and therefore reveals nothing about the historical Jesus (cf also Kelber 1985:26). The view that redaction criticism should be regarded as a completion of form criticism was called into question by Marxsen (1959:7-14) already, then very strongly by Güttgemanns (1971) and Kelber (1983). Their insights should lead to a new paradigm in describing the Jesus tradition that avoids the concentration on isolated fragments. Crossan's approach is open to criticism in this regard because he seems to be looking for an 'early' version of a saying or parable.
from which the other ones should be derived. But one cannot go beyond the
different versions and contextualizations of a saying into the oral phase of
transmission. The difference between orality and literacy not only rules out
the possibility of recovering *ipsissima verba*, but also calls into question the
idea of original settings of isolated fragments. What is left, therefore, are dif­
ferent versions in several literary contexts which are to be understood as
interpretations of a historical phenomenon.

These are the features Crossan's concept and the conventional approach
of form criticism have in common. The differences are first—as has already
been mentioned—that Crossan rejects the quest for the wording of a saying
by replacing it by the *ipsissima structura*. But this is only a variation in execu­
tion, not a substantial deviation. The second difference is the broad inclusion
of extracanonical material from writings which are in many cases dated very
early by Crossan and are regarded as independent from the canonical writ­
ings. This enables him to put up a 'hierarchy of attestation' that, as he main­
tains, forms the basis of the portrait of Jesus as it is depicted in his *The his­
torical Jesus* (1991). Apart from the fact that Crossan does not keep to his own
principle of only taking into account traditions that are early and several
times attested (of course according to his view of these writings), it is to be
asked first whether the alleged multiple attestation—which can be used as a
criterion only if these are independent attestations—is a historically
appropriate criterion. A multiple attestation proves a strong interest of the
tradents in this piece of tradition but not its origin from the historical Jesus.
Furthermore, it could be asked whether Crossan's claim of multiple and
independent early sources is actually verifiable. We put aside the anyway
problematic thesis of an isolated 'Cross Gospel' that allegedly has influenced
the synoptic passion stories and which has been taken up in the Gospel of
Peter as well as the assertion of a formative sapiential stratum of Q—I will
deal with this elsewhere. Here we take as a test case for Crossan's claim of
multiple attestation a comparison of a synoptic tradition with their parallels in
the Gospel of Thomas, which seems to be all the more reasonable, for the
view that this writing is an independent witness for the Jesus tradition is
broadly accepted in some circles of North American scholarship. Before we
turn to the mission instructions as an exegetical example I would like to
make some general remarks in advance.

In my view the research on the Gospel of Thomas has led, at least in some
recent publications, to an impasse. First Sieber (1965; cf 1990), then Patterson
(1993), have put forward the thesis of the independence of the Gospel of
Thomas with verve, disputing the view of Schrage, who regards the Gospel of
Thomas as influenced by the Coptic translations of the synoptic Gospels
(1964). Patterson claims that the trajectory behind the Gospel of Thomas
would offer a previously unknown view on the early Jesus movement and also on Jesus himself (cf Patterson 1990; 1991). Without having the renewal of the thesis of Schrage in mind, of which the methodological weaknesses are obvious and well known, it has to be noted that the comparison of the Thomas sayings with their synoptic counterparts by Sieber and Patterson is in several cases less convincing. Amongst other reasons this is due to the fact that cases of obvious influence are dismissed too quickly and that the discussion of the counterarguments does not receive enough attention. It is undeniable that there are several sayings where influence from the synoptic tradition is not to be disputed.\(^1\) The studies of Quispel and Baarda pay attention to the relationship between several sayings in the Gospel of Thomas and in Syriac traditions with regard to language as well as to content (Quispel 1957; 1967; Baarda 1983). The tradition that forms the basis for the Gospel of Thomas (with definite Gnostic influence) which was found in Nag Hammadi should, therefore, be localised in Syria, perhaps in the Encratitic circles of the second century, but not in Palestine in the second half of the first century. Finally the fact should be mentioned that the Gospel of Thomas contains special material not only from Matthew and Luke but also has a common tradition with John, as is admitted even by advocates of the independence hypothesis (cf for instance Davies 1983:106-116). One cannot escape these observations by referring to a supposed earlier stage in the development of the Gospel of Thomas. It would be a circular argument to postulate the independence of the Gospel of Thomas and at the same time to dismiss cases which show a clear influence of the Synoptics as later assimilations.

\(^1\) Some degree of such influence is admitted even by those scholars who strenuously defend the independence of GTh (cf Köster 1990:85-86 n 5; Kloppenborg et al 1990:86-87). Cases of such influence are shown by Tuckett (1988:145-156) and Snodgrass (1989-89:28-37). In the face of such examples one sometimes has the impression that the independence is more alleged than really proved. Remarkable, for example, is the inconsistency that Crossan himself (1973b:257-258; 1973a:45-46) evaluates the superlative \(\text{μείζον} \ \text{τάς} \ \text{τῶν} \ \text{λαχανῶν}\) in the parable of the mustard seed, which is not in Q, as a Markan insertion but nevertheless regards the version of GTh 20, which has this phrase too, as independent. It is much more probable that GTh here presupposes the Markan version. A similar case of at least highly probable influence from the synoptic texts is the \(\text{δικαίος}-\text{phrase}\) in the Markan and Matthean version of the parable of the sower. The version of GTh (Log 9) has this phrase too. Crossan himself (1973b:247; 1973a:40) regards the phrase as an application of the Markan interpretation by the author of Mark. So it is again probable that GTh is influenced by this version. In Log 47 and 33 Coptic equivalents to \textit{hapax legomena} in the synoptic tradition occur (cf the Coptic equivalent \textit{ḥmbal} to the Greek \textit{oikētēς} that is only found in Luke as well as the Coptic \textit{ma ehpēp} in Log 33 that is to be regarded as influenced by the Lukan \textit{κρύπτης}). Consequently GTh seems to be influenced by the Lukan versions of these sayings.
These observations do not allow the conclusion that the Gospel of Thomas should be regarded as literary dependent on the synoptic Gospels nor is its theological value reduced by the fact that it chronologically represents an obviously post-synoptic stage in the history of the Jesus tradition. The attempt to prove an independent stream of tradition, however, is to be regarded as fruitless. The evaluation of the contribution of the Gospel of Thomas to the history of early Christianity should be detached from the quest for authentic words of Jesus it possibly contains. Although it is not possible to examine other witnesses in detail here (but cf Neirynck 1989; Charlesworth & Evans 1994), I assume a similar result with regard to other writings, listed by Crossan as independent witnesses, like Papyrus Egerton, Dialogue of the Saviour or Secret Gospel of Mark.

With regard to methodology for dealing with the Jesus tradition it follows that drawing up a list of attestations while dispensing with the conception of the writings which contain these listed sayings cannot be called an appropriate instrument for dealing with the Jesus tradition. Instead it seems to be more fruitful to realise the multiplicity at the beginning of Christianity which cannot be reduced to a reliable basis of words of Jesus. Even the contribution of the extracanonical writings seems to lie not in the fact that they deliver independent words of Jesus, but rather in the fact that they represent features of primitive Christianity which are often overlooked.

4 ITINERANT MESSENGERS: THE MISSION INSTRUCTIONS AS A TEST CASE

In Q as well as in Mark and in the Gospel of Thomas we find sayings which form part of the so called ‘mission instructions’. A comparison of these versions can elucidate the previous remarks.

For Q it can be presupposed that we have a coherent complex in 10:2-7, 9-16 (Q texts are designated by their Lukan location) in the order of Luke (cf for instance the reconstructions of Hoffmann 1982 and Uro 1987). In a wider context 9:57-60 and 10:21-22 are to be regarded as part of the Q composition (cf for instance Kloppenborg 1987:199-203). A striking feature of the Q instructions is the sending out of the messengers to an unsafe, sometimes dangerous existence, for they cannot be sure whether they will be confronted with friendly reception or hostile rejection. Further, it is characteristic that the messengers play a very important role in the process of spreading the proclamation attributed to Jesus. The rigorous prohibitions against travelling equipment are to be interpreted in connection with the order for the salutation of peace in 10:5. Both are signs for the symbolic realisation of the eschatological reign of God which is to be proclaimed by the messengers. This is further expressed in the advice to heal the sick and to proclaim the
coming Kingdom of God in 10:9. The contrasting curse upon the hostile cities in 10:10-11 corresponds to this. The eschatological quality of this sign is further clarified by the following minatory sayings in 10:13-15. It is to be seen against this background that the Q instructions were completed with a saying about the high relevance of the messengers as fully adequate representatives of Jesus and therefore of God himself (10:16).

With regard to Mark, it can easily be agreed that here we have another perspective on the messengers according to which the instructions are processed. In linguistic respect it is obvious that Mark knew an oral tradition common with Q but not Q itself. This is probable because of the uneven incorporation of the sayings that becomes clear by the sudden transition to direct speech in 6:9b. The reception of this tradition is to be seen in accordance with the general role of the disciples and especially the Twelve in this Gospel. Already in 3:13-19 the Twelve are called to be sent out later and are distinguished from the wider circle of disciples, whereas in Q the Twelve have no special role and are perhaps in general not even mentioned. In 6:7-13 Mark has brought the tradition common with Q in a frame that comprises 6:7 and 12 and depicts the Twelve as messengers who stand chronologically between the proclamation of Jesus and the post-Easter proclamation of the ευαγγελιον. Their function is, therefore, to mediate between Jesus and the post-Easter community and for that reason their proclamation does not gain own quality and is not characterised as a proclamation of the βασιλεία or the ευαγγελιον. Consequently, we have a different view on the disciples in Mark that is to be explained against the background of its story of Jesus as a whole.

Gospel of Thomas 73 and 14 contain parallels to Q 10:2 and Lk 10:8. If we restrict ourselves here to Logion 14, we have to realise first that this saying is a combination of three parts of which the second and the third have parallels in the Synoptic Gospels. Beside Lk 10:8, a parallel to Gospel of Thomas 14:2, we have a parallel to Gospel of Thomas 14:3 in Mk 7:15/Mt 15:11. With respect to both sayings there are indications that validate the assumption that they are influenced by the synoptic versions. Lk 10:8 is to be regarded as a Lukan insertion in the Q instructions. Here Luke, while abolishing the food laws, looks forward to the mission as it is depicted in Acts, especially to the vision of Peter in Acts 10 and the apostolic decree in Acts 15 (following Hoffmann 1982:276-283). But even if one does not agree with this judgement and sees Lk 10:8 as a part of the Q instructions, it is obvious that the phrase καὶ μὴ δέχωνται ὑμᾶς is to be regarded as an indication of the incorporation of this saying in the composition when it was fixed in written form. The fact that the phrase καὶ μὴ δέχωνται ὑμᾶς in Lk 10:10 corresponds to it shows that. In the Gospel of Thomas we also find the formulation εὐσαχτ伊拉克αίε (καὶ δέχωνται ὑμᾶς) that has to be regarded
as an element that stems from Luke (or at least Q). For this reason the version of the Gospel of Thomas cannot be called ‘independent’.

With regard to Gospel of Thomas 14:3 it is to be noticed that this version is like the variant from Matthew. In both we find (against Mark) the dichotomy of going into the mouth and out of the mouth. The claim for an independent version in the Gospel of Thomas, therefore, has to prove that besides the Markan version there existed another one, which Matthew also fell back on (so Crossan 1983:250-255; Koester 1990:111). Such a claim is hardly plausible because it must be proved first that the Matthean version is not to be explained as a redaction of the Markan text. This is, however, taking for granted the two source hypothesis, hardly convincing. The Matthean text can rather be explained as a revision of Mark, that changes the Markan abolishment of the purity laws (cf particularly 7:19 καθαρίσων πάντα τὰ βρώματα—not in Mt!) to a priority of ethical orders (the same in the redaction of Mk 7:18-19 in Mt 15:17, cf also Luz 1990:416-417; 424-446).

Regardless of the question how the pre-synoptic tradition history of this saying is to be depicted (cf, e.g., Räisänen 1982), it seems obvious that Matthew presupposes Mark and that his version has influenced the Gospel of Thomas. An independent version of the saying cannot be proved by other texts either (Rom 14:14 does not help here).

For the Gospel of Thomas it follows that we have to reckon with a post-Synoptic stage in the transmission. With regard to content the combination of the three parts of Logion 14 expresses a harsh refusal of Jewish piety rules, whereas in Logion 6, in correspondence to this, one finds an ethical interpretation of these rules which is asked for in Logion 14:1. This tendency towards a radical ascetic interpretation of Jewish laws is also to be found in Macarius and in the Pseudo-Clementines (Quispel 1967:35-38), thus giving an indication for a historico-theological description of the tradition behind the Gospel of Thomas.

In summary it can be said that the mission instructions doubtlessly belong to those traditions which form a constituent part of the Jesus tradition. Especially a comparison of Mark and Q shows that we are dealing with an old tradition here. The historical event lying behind this can be described as the fact that before Easter Jesus had constituted a circle of disciples, who put forward his proclamation after Easter as well. But now the question arises whether it is really ‘historical’ to strip away the features that characterise these instructions in Q as an order of the exalted Son of man or of the Son who was sent by the Father as becomes especially clear from 9:57 and 10:21-22. The mission instructions in Mark function as an order of the Son of God, whose way is a constituent part of the ἐνοχόν and who will return as the judging Son of man with the advent of the kingdom. In the Gospel of
Thomas they have to be regarded as part of the secret sayings of the living Jesus, the interpretation of which preserves from the experience of death. Is it plausible to replace these features by a different frame gained by researching the Mediterranean culture and by consulting modern anthropologists? This is not to deny the importance of such studies, but it seems to be questionable whether they can replace the framework of the writings concerned.

These questions lead to Crossan’s approach to the mission instructions (1991:333-346). He asks for the underlying structure of itinerancy in the Jesus movement that, according to him, is then to be interpreted in terms of anthropology and sociology. The phenomena of dress or equipment and wandering from house to house as well as those of commensality and healing (with respect to the latter he picks up the distinction between ‘disease’ and ‘illness’ from medical anthropology) should show that Jesus and his followers are to be depicted as radical Jewish cynic preachers who proclaimed ‘an egalitarian sharing of spiritual and material power at the most grass-roots level’ (:344) and thereby calling into question the rules of Mediterranean society. To be sure, it is far from clear whether the Cynics are an adequate model to describe the Jesus movement. It seems to be even more important that Crossan wants to push back all the traditions about mission to gain a picture of the Jesus movement behind the different versions. It should firstly be asked whether this trajectory is plausible with regard to the evaluation of the Gospel of Thomas (and also of the Dialogue of the Saviour). If we regard the Gospel of Thomas as a second century sayings gospel that took up several Jesus traditions and the Dialogue of the Savior as a third century writing it would be difficult to count the witnesses for the sayings which form a basis for the first century Jesus movement. Secondly, it is questionable in my view whether the instructions with regard to equipment, healing and commensality should be interpreted by appealing to general cultural phenomena which replace the frame of the writings in which these instructions occur. It is doubtful whether one can jump from such very general cross-cultural observations to the life of Jesus and the earliest Jesus movement.

Therefore, the hermeneutical difference is whether we should try to depict a portrait of Jesus by comparing the traditions about him with a general picture of the Mediterranean society or whether we should not rather look for a paradigm that explains why early itinerant followers of Jesus understood themselves as eschatological preachers or radical ascetics. The reason could be the fact that in following Jesus they felt a special immediacy of God and therefore carried on with a life style that, according to their belief, was appropriate to this fact. Crossan’s remarks on commensality are considerable at this point. Nevertheless, his goal to explain the special effect of the mission instructions by depicting them in contrast to a Mediterranean
'brokered empire' and to translate their meaning by generalising the above mentioned phenomena seems to lead away from this path. I doubt whether such overextended categories can serve as bridges to the historical Jesus at expense of the concepts of the early Christian writings. It seems rather that the result is a portrait of a late twentieth century scholar revealing his own view on the importance of the mission instructions against the background of his own socialisation. This is, of course, not questionable as such, but I doubt whether such an exegesis should be given the title, 'The historical Jesus'.

5 CROSSAN AND JESUS: SUMMARY AND PROSPECT

If we return now to the two questions asked at the onset it becomes clear that the importance of recent research on the historical Jesus, for which the approach of Crossan should function here as a prominent example, is to be found in the emphasis that is laid on extracanonical texts and the demand to take them into account in writing the history of primitive Christianity. These views thus have critical potential and should be taken seriously in New Testament research. It cannot be denied that, for instance, Syriac traditions, but also Jewish-Christian and Gnostic writings, should play a more important role in depicting the beginnings of Christianity. This could enrich our view of the diversification at these beginnings and would therefore probably lead to a more appropriate approach. This programm was already postulated by Bauer (1934), then taken up by Koester (1965) and should be supported emphatically.

Unfortunately this approach seems to be undermined by the peculiar and uncritical tendency to look for a safe historical basis of words of Jesus. The result could be a somewhat arbitrary 'canon within the canon' that promptly reduces the fascinating multiplicity at the beginning of Christianity, that has just been explored, with the next step to a frustratingly small basis formed by scholarly agreement about criteria of 'authenticity'. This phenomenon seems to express itself in the tendency to credit the antiquity and independence of many extracanonical writings and therefore to postulate even their high value for a portrait of Jesus and his preaching. For this reason it is the declared aim to escape from the 'Tyranny of the Synoptic Jesus' (Hedrick 1988). This approach is carried out by searching through these writings for authentic words of Jesus which obviously would secure the value of these texts. Thus the impression cannot be avoided that the real importance of these writings is disregarded if their value is made dependent of the degree to which one can find sayings from the historical Jesus in them.

Apart from the often somewhat dubious dating of these texts an appropriate model for determining the understanding of 'history' in them should be found. If it could be shown—and I suppose it can—that they took up the preaching of Jesus to create a new orientation in the world and to
form the basis of a new community, then the question for the historicity of
the underlying events should be asked differently. Jan Assmann (1992:76)
shows that in some societies there are examples for the transformation of his-
tory into myth. What he calls 'myth' is a story that is not only true but
makes demands and has a formative power. So it can be called a 'compressed
past establishing history' ('zur fundierenden Geschichte verdichtete
Vergangenheit', 1992:77-78). Terms like 'reality' and 'historicity' con-
sequently appear in a new light. Assmann argues that a certain group creates
its own past. Consequently history exists for this group in the form of a
'collective memory' (kollektives Gedächtnis). 'The Exodus', Assmann says,
'is—totally regardless of the question of its historicity—the founding myth of
Israel...' (1992:52). This should, of course, not be understood as an attempt at
transforming the life and preaching of Jesus into a 'myth' in the sense of a fic-
tive story. But it could mean that we should not ask for the life of Jesus in a
paradigm of 'original' and 'interpretation' but rather put the view on
'history', as far as it concerns Jesus in the early Christian writings, into shar-
per focus. The way to confront the difficulties created by the relationship
between the 'Jesus of history' and the 'Christ of faith' should be to look for a
model which explains the characteristic features of the early Christian writ-
ings as interpretations of historical events. Working with different layers of
which the supposed oldest one should be the most 'original' in historical
respect is definitely unconvincing.

The real bone of contention is that a quest for the historical Jesus, that
does not take its starting point in the reception of his preaching in the primi-
tive Christian texts, cannot be called a 'Third Quest' when a revival of the
'Old Quest' of the nineteenth century with a larger basis of sources is meant.
It is not a hierarchy of attestation which should be aimed for, but the descrip-
tion of the early reception of Jesus as comprehensively and precisely as pos-
able. With this goal we should examine all the sources, for it seems the only
manner to deal with the texts in a historically appropriate manner. What we
get may be not a safe basis of authentic words of Jesus but rather a diversity
of pictures which could not, without arbitrariness, be reduced to a single
portrait. This may be unsatisfactory to some of us, but I am convinced that
we have to live with this uncertainty if we want to pursue the research in our
field in a manner appropriate to our sources.

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2 I am not quite sure whether Mack (1988) understands the term 'myth' in a com-
parable manner. Problematic, however, in my view is his sharp distinction between
Mark as a 'myth' and Q (or Q') as a deposit of the original words of Jesus.
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