

A sunset over a beach. The sky is filled with soft, golden light from the setting sun. The ocean waves are visible in the distance. In the foreground, there is a small, rustic hut made of sticks and branches on the sand. The overall mood is peaceful and contemplative.

Q¹

the heart
of the gospel

Wim van den Dungen

WIM VAN DEN DUNGEN

Q¹

the Heart of the Gospel

English, French, and Dutch Translations

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Where your treasure is, there your heart will also be.

Jesus of Nazareth

Contents

Situating Q ¹	1
Q ¹ in English	9
Q ¹ en français	19
Q ¹ in het Nederlands	29
Bibliography	37
Short Author Bio	40

His disciples said to him :

‘When will the Kingdom come ?’

Jesus said :

‘It does not come by expecting it. It will not be a matter of saying :
“See, it is here !” or : “Look, it is there !”.

Rather, the Kingdom of the Father is spread over the Earth,
and men do not see it.’

The Gospel According to Thomas – Logia 113.

Situating Q¹

Thanks to Hegel (1770 – 1831), European civilization was introduced to the concept of history, since then playing a fundamental role in the economy, politics, sociology, psychology, philosophy, and science in general. This concept points to *human agency*, the power of change, the role of circumstances, the putative meaning of historical events, and the importance of general, medial and immediate contexts in human affairs and hermeneutics. We came to realize we may 'learn from history,' thereby better understanding ourselves here and now based on information about the powers, choices, context, and circumstances before our current situation. History touches all cultural objects of humanity, religion included.

In 1996, two centuries of Biblical studies, encompassing ca. 80.000 monographs about 'Jesus Christ,' had passed. Indeed, the concept of history had also touched the cherished 'sacred' scriptures of both Judaism (*Torah*) and Christianity (*New Testament*). It had become possible to trace the authenticity of texts using the methodology of historical and literary criticism. These texts were no longer viewed as revealed by God to humanity through His prophets but as *man-made literary compositions*.

In 1776, Griesbach identified the 'synoptic problem'. The gospels of Matthew, Luke, and Mark match in such a way they can be arranged in parallel ('synopsis' : 'sun,' 'together' + 'opsis,' 'seeing,' or seeing-together). According to Augustine, Matthew was written first, Mark used Matthew and Luke followed both.

The Protestant critics favored the literary Griesbach-hypothesis or *two-gospel hypothesis*, accepting Matthew first, making Luke use Matthew and non-Matthean factors, while Mark used both.

The similarities and differences found between the Synoptics were explained by pointing to internal and external evidence. Internal evidence accounts for two features : the 'triple tradition' (the Synoptics share both wordings and arrangement of pericopes) and the 'double tradition' (sometimes Matthew and Luke share material not present in Mark). External evidence implies the testimony of the Roman Catholic Church. The Early Church had testified as to who wrote the gospels, in what order, and when they wrote them, giving specific circumstances surrounding their creation.

In the 19th century, this testimony came under attack by critical *New Testament* scholars who rejected Matthew's priority in favor of Mark and instead argued the authors of Matthew and Luke drew their common material from Mark. Some solved the internal problems by conjecturing a hypothetical lost 'sayings of Jesus' text all three used independently from one another. Herbert Marsh (1801) was first to distinguish between a 'narrative' and a 'sayings' source. Friedrich Schleiermacher (1832) pointed to a statement made by Papias of Hieropolis (ca. 70 – 163) in 125 CE to prove a separate '*logia*' source. Eusebius wrote : 'Matthew arranged the *logia* in the Hebrew language, and everyone translated them as he could.' (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 3.39.16). In 1838, Christian Hermann Weisse combined Schleiermacher's idea with Markan priority and formulated the *two-source hypothesis*. As Matthew and Luke share large sections *not* found in Mark, he argued neither drew upon the other but upon *a second common source*. This source was given (in 1863 by Heinrich Julius Holtzmann) the symbol *Lambda* (Λ).

As doubts grew about anchoring this second source in the account of Papias, the neutral symbol *Q* was devised by Johannes Weiss (some say because in German 'source' is 'Quelle,' but others claim the letter was chosen arbitrarily). New dates for the composition of the synoptic gospels were advanced : Mark was dated ca. 70 CE, Matthew ca. 80 CE, and Luke ca. 95 CE. In the early 20th, over a dozen reconstructions of *Q* were made, but they differed so much, interest in *Q* subsided.

When in the 1960s, the Nag Hammadi Library was discovered. The *Gospel According to Thomas* (ca. 75 – 100 CE) became available, James M. Robinson and Helmut Koester conjectured both collections (*Q* and the *Gospel According to Thomas*) represented the earliest Christian materials, in due time resulting in the canonical gospels. It allowed John Kloppenborg, analyzing literary and thematic phenomena, to reconstruct *Q* and argue it was composed in three stadia. Finally, the members of *the Jesus Seminar* argued the oldest layer of *Q*, called *Q¹*, reflected the ‘purest’ Jesus tradition, close to the oral teachings.

Scholars like Pier Franco Beatrice (2006) do not understand why the extensive catalogs of Eusebius and Nicephorus, including non-canonical material like the *Gospel of Peter* or the *Gospel According to Thomas*, would exclude an important text as *Q* (of course, keeping *Q*, already entirely assimilated by the canonical gospels, as an independent text may have seemed unnecessary). Austin Farrer has also argued against *Q*.

Controversy remains, and no doubt will continue to linger. At present, there is no ‘*consensus omnium*’ regarding the historical origins of Christianity (its rise in the first century), especially concerning *the dates of composition of the narrative gospels of the New Testament*, their coherence, and historical genesis.

On this issue, Biblical scholarship is divided into two camps :

- the ‘liberals’ (often radical Protestants, dogmatic atheists, skeptics, humanists, and critical historians) stress *the human factor* in the composition of these founding texts of Christianity, and hence question the cornerstones of Christian faith, like the Resurrection, the authority of the churches and the notion Jesus Christ is God. These scholars conjecture the narrative gospels could *not* have preceded the destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem (70 CE), for the latter event, scattering the Church of Jerusalem, prompted the need for a canonical redaction of the life of Jesus of Nazareth, called ‘the Christ’ ;

- the ‘conservatives’ (often dogmatic fundamentalists, believers, priests, and church authorities) understand the New Testament books as a gift of God directly inspired by the Holy Spirit. They believe Jesus to be Christ to be resurrected. He is the unique Son of God, and His Holy Church is the only community leading to salvation, for only through the Son can the Father be known.

Critical study asks how the founding texts of the religions have to be understood in the light of a multi-disciplinary approach calling in history, philology, sociology, economy, and philosophy.

The strong ‘conservative’ view seems highly unlikely. But the idea Jesus is a myth invented by a few good men in Jeruzalem and an itinerant visionary (Paul) also seems too farfetched. What is the truth of the matter ? The *Bible* is a set of books written by various authors about whom little to nothing is known for sure. These are literary works instead of revealed texts.

The author accepts the following conjectures as reasonable and likely (not certain) :

‘Considering scholarly hypotheses about the relationship among the Gospels, we must keep in mind that they are hypotheses, not fact. They are also simplifications of the actual relationships among the Gospels. Our portraits of Synoptic relationships are just that : paintings that highlight some details, not photographs, and certainly not a full description of what happened.’ (Kloppenborg, 2008, p.38).

A papyrus or parchment copy of Q does not exist, and we do not know why it was lost. The names of several Jewish Christian Gospels that also vanished, except for brief excerpts quoted by early church authors, are known to us :

Papyrus Egerton 2, Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 840 and 1224, the Gospel of Peter, the Gospel of the Ebionites, the Gospel of the Hebrews, the Gospel of the Egyptians.

The *Gospel of Mark* served as the model for Matthew and Luke (Christian Wilke, 1838). It means the sequence of events introduced by Mark was copied by Matthew and Luke, adding to this their material (or 'Sondergut') ;

- 1) Mark (76%), Matthew (45%), and Luke (41%) share a triple tradition. Mark (3%) and Luke (1%) share a double tradition, likewise Mark (18%) and Matthew (10%), as well as Luke (23%) and Matthew (25%). Only 3% is unique to Mark, 20% to Matthew, and 35% to Luke (Honoré, 1968) ;
- 2) besides the *Gospel of Mark*, both Matthew and Luke used, independently from one another, a text called *The Words of Jesus* or 'Q.' Mark did not ;
- 3) the redaction of this ' *logoi sophon*' (or 'wisdom words' – Robinson, 1964) happened in three steps : Q^1 , Q^2 , and Q^3 . The oldest layer is Q^1 (Kloppenborg, 1988 and Mack, 1988, 1993). Q^1 was written ca. 50 CE. In ca. 65 CE Q^2 was added, and ca.80 CE, Q^3 joined, completing Q ;
- 4) *The Gospel According to Thomas* shares with Q nearly one-third of its contents (37 of the 114 sayings). It is very unlikely Thomas drew on Q . Nor does Thomas display any knowledge of the editorial elements in Q . Both point to an ancient 'sayings collections' next to the canonical gospels.

If Q is distinctive for what it lacks (a Paulinian dying and rising savior), its earliest layer, Q^1 , has *-ex hypothesis-* the original teachings of Jesus of Nazareth (the 'oral lore' given to the Jesus-people). In contrast, the subsequent layers organize (editorial) themes becoming important to the community *after* his death (ca. 30 CE) and again *after* the destruction of the Second Temple. Q makes it possible to understand Christian origins in a new perspective, approaching historical developments differently.

'It is not a dying and rising savior that we see in Q , but a sage with uncommon wisdom, wisdom that addresses the daily realities of small-town life in Jewish Galilee. Knowing about Q lets us think

differently about the complexion of the early Jesus movement, differently about the development of the Synoptic Gospels, differently about the creation of documents such as the letter of James, differently about the death of Jesus and Jesus' vindication, and differently about *the core and essence of the Jesus movement.*' – Kloppenborg, 208, p.121, my italics.

Q¹ is the *Heart of the Gospel* and 'the first attempts at spelling out an ethic' (Mack, 1993, p.45). Together with the *Gospel of Thomas* (ca. 50 CE), Q¹ is part of the *earliest textualization* of the teaching of Jesus.

Scholars subdivide the text into 7 clusters (I, II ... VII) called : teachings, instructions, confidence in the Father, on speaking out and against anxiety, on personal goods, parables of the Kingdom, and the followers of Jesus.

In Q¹, we find no Eucharist, no *Petri-verse*, or Christ-Messianism. Crucifixion and Resurrection are not mentioned. Is sacrificial Christianity (*evangelium de Christo*), cherished by the churches and initiated by Paul, recognizable in these original words (*evangelium Jesu*) ? If not, one may ask why they continue to root their salvic intent in texts written by a few good men ? Was the Roman Catholic Church foremost an invention of Paul ? And what about Protestantism ? Can '*sola fidei, sola scriptura*' be maintained on such a narrow textual basis ? Some claim it can.

The heart of a religion is its authentic core.

The Jesus of Q¹ is a wisdom teacher rather than a rabbi. His wisdom words invite us to open up our hearts and enter *the Kingdom of the 'God of Gods' (Elohim)*. In *The Gospel According to Thomas*, this Kingdom is 'inside You and outside You' (*logia 3*). The teachings of Jesus are about *direct spiritual conscience and awareness*, presenting us a path to the *presence of the Divine here and now*. It is a message only the strong can bear. It calls for personal effort, radically moving away from the laws of the Judaic establishment.

According to some, the whole exercise of critical hermeneutics is futile, either because Jesus of Nazareth is a myth (skepticism) or because the notion God revealed the gospels to the apostles is sacred and inviolate (fundamentalism).

To others, *Q*¹ is the living and sacred heart of Jesus' message : *the good news the Kingdom has arrived !*

Jesus said :

If those who lead You say to You :

'See, the Kingdom is in heaven !', then the birds of the sky will be there before You.

If they say to You :

'It is in the sea !', then the fish will be there before You.

But the Kingdom is inside You and outside You. When You know yourselves, then You will be known, and You will know that You are the children of the Living Father. But if You do not know yourselves, then You dwell in poverty ; then You are that poverty.

The Gospel According to Thomas – Logia 3.