The church before the church —

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ABSTRACT
Churches are inclined to neglect Jesus’ kingdom preaching in relation to the role and task of the church. The relation between Jesus and his church can be directly linked to the relation between the earthly Jesus and the Christ of faith. In this article I will focus on the question as to what kind of Jesus gave rise to the church, discussing four different attempts to explain the historical Jesus: a Jewish peasant, a Cynic philosopher, a healer, or a rabbi. Questions as to whether there was something special about Jesus and the significance of the historical evidence about him are raised. I point out how the church was implicit in Jesus’ kingdom preaching, showing in my exegesis of Luke 9 and 10 how the so-called ‘Jesus movement’ started in Jesus’ preaching and conduct and not only after Easter. I work on the premise that Jesus’ whole life and preaching were grounded in a radical and even unique relationship with God. This missionary task Jesus set his disciples reveals the basics of a movement founded by him.

For many years now I have been troubled by the way present day churches tend to neglect, or even ignore, Jesus’ kingdom preaching when church issues are under discussion. I therefore wish to use this essay to offer my views on this matter and to honour my lifelong colleague and friend Prof J H Roberts. His research, enthusiasm and honest criticism on issues dealing with the church have always been an inspiration and challenge to me.

1 THE HISTORICAL JESUS, THE KINGDOM AND THE CHURCH

It has been a number of years now since Alfred Loisy made his shocking statement that, although Jesus announced the coming of the Kingdom, it was the church that came. Recently, Wolfgang Trilling repeated this claim that Jesus did not think of starting or even founding a church (1978:68).1

It is clear that the question regarding the relationship between Jesus and the church is basically identical to the question regarding the relationship

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between the earthly Jesus and the Christ of faith. This raises the question of the continuity between Jesus and the church. Was Jesus' preaching about the kingdom only concerned with a renewed lifestyle, so that it was up to his followers to create the church as we know it today? What is the relationship between the picture of Jesus as reflected in the Gospels and the historical Jesus? Can we still trust the presentation of Jesus in the Gospels? Was the development that started from Jesus' kingdom preaching and ended in a concrete church only due to specific social and cultural conditions? What was the process through which the events around the earthly Jesus came to be enscripturated?

Answers to these questions have lately been given by scholars trying to portray the historical Jesus and explaining how his followers created and elaborated the life and teachings of the historical Jesus. These scholars have used various means—social, anthropological, cultural, rhetorical—to picture the conditions which led to the development of the church and the process through which it happened.

2 WHAT KIND OF JESUS GAVE RISE TO THE CHURCH?

We have come a long way since the first attempts to find the historical Jesus in the eighteenth century. This search for the historical Jesus has had its ebb and flow but somehow it keeps on making its appearance. At present we have reached the stage of the so-called ‘Third Quest’ which started in the 1970s. The Third Quest is not monolithic at all, but incorporates a great number of viewpoints. These emphasise that orthodox Christianity as we know it today was only one of many traditions. Let’s look briefly at some of these attempts.

2.1 Jesus the Jewish peasant

John Dominic Crossan is perhaps the most well known contributor to this search, with his view of Jesus as a Mediterranean Jewish peasant (1991). He proposed that ‘the historical Jesus proclaimed and performed the Kingdom of God, and empowered others to do likewise, as a community of radical egalitarianism negating not only the ancient Mediterranean’s pivotal values of honour and shame, patronage and clientage, but culture and civilization’s eternal round of hierarchies, discriminations, and exclusions’ (Carlson & Ludwig 1994:1).

Crossan pointed out that people responded differently to this historical Jesus.² He identifies four types or groups of the earliest Christian faith whose

² This fact was recognised by the late Willem Vorster (1990:34) when he drew a picture of Jesus the Galilean and stated: ‘After his death he was put into many religious
actions, beliefs, confessions and general views of the historical Jesus were later reflected in the Gospels and Acts (Carlson & Ludwig 1994:4). These four groups were:

* **Thomas Christianity** (as reflected in the *Gospel of Thomas*), who showed no interest in the death or resurrection of Jesus and gradually moved towards Gnosticism, where the historical Jesus became more and more irrelevant to faith (1994:4).

* **Q-Christianity**, which also showed no interest in the death and resurrection of Jesus, but saw him as living according to Wisdom and empowering others to do so (1994:15).

* **Exegetical Christianity**, where learned followers of Jesus began to search their scriptures immediately after the crucifixion, not just to find apologetical or polemical ammunition against others but to find foundational and textual understanding for themselves (1994:16,20).

* **Pauline Christianity**, where those who followed Paul accepted the historical Jesus who died on a cross is part of Christian faith (1994:7-11).

### 2.2 Jesus the Cynic

Another angle on Jesus was offered by Gerd Theissen (1978) when he suggested the wandering Cynic philosophers to be the most striking non-Judaic analogy for the early Christian wandering charismatics. He described the decisive figures in early Christianity as travelling apostles, prophets and disciples who moved from place to place. He compared the lifestyle and actions of Jesus with those of Hellenistic Cynicism, especially their philosophy and lifestyle of going about as wandering beggars. Stegemann (1984: 155), however, considered Theissen's cynical interpretation of the historical Jesus movement as incorrect. He pointed out that it was actually the authors of the synoptic Gospels, especially Luke, who suggest this interpretation to Theissen.

Burton Mack took up Theissen's suggestion when he viewed Jesus as a radical Cynic. He looked for a 'social role' to fit the historical Jesus, and roles, because of this significance for his followers. Vorster suggested that the followers of Jesus, unlike Jesus himself, regarded Jesus as the final eschatological figure after his death. He, however, acknowledged that much more has to be done on the wisdom trajectory before we can finally determine which of the two are really applicable to Jesus (1990:34).

1 He thought of these travellers in terms of 'vagabond radicalism' (wandernde Radikalismus) or 'wandering charismatics'.

2 Cf also the work of F Gerald Downing (1988). Another strong supporter of the notion of Jesus as a Cynic came from Leif Vaage (1987). In his study on Q he comes to the conclusion that there is *nothing unique about Jesus*. According to him the beginning of the synoptic tradition was initially not a beginning. It belonged to the
pointed out three phenomena that would suggest such a social role: Jesus' aphoristic wisdom, his social criticism, and the social environment of Hellenistic Galilee (1988:53–66). He regarded Jesus' use of parables, aphorisms, and clever rejoinders as very similar to the Cynics' way with words. Many of Jesus' themes are familiar Cynic themes, and his style of social criticism also agrees with the typical Cynic stance. The notion of the kingdom of God he also interpreted in Cynic, not in apocalyptic terms. These Cynic analogies, according to Mack, reposition the historical Jesus away from a specifically Jewish sectarian milieu and toward the Hellenistic ethos which prevailed in Galilee at that time. He located the different Jesus movements geographically in different regions.  

2.3 Jesus the healer

More recently Stevan Davies (1995) drew a picture of Jesus as healer in which he took the information from the Gospels on Jesus the healer seriously. Contrary to the general trend in historical Jesus searches, where scholars concentrated on the teachings of Jesus, Davies analysed the actions of Jesus as a Spirit possessed healer in the light of modern psychological therapy and found that a great part of Jesus' healings can be explained in this way. He criticised the Jesus Seminar's conclusions, based on Jesus' teachings, and thought that 'it may well be that the very idea of Jesus was primarily a teacher came into being only after his death' (1995:12). He considered Jesus' followers as people who have been healed by him and not so much that they followed him because of his teachings. He argued that the historical Jesus became the embodiment of the spirit of God and that this fact, in part, answers the question of how Jesus healed people (1995:18).

2.4 Jesus the rabbi

Although Matthew, Mark and especially John refer to Jesus as 'rabbi' on several occasions (e.g. Mt 26:25, Mk 9:5; 11:21; Jn 1:39, 50) Luke never calls

current possibilities of contemporary civilization. Jesus is thus not unique, his identity was simply 'internal to the culture' (Cf Vaage 1987:497–498 and Betz 1994:460).

One group was identified with Jerusalem. They were Jewish followers of Jesus who created a myth of Jesus to identify themselves. They did not, however, worship Jesus as a divine figure. The family of Jesus was another group. A third group he identified as the Q community, whose development he divided into three chronological phases (30–40; 50–60; 60–70 CE).

The work of the so-called Jesus Seminar started by concentrating on the 'authentic' sayings of Jesus. They tried to put a picture together of an historical Jesus true to these sayings/teachings.
Jesus 'rabbi'. Historically speaking preachers were not called by the title 'rabbi' in Jesus' time, according to Faber van der Meulen (1996:431). There is no proof that he joined any particular teacher-group or belonged to a particular tradition of teachers. He did not even want to get involved in their legal squabbles (Lk 19:39), even though the evangelists never report Jesus using this terminology for himself.

The evangelists, however, had no doubt that Jesus had disciples and related to many people as if they were his disciples. His moving around was not conducive to good instruction—for that he would have needed a more permanent location. At the same time he was more than just a wandering teacher as Vermes (1983) seems to think. For Vermes (cf 1983:11), Jesus was the result of the honest and simple religiousness for which the Palestinian North was noted (see the criticism of Faber van der Meulen 1996:434 on this point). Vermes reasons in the same way as those scholars who consider Jesus as just another product of a particular culture. Contrary to early rabbinic times when it was not the custom for a teacher to invite someone to become his disciple Jesus did indeed call and invite people to become his followers.

In this case, as in some of the others mentioned above, it is often quite difficult to characterise Jesus precisely in terms of his time and culture. He does not always match the types we consider as typical of his time. Faber van der Meulen made a very down to earth, but true, observation when he said in this regard: 'In feite is de uitdrukking leren en leraar eerder gebruikt uit een soort onmacht om precies uit te drukken binne welke leerkategorie Jezus nu is in te delen' (1996:433). What we can gather from historical research and even from reading the New Testament text, still leaves us to a large degree in the dark as to who the historical Jesus really was.

2.5 Reaction to the search for the historical Jesus

According to historical research of the 'third questers', it would appear that what the historical Jesus did was received and experienced differently by various individuals or groups. The reflections and interpretations of these
groups very much influenced the development of the church. Some of these views and understanding of the significance of Jesus became dominant in the church, while others were rejected or only partly pursued. Based on social-rhetorical analysis Vernon Robbins (1996) worked out an elaborate schedule of how and when the various groups developed.9

The question of course is, what proof do we have that these various strains only appeared after Jesus and whether they were not present in the life and preaching of Jesus? How one answers this question very much depends on whether one looks at Jesus as the Christ or as just another pious Jew. Of course, everything we find in the Gospels cannot be traced to Jesus. One could therefore agree with Crossan that: 'Jesus left behind him thinkers not memorizers, disciples not reciters, people not parrots' (1991:xxxii). He, however, also warns that 'no amount of anthropological modelling can obscure the fact that any study of the historical Jesus stands or falls on how one handles the literary level of the text itself' (Crossan 1991:xxix).

From the different pictures of the historical Jesus illustrated above, it is clear that serious theologians still disagree about the real Jesus and what we can know about him. Our total knowledge about the historical Jesus, in spite of the enormous expansion of research and information at this stage, is still only very vague and much of the current conclusions are premature.10 One of the most vociferous voices against certain aspects of the search for the historical Jesus came from Luke T Johnson. The title of his publication on this issue11 is significant in itself. Johnson points out the futility of trying to find 'the real Jesus' through elaborate historical review and analysis. With this viewpoint we can agree whole-heartedly. The Christian faith has never been based on the historical reconstruction of Jesus, even though Christian faith has always involved some historical claims concerning Jesus. The average believer bases his/her faith rather on religious claims concerning the present power of Jesus. Many present scholars claim certainty about various aspects of the 'real' Jesus, but their conclusions are widely diverse and even incompatible with one another. To portray Jesus as an eschatological prophet, as Cynic sage, violent revolutionary, charismatic renewer, Spirit-possessed healer, or mystic teacher, indicates a very divergent picture of Jesus by different scholars. It also suggests that not everyone can be right.

10 See the unpublished reaction of P J J Botha ('Some cryptic points in response to Stevan Davies' Jesus the healer', Department of New Testament, Unisa, Seminar, 1996).
This divergence does not mean that historical research can prove nothing or that all their efforts are in vain. However, the results and conclusions regarding a portrayal of Jesus and his milieu have to be scrutinized to make sure that any possible claim can be upheld. The way one interprets the historical situation and how one uses the evidence is of the utmost importance. This can best be illustrated by looking at some of the critical remarks offered by scholars on Jesus as Cynic or as peasant.

Hans-Dieter Betz (1994) claimed that there is no evidence for the presence of Cynics in Galilee and that the Cynic movement cannot be stereotyped in the way the exponents tried to do. He did agree that there are similarities and numerous parallels between Jesus' conduct and that of the Cynics, but suggested that a careful interpretive comparison still has to be done. He is convinced that even greater differences between the teaching of Jesus and the ancient Cynics will be laid bare. These differences, he believes, would become more apparent if the reverse test of approaching the Jesus tradition from Cynicism were made as well (1994:471). Betz even claims that

the presumed presence of Cynics in the Galilean society in which Jesus lived is mostly fanciful conjecture... It is, therefore, wrong to make up for our lack of evidence by projecting a sophisticated urban culture replete with Cynics into every part of Galilee and then to place a Cynic-inspired sayings source Q together with the Jesus movement in this Galilee. It is just as unwarranted to perpetuate the bucolic idyll of a completely rural Galilee with Jesus as the typical Jewish peasant with his naive and unspoiled wisdom. At the time of Jesus, Galilee was a region diverse in culture and religion, different from city to city, and filled with social and political tensions (1994:471-472).

It is clear that Betz' opposition is especially aimed at the proponents of a 'Cynic Jesus' who do not sufficiently take the diversity of Cynic philosophers and the necessity of dealing with each in his own special way of life into account. Betz thus raised the question:

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12 Myburgh (1995:216) seems to agree with this when he says: 'The largest argument against the Cynic image of Jesus is the fact that he is constantly portrayed as a Jew in a Jewish environment.' And: 'The religious acts of a Jew in Jewish society would rather have been understood in the context of Jewish religion, than Hellenistic culture.'

13 In a similar fashion Stegemann (1984:160-161) criticised Theissen's view that the Q-texts reflect the social situation of the Jesus movement. He states that the representatives of this Jesus tradition in Q are not identical with the earliest Jesus movement and that the cynical interpretation does not square with their way of life. Although the texts from Q also reflect the homeless existence of wandering prophets in Syria and Palestine before AD 70, they do not advocate a pattern of homelessness. The problems of the Q-prophets are those of the majority of people: anxieties about the bare necessities of life.
Is not the aim of this entire venture to make sure that there was "nothing urique" about him, that he was "not the 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).

David Seeley, in turn, reacted sharply to Betz's criticism on Downing, Mack and Vaage. He defended these three by pointing out that they are not saying simply that Jesus was a Cynic, but rather that Jesus combined elements of Cynicism with elements of Jewish heritage. He shared their view that mixing ideas and traditions was the order of the day. His criticism of Betz, however, was mostly of a semantic nature where he thought that Betz should have been more considerate of the nuances in the viewpoints of these scholars presenting Jesus as being 'like' a Cynic and not being a Cynic himself. His attempt must be appreciated as one of bringing a balance in the argument, but in the end one cannot totally escape the basic argument of Betz against the shortcomings of the views of Downing, Mack and Vaage.

Somewhat in the same vein as Betz' criticism of the 'Cynic Jesus' was the questioning of Crossan's 'peasant Jesus'. In a discussion of a number of Lucan passages to see if Jesus—if he was a peasant as Crossan claims—was acting true to his being a peasant addressing a peasant audience, Johan Strijdom (1995a) poses some probing questions. His main concern is: If Jesus was a simple peasant as Crossan claims, were his actions and ideals really in line with peasant values and realities or were they more unconventional and therefore not just to be explained from the culture as such? Although Strijdom is more positive towards Crossan than Betz is towards Mack, he also asks for a more nuanced assessment of Jesus' words and deeds (1995a:322). In another article he compares Crossan's and Mack's constructions of the various early Christian groups and indicates how two New Testament scholars each give a different construction of the earliest history of the Christian church (1995b:126). This criticism was echoed by Jonathan Draper when he critiqued Crossan's thesis that takes for granted that Jesus was a peasant 'but does not really explore what it means to be a peasant and what peasants actually do and say' (1995:185). Even if Jesus had a strong following of simple peasants, he himself was a leader with a variety of followers. Strijdom challenged Crossan to explain why Jewish exegetes should be so interested in a 'peasant nobody' as Crossan had called Jesus (Strijdom 1995b:121). The question therefore remains: How should we explain the interest in Jesus during

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14 I refer to Seeley's article to be found on the Internet: 'Historical Jesus Homepage' 1996.
his life and after his death if there was not something special about this Jesus? Was this something special not what made him unique? One should of course be careful with adjectives like 'special' and 'unique' because they lie on a level which is beyond what is usually considered rational. At this stage of our knowledge of the historical Jesus we should, however, be much more nuanced in our propositions.

At the present stage, as witnessed by arguments such as mentioned above, we do not have nearly sufficient reason to believe that Jesus' views were mostly formulated or created and projected back by the different Jesus movements or different Christian groups as proposed by the third questers or socio-rhetorical critics. These proponents often give the impression that Jesus was a 'nobody' whose followers invented the ideas and thoughts ascribed to him in the Gospels and Acts. Some of their ideas differ very little from the earlier notion of a 'Gemeindetheologie'. The role of eyewitnesses and other informed followers who played a significant role in controlling what was said about Jesus, are too easily ignored. We have to keep a balance between, on the one hand, what could have been added or even created after Jesus' death by his followers who were differently orientated socially, religiously and even differently located geographically, and, on the other hand, the oral and written traditions which were handed down. Only when, and if, we have succeeded in this would it perhaps be possible to come up with a different approach to the historical Jesus and his preaching. In the meantime we have to be very aware of the limitations of what extratextual (in Biblical/canonical sense) information and reconstruction can contribute to our understanding of Jesus.

Our exegesis of the text should therefore give proper cognizance to possible parallels and agreement with other sources, and to information from social, anthropological, and cultural studies. It is, however, not wise to consider only those words of Jesus which everyone agrees to be authentic. That leaves us with a Jesus so reduced that we can no longer really get a picture of who he was and what his real intentions were.

2.6 A few preliminary conclusions

From our discussion in this section it should be clear that different New Testament scholars often make different reconstructions of the earliest history of the Christian church. Intellectually one has to appreciate the serious attempts to find the link between the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith. It is a very serious matter, because the beliefs of 'orthodox' Christianity today are often far removed from the views of many modern scholars. Unless this gap can be bridged, it has very serious consequences for both the church and theology (as well as theologians). Intellectual integrity and freedom are
not to be scorned when we deal with religion. Care, however, should be taken when anyone tries to produce absolute evidence for whatever viewpoint they like to take. This of course applies to both the church and to theologians.

We cannot escape the question: Of what significance is the historical evidence that is laid bare by historical research? History is simply not the same as reality. Clinical analysis and comparison of historical information with current beliefs in the church will not solve the impasse. For the average Bible interpreter, it is in the end the text of the New Testament and its interpretation which determines what they believe or not. Any scholarly contribution will have to reckon with this. Most believers do not even realise that their understanding of the Bible is also just another interpretation. They just take it for granted that their interpretation of the Bible is identical to the truth. The issue of the authority of the Scriptures and the rhetoric of interpretation will probably become burning issues in the very near future.

3 THE CHURCH IMPLICIT IN JESUS' KINGDOM PREACHING

In the preceding discussion I have pointed out that a picture of the historical Jesus is still very vague. Research into the historical Jesus has so far led to a very unclear and undecided picture of Jesus. Unless one is satisfied with a Jesus whose face changes depending on which scholar is painting the picture, I believe that a proper study of the text of the NT still offers the most satisfying picture of Jesus.

I would therefore like to turn to some specific passages in Luke's Gospel to see what Jesus, as he is presented by Luke, had in mind with regard to his preaching and the church. In this study of Luke we should keep in mind what was said in the whole discussion above.

I believe that the problem of the continuity between Jesus and the church should be tackled and solved from a proper study of the relationship between Jesus' kingdom preaching and the church. Up to a point we could agree with Loisy (see above) about the kingdom and the church. This, however, is not the whole story. It is a false proposition to consider kingdom and church as two opposing poles. We should rather approach this problem with the perspective that the church was implicit in Jesus' kingdom preaching.

A study of Luke's Gospel and Acts makes one aware that one should differentiate between the faith of the early church and the so-called Jesus movement. They are, however, mutually related phenomena (cf Schille 1994:104). My study of Luke 9:1ff and 10:1ff has convinced me that the church was not founded at Pentecost but that its roots and the first signs of its formation go back to Jesus' preaching. Even if he did not historically speak of the 'church', it had been visible in his acts and words from a very early stage in his minis-
try. We could therefore justifiably speak of the formation of the church as a *movement*. This was, however, a movement which started in Jesus' conduct and not only after Easter.

Jesus' message concerning the kingdom included a so-called 'Naherwär­tungs' dimension. His preaching about the nearness of the kingdom cannot, however, be limited to the 'when' of the coming of the kingdom. The framework and the motivation of Jesus' message are not based on the 'when' but rather on the implicit and explicit speaking about God (cf Trilling 1978:62). His whole life and preaching was grounded in and surrounded by a radical, even unique, relationship with God. Jesus' significance as it is portrayed after the Easter event cannot be separated from what he *was* and what he *preached* earlier on concerning the kingdom. This implication was realised by Bultmann with reference to an implied Christology. He pointed out that Jesus' call for a decision already implied a Christology which became the explanation of the reply given to Jesus' call for a decision (Bultmann 1933:245-267; see also Trilling 1978:69).

Jesus' life should be understood as a life in service of this cause—namely, the cause of God who offered his kingdom to mankind. What Jesus had done and had suffered is inextricably bound to this cause.

4 THE CHURCH AND THE JESUS MOVEMENT

Luke, as the only evangelist to write about the life of Jesus as well as the early church, deserves our attention in our effort to determine the relationship between Jesus' preaching and the development of the early church. It is true that Luke describes the church as originating at Pentecost (Acts 2). On the other hand he reports the calling of disciples (Lk 5:1-11), the selection of the twelve (6:12-16), their mission (9:1-6) as well as the mission of the seventy (two)¹⁵ (Lk 10:1-20). All these events form part of Jesus' fulfilling of his task. Jesus' ministry was, however, completed in his followers continuing this task after his death in their missionary activities. Because it is our aim to point out that the origin and development of the church was *implicit* in Jesus' own activity, this essay will mostly focus on Luke's representation of Jesus' actions in his Gospel—and particularly in Luke 10:1-24—and not so much on Acts.

Does this mean that Luke thought in terms of different stages of church formation? Lohmeyer (1936, see reference in Schille 1994:101) was of the

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¹⁵ There is good manuscript evidence for both 'seventy' and 'seventy-two' (cf Metzger 1971:150-151). For the sake of brevity and simplicity we will just refer to the 'seventy'.
opinion that Luke's report in Acts was referring only to the growth of the church and not to its founding. Such a differentiation is perhaps too strong and can no longer be supported. If one, however, looks at Luke's portrayal of the universal element in Jesus' preaching, it is clear that he had more in mind than just the immediate audience. The so-called 'Jesus movement' and the development of the church should not be approached as if there is an absolute discontinuity between the two. To a large degree the church developed out of the Jesus movement as based on what Jesus preached and did. The Jesus movement and the development of the church are, however, sociologically not identical, neither should there be an absolute separation. The one is a pre-Easter and the other a post-Easter event. The one is rather taken up in the other (cf Schille 1994:106).

We have already referred above to several possible groups of Jesus followers of whom some did not end up in the early Christian church (see 2.1 and 2.2 above). Some scholars, like Mack, Crossan and Robbins, differ in their identification of some of these Jesus movements, but they do agree on the existence of groups who had different views of Jesus. Some of these Jesus movements thought of him as divine, others not, some considered his death of the utmost importance and significance, others not, and so on. The church was in the end more than the Jesus movement. Because of the existence of a variety of groups the danger of disunity within the church was not just imaginary. It is therefore understandable that attempts were undertaken to facilitate and encourage the unity of this movement. This is the kind of activity which can be seen in Paul's ministry and letters.

A close reading of Luke 9:1ff and 10:1ff shows that the Jesus movement started before Easter. In the way Luke presents the story of Jesus we detect a certain development and expansion in the ministry of Jesus. For example, although 9:1ff only refers to the twelve being sent out, by the time we reach 10:1ff we get the impression that the Jesus movement was already showing signs of becoming a broader movement. The movement received its first impetus in Galilee where Jesus had his main ministry and following. We believe that a close reading of Luke will show how there gradually grew a more coherent and focussed movement in Jesus’ activity during his Galilean ministry, towards a movement which would eventually result in what we find in Acts as the early church. This becomes most evident in Luke 9:1ff and 10:1ff.

5 THE BEGINNING IN GALILEE LUKE 4:14ff

Luke starts off with his description of Jesus' ministry in Galilee (4:14-15) referring to Jesus being filled with the Spirit, which led to reports about him spreading through the whole countryside. These reports could refer to his
healing, which led, according to Davies (1995), to the cured becoming followers of Jesus. In 4:15, however, Luke refers to Jesus teaching in the synagogues where people sang his praises. For Luke, Jesus' fame was linked to his teachings, though his healings could have been part of it at an early stage.

According to Luke Jesus started off and carried on with his preaching and healings. He does not specifically mention that anyone from his audiences, or from the number of healed persons, followed him or became his disciples. This observation from the text goes against the viewpoint of Davies (1995) that the Jesus followers were limited to those he healed of their diseases.16

Luke 4:37 makes mention that in spite of the spreading of Jesus' fame, he forbade people to call him 'Son of God' (4:41). Already, before his first 'official' calling of disciples, he is driven to preach the kingdom of God wherever he went (4:43-44). The impression is given that when Jesus started out preaching the kingdom he was originally doing so on his own, without any specific followers.

We hear as early as Luke 5:11 of Jesus' first three close associates, namely Peter, John and James. We read that they left their livelihood to follow Jesus. The next to follow, according to Luke (5:28) was Levi. We have to realise what it meant for a responsible person to leave his profession, livelihood and family to follow an itinerant preacher. This was an important decision to make. We do not know for how long followers of an itinerant preacher would stay with him or what they would be doing all the time while they stayed with him. It does, however, affect our understanding of such a movement.

It is only in 6:13 that we read for the first time about 'disciples' from whom Jesus selected a number of twelve to be his closest co-workers. Luke mentions that Jesus prayed through the night before he chose these twelve, indicating the seriousness of the matter. It is well known that Luke refers to Jesus praying at important turning-points in his life. Jesus' praying before his selection of the twelve might therefore be Luke's cue to his readers of another important turning-point in Jesus' ministry. These twelve men were no longer passive onlookers, but had become active participants in the work of Jesus.

6 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF LUKE 9:1-6

It is significant that Luke describes the sending of the twelve in 9:1-6 immediately after the miracle stories in 8:22-56. We do not consider 9:1-6 as

16 Davies argues against the viewpoint that Jesus' followers were mainly people impressed and influenced by his teachings.
a new unit but would rather view it as a conclusion to 8:22-56 (so also Fitzmyer 1981 and Talbert 1982). The four miracle stories in 8:22-56 are followed by Jesus sending his apostles to go and preach the gospel, endowed with the same power and authority as were displayed in the foregoing four miracles. Healing (including exorcism) and preaching the kingdom of God are the two main components of their task (9:1-2). 17

Those sent out are warned that poverty and resistance to their message will be two realities in the lives of Jesus' followers. For this Jesus had warned them in his sermon on the plain in 6:20-23 when he addressed his audience as 'poor'. It was also highlighted in 6:27-36 when he paid special attention to the proper use of material things and property. The sermon on the plain follows shortly after the calling of the twelve, which is Luke's way of summarising Jesus' preaching for his readers and indicating how Jesus taught and prepared his followers for their future task. The twelve are also prepared for possible resistance and rejection (9:5). These conditions and warnings will be repeated in the next chapter when Luke reports about the mission of the seventy (10:3-11). It is not easy to determine whether Luke used two independent sources or whether he repeated and modified the same event for his own purpose. The fact is, that there are a lot of common features in the two events as described by Luke. Seeing that he included both, seemingly on purpose, we will have to see whether we can discover his reason for doing so. For our purpose it is important to notice that the preaching of the kingdom of God is central to the task given to both the twelve and the seventy. This is important for our viewpoint that the church is already implicit in Jesus sending out his followers to heal and to preach.

7 THE SECOND MISSION (LUKE 10:1-24)

7.1 The two traditions

It is generally accepted that there are two accounts of the mission, those of Mark and an independent Q version. Opinions differ as to which is the oldest tradition (see Marshall 1978:412-413 and Draper 1995:188). This is not the place to enter into this debate. For our purpose it is only important to note that Luke used these traditions seemingly separately in chapters 9 and 10 respectively with some assimilation between them (cf Marshall 1978:349), while Matthew conflated his two sources (cf Schramm 1971:26-29). The way Luke applies his information to the two missions (Lk 9 and 10), the first deal-

17 From a social historical point of view, Jesus is moving the twelve up in the hierarchy of powers. He is giving them the role of brokers in bringing God's benefits to the people. See Malina & Rohrbaugh 1992:338.
ing with the twelve and the second with the seventy, gives the impression that for Luke the twelve belong to the seventy (cf Rengstorf 1969:134). It could even be seen as his way of picturing Jesus’ mission being expanded already during the course of his ministry—first the twelve in chapter 9 and then the seventy in the next chapter.

7.2 Continuing the role of John the Baptist

In 10:1 Luke combines the idea of a mission with Jesus’ journey to Jerusalem. His use of the phrase πρὸ προσώπου αὐτοῦ reminds the reader of what happened in 9:51-53 where Jesus had sent out messengers before he started out on his journey to Jerusalem, so that they could prepare his journey. It reminds us of the prophecy in 7:27 which was applied to John the Baptist, who was to prepare the way for the Messiah. These messengers are given the same role as John. The narrator thereby suggests that these disciples sent out before Jesus are now taking over the role of John the Baptist. This linking of the disciples with John the Baptist is also present in the use of the Greek word (ἐνδείξεω) for the appointing and commissioning of the disciples. Hellenistic historians like Polybius and Josephus gave this word a technical meaning: ‘to appoint in office’ or ‘to invest with authority’ (cf Evans 1990:444). This word seldom appears in the New Testament. It is significant, however, that Luke used it in 1:80 for the public appearance (ἀνακοίνω) of John the Baptist.

Linguistically, it seems as if the author wants to link the appointing of the disciples specifically to the task set out for John the Baptist. With John no longer alive, these disciples are to take over his role. If this inference about the disciples taking over the role of John the Baptist is correct, it is clear that Luke is presenting the role of the disciples as supporters of and as the continuation of the plan of God with Jesus. This role of the disciples therefore forms part of the main plot of Luke’s story. On the narrative level, Luke—differently from Mark—pictures the actions of Jesus in his preaching and performing of the kingdom of God as closely linked to and imitated by his disciples.

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18 The verb ἀναστέλλειν used in 10:1b,3b,16c in participial form echoes 9:51 where more or less the same expression is used to refer to the disciples whom Jesus sent out at the beginning of the journey to Jerusalem to prepare his way. The same modus operandi is used by Jesus before he entered Jerusalem (19:29). On the occasion of his entering Jerusalem we also hear of two messengers who were sent out to help with the preparation of Jesus’ triumphant entry.

19 The plot of Luke’s Gospel can be described as: God’s plan for universal salvation which has been fulfilled in and through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus (cf Du Plessis 1995:12).
In the story, the mission of the seventy has the function of educating the disciples and giving them practice for their future task. The phrase μετὰ δὲ τοῦτο with which Luke 10:1 starts, links up with the immediate preceding pericope (9:57–62) where Jesus was explaining how he should be followed. The mission in 10:1ff is then the practical application of the conditions set out in 9:57–62 for discipleship.

That they are sent out two-by-two might refer to the fact that two witnesses were required in a court case (cf Deut 19:15). The judgement of a second person would probably be required in the case of people rejecting the disciples and action against them being necessary. This indicates that their task was to preach and heal and not just to arrange hospitality for Jesus as in 9:52. It is doubtful whether the sending out in small numbers would be for the sake of not being conspicuous, and not to draw suspicion from the authorities (against Draper 1995:192). Within the context of Luke it should rather be understood as part of the strategy required to urgently get Jesus' message across to the widest possible audience, thus using the available human resources as widely as possible. This habit of travelling in pairs was generally practised in the early church—as in the case of Paul and Barnabas, Paul and Silas, Barnabas and Mark.

7.3 The significance of a second mission

The fact that Luke is the only one to refer to a second mission could be attributed to his custom of repeating important events to emphasise the issue at stake. In this case it would appear as if this second mission is also an invitation to a wider group of disciples to commit themselves to the task of Jesus. Proof that Luke included this second mission on purpose can be found in 22:35,²⁰ where Jesus reminds the disciples specifically of this mission. The reference in 22:35 to 'sandals' is an indication that he is referring to the mission in 10:1–16 (which has its parallel in Q and Mark 6:6b-13), and not to the mission in 9:1–6 where Luke (in contrast with Mark 6:9) did not include the reference to 'sandals'. For Luke, a second mission has the purpose of enhancing Jesus' intentions with the sending out of helpers to broaden his own mission. The fact that he refers to 'others' which are appointed and sent out, has the effect that Jesus is going beyond his closest circle of apostles and is including more people in his missionary task. In this way his message is given a broader scope and a wider audience than he himself can manage. It could also

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be Luke's way of illustrating a growing awareness in Jesus of the permanence of his message which deserved to be broadcast much wider.

The number of the disciples sent out is given as 70 or 72. The number 70 appears in a variety of symbolical uses although the same can be said for 72. There were 70 elders of Israel (Ex 24:1). There were 70 members of the sanhedrin, excluding the high priest. According to Genesis 10 there were reckoned to be 70 nations of the world. Most commentators see this number as a reference to the nations of the world and consider this number as symbolic of the later missionary work by the church in the world (cf Rengstorf 1935 630-631). The universal thrust of this mission is enhanced by the reference to the harvest (10:2). It is an indication of the gathering of God's people which will be dealt with by Jesus' disciples. For Luke, however, this mission is not only for God's people in the narrow Israelitic sense. The notion of a harvest is qualified by the Greek word πολὺς which points to the greatness of the task rather than to the nearness of the end.

7.4 The real Sender

In 10:2 κύριος refers to God. The commissioning therefore comes from God. He is the real Sender. From him originated the task with which Jesus was commissioned and now also the mission to the seventy. He is the one to whom the harvest belongs and who has to supply the means to gather in the harvest. This fact is enhanced at the end of the speech. In 10:16c the missionary theme which runs through Luke 10 receives special importance with a reference to 'him who sent me'. The position of this reference at the end of this commission lends a special significance to this theme. It emphasises that God is the actual Sender. It is his plan and will which are being fulfilled. The mission of the seventy is therefore not just an ad hoc affair, but it is an indication that their mission is part of God's plan which is being worked out. Jesus is represented as the agent of God's plan and his disciples as sharing in this larger plan. The commission given to the seventy is the same as that of Jesus himself (cf Malina and Rohrbaugh 1992:346). They are to become the brokers of God's power just as Jesus has been.

7.5 The significance of the return of the missionaries

It is significant that in both missions reported in Luke, the people sent out return to Jesus to report on their success (9:10 and 10:17). The implication is that the missions are continuing. Although Mark describes only one mission, he does report the return of the twelve to report to Jesus (Matthew does not report the return).21 In Luke 9:10 we are informed that Jesus took his dis-
disciples in the direction of Bethsaida where they could be alone—perhaps to rest or to contemplate their success. At the return of the seventy in 10:17 we hear nothing of any location, whether city or countryside. It is therefore doubtful whether one should consider the reference to Bethsaida (Lk 9:10) as ‘an indicator of the urban orientation of Luke-Acts’ (Draper 1995:189).

7.6 Purse, pack and sandals

In Luke 9:3 the twelve are told not to take a staff, bag, bread, money or extra clothing. In Luke 10:4 some of these items are left out, but they are again admonished to travel without a bag, purse and sandals. Luke 9:3 and 10:4, as well as Matthew 10:10, differ from Mark 6:8-9 where a staff and sandals are allowed. The prohibition has been considered by some scholars as indicating that these missionaries were to be distinguished from Cynic beggars who would carry a staff and beggar’s bag. Πηγα could be the beggar’s sack which was used by Cynic itinerant preachers. In various dictionaries, however, doubt has been expressed as to whether this was the case. It is also an open question as to whether such a possible Cynic reference can be assumed for the historical Jesus (cf the discussions in Betz 1994:471-475). Draper (1995:191) suggested that it ‘may simply reflect a later Hellenistic environment in the redactions of Matthew and Luke, where such distinctions might be necessary.’ Seeing that it is difficult to prove that Jesus had any distinction from Cynic or other Asia minor cults in mind, we take all these prohibitions by Jesus as part of his demand that these missionaries are to travel light. What is clear, is that the disciples should be an example of absolute dependency on and trust in God. This is later confirmed in 22:35 when Jesus reminded them how God took care of them during this particular mission.

21 Draper (1995:189) ascribes the absence of the return to the continuing role of prophets and apostles in Matthew’s Gospel.
22 Reiling and Swellengrebel (1971:364) were of the opinion that the πηγα could ‘possibly but not preferably’ be considered as a beggar’s sack. Michaelis (1959:120-121) also expressed doubt as to whether Jesus could have met any of the wandering preachers of the Asia Minor cults or Cynicism. He thinks that πηγα originally and in general did not indicate the beggar’s bag. Bauer, Arndt and Gingrich (1952:662) do mention the possibility of the beggar’s bag but point out that such a bag was also used by shepherds.
23 Stegemann (1984:163-164) considered the specific Q-texts used by Theissen to support his ‘cynical’ interpretation as unacceptable, because they do not reflect an ascetical ethos, but rather the radicality of a life situation in which poverty, hunger and violence are the dominant factors. The Q-prophets countered the radical suffering of the majority of the Palestinian population with their own radical trust in God.
7.7 Greetings on the road

A further prohibition is found in the demand not to exchange any greetings on the road. This prohibition is peculiar to Luke. This seemingly discourteous demand must be understood within the context, namely that the harvest is ready and therefore no time should be wasted with any trivialities. It is a matter of priorities. Oriental greetings were important but also time-consuming. The need for this prohibition lies in the urgency of their missionary task. The view of Lang (1982:75–79) that it indicated a prohibition on receiving hospitality, is unacceptable because it approaches the whole matter out of context, and does not take sufficient cognisance of the rhetorical nature of this command.

In contrast to the negative instruction concerning greetings on the road, the missionaries are to extend greetings to the household where they receive hospitality (10:5). A greeting on entering a house was normal practice and the wording of the greeting is also normal (cf Foerster 1935:412). This greeting of peace, however, is no ordinary formality, but is associated with the coming of the salvation of God. ‘A son of peace’ referred to in 10:6 indicates a person who is willing to receive the peace and salvation offered by Jesus’ representatives. There is no indication that these are people who are already believers. It rather underlines the authority with which the disciples can act on behalf of the Person who sent them out. Both the negative and the positive instructions regarding specific greetings are part of the strategy for the urgent spreading of the essential message of Jesus. The implication is that Jesus wished his message to be made available to as many people as possible in as short a time span as possible. In other words, we have here already the basics of a movement or an institution founded and instigated by Jesus.

7.8 Stay in one house

This instruction deals with the daily upkeep of the disciples. They should remain in one place and be satisfied with what is offered to them by way of food. They can claim to be cared for but should not expect any special treatment. This does not look particularly like any action directed against any

24 We find a similar command in the Old Testament where it is directed to Gehazi by Elisha (1 Kings 4:29). Again it is for the sake of urgency.
25 Οἶκος here means ‘household’.
26 This would fit in nicely with ancient Mediterranean societies which were not individualistic. Every person was considered to be embedded in other persons (especially the family) and derived his/her sense of identity from the group to which they belonged. This web of interrelated relationships formed a good grid for the disciples acting on behalf of Jesus. See Malina and Rohrbaugh 1992:346.
Cynic habit, because Cynics refused to stay indoors at all, rather seeking the outdoor life and open air hardship. Cynics who stayed with a family like this would cease to be Cynics (cf Draper 1995:193). Draper’s (:193) attempt to find a parallel in the Passover where no-one was to go out until the morning (Ex 11:22), looks a bit farfetched because it does not really suit the present context.

After the instruction for behaviour in an individual household, Luke turns to how they should behave towards a whole community.27 If they are rejected by the community their reaction should be severe. Even the dust on their feet should be wiped off as a demonstration that not only the missionaries have been rejected, but also the kingdom of God. The nearness of the kingdom thus becomes a judgement over those who have rejected their preaching. It is of significance that the coming of the kingdom is repeated in 10:11. The mission is, therefore, not just a practical exercise with an eye on their future task, but is of the utmost importance for the establishment of a new movement which needs to be urgently propagated.

7.9 Healing and preaching the kingdom

The command to heal the sick precedes the the command to preach, although it is the other way around in 9:2. The relation between the two is clear, however. The healing is a sign of the nearness of the kingdom—of God's reign. In the following chapter (Luke 11:20) exorcisms—as signs of the presence of the kingdom—are available for the hearers of the preaching. In 11:20 Jesus' signs are therefore indications that the kingdom has already arrived. 10:9 refers to the kingdom that has drawn near to those to whom it is being preached. The difference between the statements, that it is still in a process or that it has arrived, is actually very slight. The fact is that the presence of the preachers, representing Jesus, makes the kingdom visible. What Jesus had said about himself in Luke 7:22, and about the significance of the miracles he performed, is now applied to the disciples. They are continuing and expanding his power, authority, and the significance of his work.

The discourse is brought to an end (10:16) with a saying which authorises the disciples to act in the name of Jesus. The way they are treated is in effect a response to Jesus and finally to God, who is the real sender. There is no mention of where they are sent. They will, however, return to Jesus, as in the previous mission (9:10). This signifies two things:

(1) The message of Jesus and its effect are given a wider scope, beyond his own reach.

Matthew 10:10ff does not differentiate between a single home and a whole town.
(2) Jesus remains the focal point and in control of this movement.

In effect it means that the church, as it was finally established, had already become visible in these early missionary projects. The healing and preaching by Jesus' followers to various audiences outside the immediate presence of Jesus could have added to the founding and development of diverse movements and groups. It is possible that people who heard about Jesus and experienced what his disciples said and did, formed groups who focused on different aspects of Jesus' life and ministry. Some of the groups could have come into existence before the death of Jesus and before the events in Jerusalem after his death.28

7.10 The return of the seventy (two)

Immediately after the mission Luke reports about their return (10:17). They jubilantly report to Jesus about their success, exclaiming that even the devils had submitted to them. Thereupon Jesus made the significant remark: 'I watched how Satan fell, like lightning, out of the sky' (10:18).29 This expression is based on the Old Testament image of Satan as God's opponent, a figure in the heavenly court of Jahveh, where he acted as the persecutor of mankind before God. His fall could probably be connected with the tradition found in Revelation 12:10, namely that 'the accuser of our brothers is overthrown.' The reference to 'lightning' and 'from the heaven' indicates the suddenness of the event as well as the association with something supernatural. There are differences of opinion as to whether the concept of Satan falling from heaven is to be considered a vision (so Creed 1930:147) or a symbolic metaphor. This concept appears nowhere else in the New Testament. The Beelzebub pericope in Luke 11:14-20 may, however, shed some light on this expression. The Beelzebub pericope harks back to Jesus' exorcisms and healings. In these signs the kingdom of God became visible on earth while the kingdom of Satan was being destroyed. The available information seems to point to the understanding of this statement by Jesus as a mythological portrayal of the fall of Satan used symbolically to express the submission of the demons as the disciples had reported. The submission of the demons (cf 10:17) is therefore a sign of the coming of the kingdom of God. That is what Jesus is in effect con-

28 In this connection the contributions of scholars like Crossan, Mack, Robbins and others can be appreciated even though one may differ with them on many details.
29 Hills (1992) proposed that the imperfect ἔθεσαν should be translated not 'I saw' but 'they (the demons) saw', which would imply that the demons became subject to the disciples because they had seen their leader, Satan, dethroned. Even if one accepts this translation it would not really affect the argument of this essay. Thus we stick to the generally accepted translation.
firming when he heard the report of the success of his followers on their return.

Jesus makes it clear, however, that it is not the sensational submission of the demons which is decisive, but rather the fact that their ‘names are enrolled in heaven’ (10:20). They now have proof that the power of the demons has been overcome. Their minds, therefore, need no longer be fixated on the evil of Satan's kingdom, but rather on their being elected to life by God (cf. Vollenweider 1988:200).

7.11 A commission to be completed

The success theme present in the return of the disciples is continued in the following pericope (10:21-24) where Jesus praises God for the special status which has been given to his disciples as his witnesses. It functions as further comment on the relationship between his disciples and himself. Jesus’ words imply that knowledge of the Son and the Father can only happen by means of revelation. The special attention and specific references to the Holy Spirit, the Father and the Son (10:21-22) show that, on the narrative level, the narrator considers these statements as very important (cf. Tannehill 1986:238). He is presenting the relationship between Jesus and God as a very unique one. Although the nouns should be taken generically of any son and father (cf. Jeremias 1971:56-61), the narrator describes Jesus as the Son of God. Jesus is given the role of Son of God, who claims to stand in an exclusive relationship to him and as the sole mediator of knowledge of God to mankind. It is the narrator’s intention to give expression to Jesus’ unique status (cf. Marshall 1978:438). This unique relationship between Father and Son is further closely associated with the relationship between Jesus and his disciples. Right through Luke's Gospel the commission of the Father to the Son and the Son to his disciples is an important theme (cf. Du Plessis 1995:359).

8 CONCLUSION

Research into the world of Jesus and into the character and possible features of the historical Jesus has come up with a picture which is still very unclear. Although we have to take serious notice of the available pictures and scenarios of the historical Jesus, the divergent views make it difficult to use this Jesus to explain the origin and development of the Christian church. We therefore still prefer to study the text of the New Testament for our understanding of the Jesus movement and the origin of the church. We have focused on Luke’s gospel for this purpose. In his presentation of the conduct of Jesus, Luke shows that the church was indeed implicit in his activity and in his preaching about the kingdom of God. In our exegesis of some passages
from Luke’s gospel we found that the basics of a movement or an institution which originated with him was already present in the conduct of Jesus. Jesus was the founder, engineer and centre of this movement. According to Luke the commission of God the Father to Jesus was continued in the disciples. The church was already present in Jesus’ actions and preaching and did not originate at Pentecost.

WORKS CONSULTED


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