

## The Lost Gospel Of Q—Fact Or Fantasy?<sup>1</sup>

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Imagine flying to a non-existent island on an airplane that has not yet been invented. Even if this impossible trip were to take place during the thirteenth month of the year, it would not be as fantastic as the tale, recently christened as scientific certainty by some NT scholars, concerning the so-called lost gospel Q and the earliest Church.

The story of Q (short for the German *Quelle*, meaning "source") is not exactly hot-off-the-press. It began over a century and a half ago. At that time it was part of the "two-source" theory of gospel origins. In the wake of Enlightenment allegations that the gospels were historically unreliable, it was suggested that their origins were instead primarily literary in nature. Matthew and Luke, the theory went, composed their gospels not based on historical recollection but by using the dual sources of Mark and a hypothetical document called Q.

The theory was not without its difficulties, and it is no wonder that many Anglo-Saxon scholars—B. F. Westcott (1825–1901) would be a good example<sup>2</sup>—as well as formidable German-speaking authorities like Theodor Zahn (1838–1933) and Adolf Schlatter (1852–1938) declined to embrace it. But it gained ascendancy in Germany, and to this very hour it enjoys a virtual monopoly there and widespread support in many other countries.

The much-publicized Jesus Seminar has pushed Q into popular headlines of late. But behind the Jesus Seminar's exalted claims for Q lies an interesting history. Key players in the Q revival include Siegfried Schulz with his 1972 study entitled *The Sayings Source of the Evangelist*.<sup>3</sup> Schulz speaks of a Q-church in Syria which hammered

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[p.4]

out Q's final form in the AD 30–65 era.<sup>4</sup> The "gospel" they produced—later absorbed into the canonical Matthew and Luke—lacked Christ's passion, atoning death, and resurrection. The upshot of Schulz's work: a primitive "Christian" community produced a "gospel" lacking the central foci of the four canonical versions: Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. Q was suddenly no longer an amorphous "source" but a discrete witness vying for recognition with its canonical counterparts.

In some ways Schulz had been scooped by the slightly earlier study of James M. Robinson and Helmut Koester.<sup>5</sup> But it is only recently that a phalanx of studies by Robinson, Koester, John Kloppenborg, Arland Jacobsen, and Burton Mack have in effect expanded on

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<sup>1</sup> An abridged version of this article appeared in *Bible Review*, August 1995. I adapt the title from *Fact or Fantasy: The Authenticity of the Gospels* (Worthing, England: Walter, 1980), in honor of its author D. C. C. Watson.

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<sup>2</sup> *An Introduction to the Study of the Gospels* (7th ed.; London: Macmillan, 1888). Westcott comments (p. xii): "My obligations to the leaders of the extreme German schools are very considerable, though I can rarely accept any of their conclusions."

<sup>3</sup> *Die Spruchquelle der Evangelisten* (Zürich: Theologischer, 1972).

<sup>4</sup> See S. Schulz, *Griechisch-deutsche Synopse der Q-Überlieferungen* (Zürich: Theologischer, 1972) 5f.

<sup>5</sup> *Entwicklungslinien durch die Welt des frühen Christentums* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1971).

Schulz's work.<sup>6</sup> In the end, Q's formation gets broken down into four stages: proto-Q1, Q1, proto-Q2, and Q2—asserted in detail without the slightest attempt to furnish proof. To save this house of cards from collapse, the so-called *Gospel of Thomas* is currently being pressed into service to give Q ostensible support.

The cumulative weight of these studies is captured in Stephen J. Patterson's statement that:

The importance of Q for understanding Christian beginnings should not be underestimated. Mack is surely right in asserting that a better understanding of Q will require a major rethinking of how Christianity came to be. Together with the Gospel of Thomas, Q tells us that not all Christians chose Jesus' death and resurrection as the focal point of their theological reflection. They also show that not all early Christians thought apocalyptically.<sup>7</sup>

Patterson is enamored enough of Mack to quote him favorably on a further point that he (wrongly<sup>8</sup>) claims most NT scholars share:

Q demonstrates that factors other than the belief that Jesus was divine played a role in the generation of early Jesus and Christ movements... [As a result] the narrative canonical gospels can no longer be viewed as the trustworthy accounts of unique and stupendous historical events at the foundation of the Christian faith. The gospels must now be seen as the result of early Christian

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[p.5]

mythmaking. Q forces the issue, for it documents an earlier history that does not agree with the narrative gospel accounts.<sup>9</sup>

Now we discover the truth: Q is the lever needed to pry the Christian faith out of its biblical moorings. Not the gospels but Q must be faith's new anchor, since Q is earlier than the gospels and does not agree with them. Q settles the matter.

Poor Christianity. Are sackcloth and ashes in order because we have followed the wrong gospels, overlooking the real sole authority, Q? Or is it rather time to bar the enthronement of a false gospel, following Paul's counsel and God's Word: "If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed" (Gal 1:9)?

## I. What on earth is Q, anyway?

The rhetoric used by Patterson and Mack is telling: "Q originally played a critical role:"; "Q demonstrates"; "Q calls into question"; "Q tells us."<sup>10</sup> But assuming for the sake of argument that Q ever existed in the first place, isn't it just a hypothetical source, a lost piece of papyrus, an inanimate object? But Patterson and Mack's language makes a dead thing into a commanding personal authority. This is the stuff of fairy tales.

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<sup>6</sup> Robinson, "The Sayings of Jesus: 'Q,'" *Drew Gateway* (Fall 1983); Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels: Their History and Development* (Philadelphia: Trinity, 1990); Kloppenborg, *The Formation of Q* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987); Jacobsen, *The First Gospel* (Missoula: Polebridge, 1992); Mack, *Q - The Lost Gospel* (San Francisco: Harper, 1993).

<sup>7</sup> Patterson, "The Lost Gospel," *BibRev* IX/5 (October 1993) 34-41, 61-62 (here 62).

<sup>8</sup> 8. See C. Blomberg, "Where Do We Start Studying Jesus?" in *Jesus under Fire* (ed. M. J. Wilkins and J. P. Moreland; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995) 17-50, esp. 19-25.

<sup>9</sup> Patterson, "Q," 40, quoting Mack, *Q - The Lost Gospel*, 8, 10.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 38, 40, 40, 41 (bis), 62.

It seems that so-called NT science—despising God’s Word in the gospels as “the result of early Christian mythmaking”—has created a new myth. Thus we now have not only the enchanted figure Q but also Q’s storied people:

The remarkable thing about the people of Q is that they were not Christians. They did not think of Jesus as a messiah or the Christ. They did not take his teachings as an indictment of Judaism. They did not regard his death as a divine, tragic, or saving event. And they did not imagine that he had been raised from the dead to rule over a transformed world. Instead, they thought of him as a teacher whose teaching made it possible to live with verve in troubled times. Thus they did not gather to worship in his name, honor him as god, or cultivate his memory through hymns, prayers, and rituals. They did not form a cult of the Christ such as the one that emerged among the Christian communities familiar to readers of the letters of Paul. The people of Q were Jesus people, not Christians.<sup>11</sup>

If we want to avoid following “cleverly devised tales” (2 Pet 1:16), then it is preferable to leave such fantasies behind by turning to the facts. What can we know for sure about Q?

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[p.6]

The writings of the ancient church give not the slightest hint that such a source ever existed. Among the early church fathers there is not even a rumor of a lost canonical gospel. The earliest information about the gospels of Matthew and Mark is furnished by Papias (ca. AD 110), who states that Matthew compiled τὰ λόγια (the oracles) in a Hebrew dialect. In Papias’ comment concerning Mark, τὰ λόγια are parallel with τὰ ὑπὸ Χριστοῦ ἢ λεχθέντα ἢ πραχθέντα (“the things either said or practiced by Christ”). This parallelism rules out an interpretation of τὰ λόγια in connection with Matthew as words or “sayings” alone. Until the 19th century Papias’ statement about τὰ λόγια was rightly taken to refer to Matthew’s gospel.

Long ago Theodor Zahn pointed out that τὰ λόγια would have been an unlikely title for a book.<sup>12</sup> Nor, he continued, is there a trace of evidence that such a book, as distinct from Matthew’s gospel, ever existed. Far less is there a hint that Matthew (or any of the other gospels) was produced by the use of written sources. And there is not the slightest textual evidence that some lost gospel “Q” existed, although it is claimed today that Q was so widespread that Matthew and Luke (and maybe even Mark) got hold of copies of it independently.

Paul never mentions Q, although he could hardly have been ignorant of it if it had such virulent influence and championed a faith so contrary to his own. He could not have known the four gospels, but there is no reason why he should not have known Q if it really existed in the decades prior to their appearance.

For Q allegedly developed between AD 30–65, was still available when Matthew and Luke wrote their gospels about AD 85, and is supposed to have been widespread enough that they each had copies (and maybe Mark did too). Is this possible in the light of Paul’s writings? These three decades would have given Paul ample time to encounter Q. If the Q-people were the earliest “Jesus movement,” they must have founded the church in Jerusalem. Peter and Barnabas, coming from there, could have known Q and would have introduced Paul to it in Antioch in the early forties. Paul would have encountered it and the “Jesus people” at the latest around AD 49 at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15). Are we to believe that this Council was content to quibble over the interpretation of Jewish law, as Luke reports, when Paul was “mythologizing” the gospel, claiming Jesus to be God’s son, while the Q-people held him to be no more than a sage?

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 40 (Patterson quoting Mack, *Q - The Lost Gospel*, 4f.).

<sup>12</sup> *Einleitung in das Neue Testament*, vol. 2 (Leipzig: A. Deichert’sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1924) 261.

If in fact "the people of Q were Jesus people, not Christians," conflicts would have been inevitable. How could these conflicts have left no trace in Acts and all of Paul's letters? How could Paul have written to the Corinthians that he delivered to them what he had received—that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures (1 Cor 15:3)—if the atonement at the cross was only a brand new,

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[p.7]

mythological idea, not accepted by the earlier followers of Jesus, who "did not regard his death as a divine, tragic or saving event"?<sup>13</sup>

Either Paul, "called as an apostle by Jesus Christ by the will of God" (1 Cor 1:1), is a liar, or the current crop of Q-theorists is spinning yarns. We have to choose.

In sum, Q's existence cannot be corroborated from manuscript evidence, Paul's letters, or the known history of the early church. Q and the "Q people" are an historical fiction, no more real than the man in the moon. It would be intellectually irresponsible to rethink Christian faith based on such a tale.

## II. The Origin of Q

Q was unheard of until last century. It has never been anything but an hypothesis, a supposition that Matthew and Luke might have taken their common material from a single written source.

Schleiermacher (1768–1834) got the modern ball rolling by twisting the Papias quote cited above. By ignoring the context of Papias' statement and the gospels' historical background, and paying attention only to the lexical meaning of the word *λόγια*, he took Papias to be claiming that Matthew wrote a document consisting of Jesus-sayings. Later, someone else composed a gospel that contained this document.<sup>14</sup> Unfortunately for Schleiermacher, *λόγια* here means "what the Lord Jesus said or did," not just "sayings."<sup>15</sup>

Schleiermacher proposed that Matthew wrote only the sayings, not the gospel itself, a view lacking support in both ancient church tradition and Matthew's gospel. There are simply no grounds for distinguishing between the gospel and some sayings-source. If one were to sort out all "sayings," the result does not resemble what is called Q today. For Q does not contain all the "sayings" found in Matthew's gospel, nor does it consist merely of "sayings."

Christian Hermann Weisse (1801–1866), founder of the two-source theory, was the first to build on Schleiermacher's error.<sup>16</sup> Contrary to Schleiermacher, Weisse claimed the sayings-source as a source for Luke's gospel as well, misusing Schleiermacher's authority, who had argued the opposite.<sup>17</sup> And so the infamous Q made its debut in the theological world. We likewise have Weisse to thank for the invention of the Lachmann fallacy,<sup>18</sup> which wrongly asserts that Lachmann proved that Mark was the source for Matthew and Luke, when in fact Lachmann said the opposite. The world-renowned two-source theory, the basis for perhaps forty

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<sup>13</sup> Jacobsen, *The First Gospel*, 4, as cited in Patterson, "Q," 40.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. H. H. Stoldt, *History and Criticism of the Marcan Hypothesis* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1980) 48.

<sup>15</sup> See G. Kittel, *λόγια*, in *TDNT*, 4.141.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Stoldt, *History and Criticism*, 50.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 146-49, esp. 148.

[p.8]

percent of so-called NT science today,<sup>19</sup> was therefore founded on both an error (Schleiermacher's) and a lie (Weisse's).

What was known for sure about the alleged sayings source behind Matthew and Luke?

The name [Q]. And what else? Nothing! How did one come to know its content and its wording? There was no other way than to infer it. From what? From the gospels of Matthew and Luke, as both allegedly have employed the "logia" as source.<sup>20</sup>

To construct Q one has to take the material common to Matthew and Luke which they do not share with Mark. The result is a potpourri—not only "sayings" in the pure sense, but also apophthegmata, parables of all sorts, and even a miracle report. Not only Jesus' sayings but also words of John the Baptist show up. Further, the so-called Q, which started as a "sayings source," excludes much of the same kind of material that it includes, material found in all three Synoptic Gospels. The deeper one probes, the less convincing the Q hypothesis appears.

But what about Matthew and Luke? Doesn't thorough examination show that they both rely on written sources for their information?

Concerning Mark as an alleged source, I have already answered this question in my book *Is There a Synoptic Problem?* My results showed that there is no evidence that Matthew and Luke were literarily dependent on Mark. Nothing prevents the conclusion that the three Synoptics could have been written independently.<sup>21</sup>

Let us now examine Q using the same methods. To avoid defining Q myself, I follow Siegfried Schulz's *Griechisch-deutsche Synopse der Q-Überlieferungen*,<sup>22</sup> corrected only as needed to conform to the latest edition of Aland's *Synopsis Quattuor Evangeliorum*.

Regarding similarities in content, we concede the obvious at the outset that, besides the pericopes that Matthew and Luke have in common with Mark, there is common material which they share with each other. But similarity in content is in itself no proof for literary dependence. It could be caused by the same event: a saying of Jesus, for instance, reported independently by several different persons who heard it. In other words, similarities might have been historically, not literarily, transmitted.

The same holds true for similarities in literary sequence: it is as apt to have been transmitted historically as literarily. In any case the differences in the order of the alleged Q-material as it crops up in Matthew and Luke are enormous. Only twenty-four of Schulz's sixty-five pairs of parallels, or 36.9%, occur within a distance of less

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[p.9]

than two chapters of each other. Only five of them (7.69%) occur in the same point of the narrative flow in Matthew as in Luke (or vice versa). It takes a robust imagination to suppose that in spite of such differences in the sequence—even as big as twelve chapters—the pericopes claimed for Q owe their origin to a common source. But imagination is no substitute for evidence, and guesses whether here Matthew, or there Luke, diverged from Q's sequence do not prove that Q existed.

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. E. Linnemann, *Is There a Synoptic Problem? Rethinking the Literary Dependence of the First Three Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992) 68-70.

<sup>20</sup> Stoldt, *History and Criticism*, 50.

<sup>21</sup> Linnemann, *Is There a Synoptic Problem?* 155-91.

<sup>22</sup> See note 4 above.

The main test for the existence of Q, and "the only safe test for literary dependence,"<sup>23</sup> is identity in actual wording. When we test Q using the principles explained in my earlier book,<sup>24</sup> the results are revealing. Please bear with me as I cite some statistics, the only way I know to arrive at sound results in this matter.

In the sixty-five pairs of parallels alleged to make up Q, the number of words in Q's Matthean form amount to 4319, in Luke's 4253. The number of identical words in parallel verses is 1792, or 41.49% of Matthew's Q portion and 42.13% of Luke's. This material consists mainly of sayings of Jesus, which when compared with Marcan pericopes usually possess a high degree of conformity. This had led me to project that the number of identical words in the alleged Q-material might run 80% or so, so I admit I was surprised when it turned out to be only about 42%. The material breaks down as follows.

*In thirty-four passages* of the 130, which comprise 26% of the Q pericopes,<sup>25</sup> *the number of identical words in parallel passages is less than 25%*. The number of words in these passages is 1110 in Matthew, or 26% of his Q material, and 1269 in Luke, or 30% of his.<sup>26</sup>

*In fifty-three passages*<sup>27</sup> of the 130, or 41% of Q, *the number of identical words in parallel passages is between 25% and 49.9%*. The number of words in these passages is 1702 in Matthew, or 39% of his Q material, and 1491 in Luke, or 35% of his.

[p.10]

*In twenty-nine passages* of the 130, or 22% of Q, *the number of identical words in parallel passages is between 50% and 74.9%*. The number of words in these passages is 1054 in Matthew, or 24% of his Q material, and 1063 in Luke, or 25% of his.

*In fourteen passages of the 130* (six in Matthew and eight in Luke), or 11% of Q, *the number of identical words in parallel verses is between 75% and 100%*. The number of words in these passages is 453 in Matthew, or 10% of his Q material, and 430 in Luke, or 10% of his.

Of the 130 passages, sixty-seven (53% of Q) contain less than fifty words. For sake of comparison, the easily memorized Psalm 143 has forty-three words; Psalm 100 contains

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<sup>23</sup> J. Wenham, *Redating Matthew, Mark, and Luke: A Fresh Assault on the Synoptic Problem* (London/Sidney/Auckland/Toronto: Hodder and Stoughton, 1991) 54.

<sup>24</sup> *Is There a Synoptic Problem?* 111-17.

<sup>25</sup> One hundred thirty comes from the sixty-five pairs times two. Twenty-six percent comes from dividing thirty-four by one hundred thirty. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number whenever possible.

<sup>26</sup> The basis for these figures is 4319, the total of Q words contained in Matthew, and 4253, the total number of Q words contained in Luke.

<sup>27</sup> Since we are analyzing pairs, it may seem odd not to have an even number here. But we are putting Matthew's or Luke's individual passages into one of four percentage categories: 1-24.9%; 25-49.9%; 50-74.9%; or 75-100%. So, for example, Matt 6:9-13 (the Lord's prayer) shares twenty-six identical words with its counterpart in Luke 11:14. These twenty-six words are 43% for Matthew's total of sixty-one words, but 59% of Luke's total of forty-four words. In this case, the two components of the "pair" in view fit into different percentage categories. This pattern repeats itself in about a dozen of the sixty-five pairs. And that is why we get fifty-three passages, an odd number, in the 25-49.9% category, or twenty-nine passages in the 50-74.9% category. Despite this complication we still get an accurate picture of the overall verbal correspondence between and among Matthean and Lucan passages alleged to reflect the common Q source.

seventy-nine.<sup>28</sup> Thirty-nine passages (30% of Q) contain 50–99 words. For comparison: Psalm 23, also easily memorized, has 115 words.

In other words, 82% of Q (106 of 130 passages) consists of blocks less than 100 words in length. Is it preposterous to suggest that Jesus' disciples, who sat at his feet and were sent out in his name for three years' time, could have preserved such reminiscences, which assumed varied shapes in the telling, by memory? Is a hypothetical written document needed, or even reasonable, to account for Matthew and Luke's overlap?

I have counted all the rest of the Q passages, too. Ten contain 100–149 words, twelve contain 150–199 words, one contains 202 words, and two, or just one pair of parallels, contain 250–300 words.

From these tabulations we can say: the longer the passage, the smaller the number of identical words and the bigger the amount of differences. In the longest alleged Q passage, the parable of the talents (Matt 25:14–30), only 20% of its words (60 out of 291) are identical with the Lucan parallel. Out of the sixty identical words, nine are "and," seven are articles, and six are pronouns scattered throughout the pericope. So 22 of the 60 (37% of the words) are meaningless for establishing literary dependence. This leaves only 38 words out of 291 that Q-theorists must rely on to establish literary dependence. Most of the identical words (47 of 60, or 78%) occur in direct speech.

The differences, however, between Matthew and Luke in this passage outnumber the sixty identical words by far. They even outnumber the 291 words in Matthew. In all they sum up to 310, or 107% of Matthew's 291 words!

The one passage with 100% identical wording, Matt 6:24 (cf. Luke 16:13), consists of 28 words. This is one fewer than the tiny Psalm 117 and not even half as much as the Great Commission, Matt 28:18b–20, which many know by heart.

The longest passage in the 75 to 100% category above contains just 78% identical words. The whole passage is about the length of Psalm 1, again a text that many know by heart. It is not hard to

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[p.11]

imagine accounts of this length being committed to memory in the oral culture of Jesus' day.<sup>29</sup>

The result of these statistical observations: there is no conclusive evidence for the alleged Q in Matthew and Luke. There are not even noteworthy facts that speak in favor of such a hypothesis. Rather, the difficulties of the hypothesis are legion. The content of Q does not correspond to what it is supposed to be; the differences in order lead into a morass of auxiliary explanations that cannot be verified. Neither the similarities in content of the pericopes nor the percentages of identical wording present argue for literary dependence, since the differences are much higher than the similarities. The Q-hypothesis does not solve a problem but rather creates problems—which then require additional hypotheses to remedy.

The gospel data do not comprise a problem if we are willing to abide by what the data themselves along with the documents of the early church tell us: The gospels report the words

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<sup>28</sup> Word counts from NASB.

<sup>29</sup> Cf., Linnemann, *Is There Synoptic Problem?* 182-85.

and deeds of our Lord Jesus. They do this partly through direct eyewitnesses (Matthew, John) and partly by those who were informed by eyewitnesses (Mark, Luke).<sup>30</sup> In that case the similarities as well as the differences are just what one expects from eyewitness reminiscence.

In a word: There is no conclusive evidence for Q in Matthew and Luke. At best, Q is an unnecessary hypothesis that has never lived up to its billing.

### III. But what about *Thomas*?

The *Gospel of Thomas* plays a big role in the new debate about Q. Patterson writes: Scholars took a long time deciding just what Q was. The sheer fact of its nonexistence was no small problem—and an obvious opening for Q skeptics. In recent years, however, resistance to the idea of Q has largely disappeared as the result of another amazing discovery: a nearly complete copy of the noncanonical Gospel of Thomas.<sup>31</sup>

The Gospel of Thomas is a recollection of sayings of Jesus... The Gospel of Thomas shows that a gospel without a passion narrative is quite possible... A theology grounded on Jesus' words, without any particular interest in his death, is no longer unthinkable... The Gospel of Thomas which also has little interest in Jesus' death and resurrection, in effect forced this reevaluation.<sup>32</sup>

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[p.12]

Together with the Gospel of Thomas Q tells us that not all Christians chose Jesus' death and resurrection as the focal point of their theological reflection.<sup>33</sup>

Does the *Gospel of Thomas* indeed prove how the oldest gospel, the alleged Q, was shaped—consisting mainly of sayings, with no passion or Easter reports?

Let me answer with another question. If a young man is leading a rock band, does this prove that a deceased person of his grandfather's generation played rock music, too? Of course not, even if it were known that the deceased was a musician.

The *Gospel of Thomas* is mentioned or quoted by some church fathers in the first decades of the third century. Recent scholarship dates its earliest possible original composition at about AD 140 (though the only complete manuscript is a Coptic translation dating from around AD 400). Even if this hypothetical dating be correct, that is more than seventy years after our canonical gospels. By that time the true gospels and the very expression *euangelion* (gospel) were well-established: understandably a new creation like *Thomas* would try to traffic in this good name by claiming the "gospel" title. But nothing here supports the theory that *Thomas* was a model for, or even a co-belligerent of, Q in the AD 35–65 time span.<sup>34</sup>

The *Gospel of Thomas* is not just "noncanonical." Every church father who ever mentioned it called it heretical or Gnostic. From a Gnostic writing we cannot expect interest in Jesus' death and resurrection since Gnosticism repudiates both as the early church

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 185-88. For fuller discussion and citations see D. A. Carson, D. J. Moo, and L. Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992) 66-74, 92-95, 113-15, 138-57. See also H.-J. Schulz, *Die apostolische Herkunft der vier Evangelien* (Freiburg: Herder, 1994).

<sup>31</sup> Patterson, "Q," 35.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>34</sup> Attempts have been made for an early dating of *Thomas* about AD 50-70, and only being that early would it validate the Q-hypothesis: but this dating has been content with assertions and has brought forth no sound proof.



understood them. So how can a heretical writing rightly be taken as the prototype for constructing canonical ones?

It is important to recall here that an actual "Q gospel" *sans* passion and Easter narratives does not exist. It is rather extracted from Matthew and Luke—which in every form known to us *do* contain the passion and Easter material.

William R. Farmer has recently suggested why the heretical *Gospel of Thomas* is being pushed to play so large a role in reconstructing early Christianity:

Because *Thomas* is a late-second to fourth-century document, by itself it could never be successfully used to lever the significance of Jesus off its New Testament foundation. Similarly, the sayings source Q, allegedly used by Matthew and Luke, by itself could never be successfully used to achieve this result. But used together,

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[p.13]

as they are by a significant number of scholars, *Thomas* and Q appear to reinforce one another.<sup>35</sup>

You cannot erect a playing-card house with a single card. You might lean two cards together as long as no wind blows. But can you live in such a house of cards?

#### IV. Q the Lost Gospel—Fact or Fantasy?

The answer to our initial question is clear.

As a modest hypothesis undergirding the two-source theory, Q turns out to be based on an error. It has been promoted without thorough examination. Put to the test it proves untenable.

As co-conspirator with the *Gospel of Thomas* to undermine the whole Christian faith, Q is nothing but fantasy. The same goes for the literary shuffling used to discern various layers in it. Such totally subjective arrangements, depending on dubious suggestions about the historical background, amount to novelistic trifling with early Christian origins.

So why are earnest scholars willing to indulge in such fantasies?

At issue today is whether the death of Jesus should be regarded as an unnecessary or an essential part of the Christian message... The trend among New Testament scholars who follow the *Thomas-Q* line is to represent Jesus as one whose disciples had no interest in any redemptive consequence of his death and no interest in his resurrection.<sup>36</sup>

Farmer's critical assessment is borne out in Patterson's essay, particularly in the closing sentences:

Together with the Gospel of Thomas, Q tells us that not all Christians chose Jesus' death and resurrection as a focal point of their theological reflection... The followers of Jesus were very diverse and drew on a plethora of traditions to interpret and explain what they were doing. With the discovery of the Lost Gospel, perhaps some of the diversity will again thrive, as we rediscover that theological diversity is not a weakness, but a strength.<sup>37</sup>

The motive is clearly perceptible. Q (with *Thomas*' aid) gives a biblical basis for persons who do not accept Jesus as the Son of God, reject his atoning death on the cross, and

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<sup>35</sup> *The Gospel of Jesus: The Pastoral Relevance of the Synoptic Problem* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1994) 3f.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>37</sup> Patterson, "Q," 62.

deny his resurrection. Then, in copyright-infringement fashion, these same scholars combine their newly minted biblical basis with early church

[p.14]

diversity to justify calling themselves "Christians" despite their aberrant convictions.

By trumpeting the claim that today's new Q-Christians are in sync with earliest historical origins, while traditional Bible believers hallow "the result of early Christian mythmaking," they lay down an effective smoke screen that enables them to keep their posts as ostensible professors of Christian origins and leaders of the church.

Be we are not obliged to follow "cleverly devised tales" (2 Pet 1:16). The canonical gospels exist. Q does not. The heretical, second century *Gospel of Thomas* is not binding (unless we are Gnostics). Whether on historical or theological grounds, there is no reason to give up the canonical gospels as the original and divinely inspired foundation for our faith.

**Table One: Pericopes<sup>38</sup>**

#	Matthew	Luke	Pericope
1	10:32	12:8	The prophecy concerning confession and denial of Jesus
2	5:3, 4, 6	6:20b, 21	The Beatitudes
3	6:9–13	11:1–4	The Lord's Prayer
4	23:25, 23, 6–7a, 27, 4, 29–31, 13	11:39, 42–44, 46–48, 52	Woes upon the Pharisees
5	5:18	16:17	The apocalyptic limits of the law of Moses
6	5:32	16:18	The rigorous prohibition of divorce
7	5:39–42	6:29f	The radical resignation of one's own rights
8	5:44–48	6:27f, 35b, 32–35a, 36	The command to love one's enemy
9	7:12	6:31	The golden rule
10	6:19–21	12:33f	The admonition not to gather worldly riches
11	7:1–5	6:37f, 41f	The admonition not to judge others
12	6:25–33	12:22–31	The admonition not to be anxious
13	10:28–31	12:4–7	The admonition against wrong fears
14	7:7–11	11:9–13	Encouragement to pray
15	4:1–11	4:1–13	The temptation of Jesus
16	11:2–6	7:18–23	The question of John the Baptist

<sup>38</sup> According to: S. Schulz: "Griechisch-deutsche Synopse der Q-Überlieferungen" ("Greek-German Synopsis of the Q-traditions," numbers added).

17	12:22–28, 30	11:14–20, 23	The Pharisees' blasphemy
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[p.15]

18	11:25–27	10:21f	The revelation-saying
19	11:7–11	7:24–28	Jesus' tribute to John
20	8:5–13	7:1–10	Jesus heals a centurion's servant
21	12:32	12:10	The sin against the Holy Spirit
22	12:38–42	11:29–32	The sign of Jonah
23	10:34–36	12:51–53	Christ divides men
24	11:12f	16:16	Taking the kingdom by force
25	24:43f	12:30f	The parable of the burglar
26	24:45–51	12:42b–46	The parable of the good and the wicked servant
27	24:26–28, 37–41	17:23f, 37, 26f, 30, 34f	The Q-apocalypse
28	25:14–30	19:12–27	The parable of the talents
29	13:11f	13:18f	The parable of the mustard seed
30	13:33	13:20f	The parable of the leaven
31	7:13f	13:23f	The admonition of the narrow porch
32	7:24–27	6:47–49	The parable of the two foundations
33	7:16–20; 12:33–35	6:43–45	The parable of the tree and the fruit
34	18:15, 21f	17:3f	The admonition to forgive
35	8:11f	13:28f	The heathens coming into the kingdom of God
36	19:28	22:28–30	The apocalyptic judgment on the twelve
37	23:34–36	11:49–51	The sophia-logion
38	23:37–39	13:34f	The saying concerning Jerusalem
39	11:21–24	10:13–15	The woe against the Galilean towns
40	3:7–12	3:7–9, 15–18	John the Baptist preaches judgment
41	11:16–19	7:31–35	The parable about "this generation" with explanation
42	18:12–14	15:4–7	The parable of the sheep gone astray
43	22:1–10	14:15–24	The parable of the dinner
44	9:37f; 10:16, 9–	10:2–12	The disciples sent out

	10a, 11–13, 10b, 7f, 14f		
45	13:16f	10:23f	The blessedness of the disciples
46	5:25f	12:57–59	Agreement with one's accuser
47	7:22f	13:26f	The rejection of the false disciples
48	7:21	6:46	Against those who call Jesus Lord but don't obey him
49	10:38	14:27	Discipleship in crossbearing
50	8:19–22	9:57–60	On following Jesus

[p.16]

51	10:19f	12:11f	Confession before the synagogues
52	10:39	17:33	Life-keeping and life-losing
53	10:37	14:26	The hate on behalf of Jesus
54	10:24f	6:40	Pupil and teacher
55	23:12	14:11/18:14	Exaltation and humiliation
56	5:11f	6:22f	Beatitude of the insulted
57	10:40	10:16	Admonition to listen to the disciples
58	6:24	16:13	Warning not to serve two masters
59	10:26f	12:2f	What is hidden shall become revealed
60	17:20	17:3f	Faith accomplishes miracles
61	6:22f	11:34–36	The parable of the eye
62	5:13	14:34f	The parable of the salt
63	15:14	6:39	The parable of the blind, leading the blind
64	5:15	11:33	The parable of the lamp on the lampstand
65	12:43–45	11:24–26	The warning against the return of the evil spirit

**Table 2:  
Quantitative Comparison of the Alleged Q-Material  
in Matthew and Luke**

#	Matthew	Luke	Identical	Matthew	Luke
1	40	38	12	30.00%	31.58%

2	28	22	10	37.71%	45.45%
3	61	44	26	42.62%	59.09%
4	196	158	64	32.65%	40.51%
5	27	15	1	3.70%	6.67%
6	23	17	7	30.43%	41.18%
7	49	34	7	14.29%	20.59%
8	83	115	27	32.53%	23.48%
9	23	11	7	30.44%	63.64%
10	49	36	11	22.45%	39.56%
11	82	106	55	67.05%	51.89%
12	186	160	102	54.84%	63.75%
13	61	72	25	40.98%	34.72%
14	74	85	59	79.73%	69.71%
15	184	203	48	26.09%	23.65%

[p.17]

16	63	104	41	65.08%	39.42%
17	138	133	82	59.42%	61.65%
18	69	75	49	71.02%	65.33%
19	94	94	73	77.66%	77.66%
20	165	187	64	38.79%	34.23%
21	33	21	10	30.30%	47.62%
22	68	41	22	32.55%	53.66%
23	42	57	8	19.05%	14.04%
24	28	19	6	21.43%	31.58%
25	39	34	28	71.80%	82.35%
26	111	102	80	72.07%	78.43%
27	124	122	46	37.10%	37.71%
28	291	257	60	20.62%	23.35%
29	50	40	18	36.00%	45.00%
30	23	24	12	52.17%	50.00%

31	44	29	5	11.36%	17.24%
32	95	83	21	22.11%	25.30%
33	63	63	26	41.27%	41.27%
34	53	31	6	11.32%	19.35%
35	43	47	9	20.93%	19.15%
36	38	43	12	31.58%	27.91%
37	72	58	21	29.17%	36.21%
38	56	53	46	82.14%	86.79%
39	78	49	44	56.41%	89.80%
40	134	157	105	78.36%	66.88%
41	65	76	44	67.69%	57.90%
42	64	81	10	15.63%	12.35%
43	161	180	7	4.35%	3.89%
44	189	186	61	32.28%	32.80%
45	36	38	23	63.89%	60.53%
46	43	58	10	23.26%	12.35%
47	42	29	4	9.52%	13.79%
48	25	11	2	8.00%	18.18%
49	15	15	7	46.66%	46.66%
50	70	77	51	72.86%	66.23%
51	35	35	11	31.43%	31.43%
52	17	15	7	41.18%	46.67%
53	23	37	4	17.39%	10.81%
54	28	14	11	39.29%	78.57%
55	10	11	4	40.00%	36.36%
56	35	51	11	31.43%	21.57%
57	13	19	7	53.85%	36.42%
58	28	29	28	100.00%	96.55%

[p.18]

59	36	36	24	66.67%	66.67%
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60	31	34	6	19.36%	17.65%
61	45	63	30	66.67%	47.62%
62	26	29	11	42.31%	37.93%
63	15	15	5	33.33%	33.33%
64	20	20	8	40.00%	40.00%
65	67	55	51	76.12%	92.73%
Total	4319	4253	1792	41.69%	42.13%

Identical words less than 25% in 34 passages of 130 = 26.15%

17 passages in Matthew = 1110 words or 25.70% of his material

17 passages in Luke = 1269 words or 29.84% of his material

Identical words 25 - 49.90% in 53 passages of 130 = 40.76%

27 passages in Matthew = 1702 words or 39.41% of his material

26 passages in Luke = 1491 words or 35.06% of his material

Identical words 50 - 74.90% in 29 passages of 130 = 22.30%

15 passages in Matthew = 1054 words or 24.40% of his material

14 passages in Luke = 1063 words or 24.99% of his material

Identical words 75 - 100.00% in 14 passages of 130 = 10.76%

6 passages in Matthew = 453 words or 10.49% of his material

8 passages in Luke = 430 words or 10.11% of his material

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