Critical Dictionary of Apocalyptic and Millenarian Movements

Sayings Source Q

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Introduction

The Sayings Source Q, or simply Q, refers to an early 'Christian' text that many scholars of early Christianity believe was composed about a generation after Jesus's death. 'Q' is an abbreviation for the German term *Quelle* (meaning 'source') and is the scholarly designation for the common collection of material that the Gospels of Matthew and Luke share with each other that they did not derive from Mark's Gospel. This is part of a theory, known as the 'Two-Source Hypothesis', which posits that Mark was the earliest Gospel to be written and that Matthew and Luke independently used Mark as the narrative backbone for their compositions and supplemented it with material from Q.

Q is a short text, under 250 verses, and is comprised primarily of teachings of Jesus with very little narrative material. Given its early moment of composition, the text stands to tell us about some of the embryonic ideas within the early Jesus movement—a period before anyone was using the term 'Christian' to describe followers of Jesus (hence the scare quotes above). These ideas, it turns out, are explicitly apocalyptic, in terms of both expecting a future divine intervention in the world and relaying divinely sourced, urgent messages to people in order to spur social change.

Sources and Evidence for Q

Before proceeding to the contents of Q and an exploration of its apocalyptic worldview, it is necessary to comment on the evidence for Q. The existence of Q is part of a wider discussion in New Testament studies known as the 'Synoptic Problem'. The Synoptic Problem explores the 'problem' of extensive verbal agreement between the Gospels of Mark, Matthew, and Luke. While numerous solutions have been entertained by scholars, the most commonly accepted is the Two-Source Hypothesis, mentioned already. In the framework of this hypothesis, Q is a logical correlative that follows from assuming that Mark was written first and that Matthew and Luke worked independently from one another.

We do not have a physical manuscript of Q. The contents of Q must be reconstructed from verbal similarities between Matthew and Luke (it is conventional to cite Q based on its Lukan versification for simplicity), which, in many cases, is quite easy given the extensive verbatim agreement (compare, for

instance, Luke 13:34–35 and Matthew 23:37–39). Admittedly, Q is dismissed by some scholars as being merely hypothetical; however, in the view of many scholars, there is no other compelling way to explain the literary relationships between the Synoptic Gospels when such extensive verbatim agreement is present. Moreover, in its reconstructed state, Q has a distinct literary and ideological profile, meaning that it has a kind of thematic and structural coherence that further supports its one-time existence as an extant document (see also Jacobson 1982); much of this thematic coherence appears in the apocalyptic sayings and prophetic judgments that Q's Jesus utters. Some dissenters notwithstanding, most scholars are relatively comfortable speaking of the Jesus movement imagined in Q and/or the authors of the text.

The Q People

Just because a document exists, and uses language that envisions an audience, does not necessarily mean that there is a coherent community of believers that lies behind it—a fact that many New Testament scholars often forget. In the case of Q, there is a group identity presupposed in the text (i.e. some sort of social formation, even if only imaginary) and a deliberate way of understanding that group identity in connection to important figures from Israel's history, such as Abraham. Even so, it is more academically responsible to speak of 'the Q people' or 'Q's authors' instead of 'the Q community', especially since we have no evidence that Q functioned in a specifically 'religious' context or that it was anything other than an interesting social vision that a handful of writers penned and tinkered with a bit over time (Rollens 2018, 2019).

There are various views on who these authors were. One view, stemming from Gerd Theissen's (1978) early work on the Jesus movement, views the Q people as itinerant 'radicals' who voluntarily adopted a life of poverty in order to travel around preaching the teachings of Jesus. While this was initially an argument about the kind of preacher that Jesus himself was, it was quickly assumed that his followers would have modelled their lifestyles after his. This understanding of Q's authors follows from passages in Q that seem to recommend itinerancy and voluntary poverty (e.g. Q 10:4 or 12:22–31). The notion of the Q people as itinerant teachers lies behind many efforts to depict their lifestyles as akin to that of Cynic philosophers (Crossan 1991; Mack 1993; Vaage 1994). However, many scholars have critiqued this understanding of the Q people on the grounds that it engages in mirror reading of the text and assumes that the textual ethos matches a lived reality. In addition, the lifestyle it recommends is rather implausible considering the realities of rural life in first-century Galilee (on critiques of the hypothesis of itinerant radicals, see Arnal 2001, 67–95; Rollens 2014, 105–12).

The text itself suggests that the authors saw themselves akin to prophets of Israel's epic past (as in Q 6:22–23 or 11:49–51), which has led to a second argument about the Q people: that they were prophetic preachers engaged in sociopolitical criticism, just like the prophets of Israel's past. Many elements of this prophetic discourse are couched in an apocalyptic framework, discussed in more detail below. The primary advocate of this view is Richard Horsley, who contends that the Q people modelled themselves on Israelite prophets of the past in order to criticize the injustice that they saw in their daily lives (Horsley with Draper 1999). Like the suggestion of the Q people as itinerant radicals, however, this simply takes over an identity construction within the document (that of prophetic critics) and turns it into an academic hypothesis about authorship. As Jonathan Reed (1999, 87–108; 2002, 58–61) has convincingly argued, we should not conflate Q's *internal*, literary representations of rejected Israelite prophets with the lived reality of the

authors. That is, just because the text *claims* that it was produced by people purporting to be akin to prophets from Israel's epic past, it does not necessarily mean that critical scholars should describe them as such in our analysis of the group (on critiques of the hypothetical of prophetic critics, see Reed 1999; Rollens 2014, 112–24).

Indeed, neither of these two proposals constructs a sociologically defensible view of the Q people. A more reasonable proposal—one that helps us understand the authors' intellectual capacities as well as their social experience—is one that describes them as mid-level scribal figures or other administrators. This view has been endorsed by several monographs (Arnal 2001; Rollens 2014; Bazzana 2015). The reason for describing the authors of Q as scribal or administrative figures has to do both with the form and the content of the document. Its form shows similar compositional patterns to documentary papyri, which were also penned by such middling administrative figures (Bazzana 2015), and its content reflects the values of learning and wisdom that we know such sub-elite authors valued (Kloppenborg 1991). This means that 'the Q people' probably refers to a localized network of sub-elite scribal figures who had some interest in Jesus as well as some criticisms of the way that their contemporary society operated. Such a social identity makes it all the more curious that the authors rely so heavily on apocalyptic language of judgment and on the depiction of Jesus as an apocalyptic prophet to promote their social vision.

Origins and Development

The origins of the Q source and the people responsible for it are rather hazy. Some scholars maintain that Q represents the earliest teachings of Jesus himself, including his original apocalyptic teachings. A more limited, but perhaps more academically responsible, view is that Q represents a collection of teachings that a group of early Jesus devotees associated with him. This latter view sees the authors of Q as selecting these teachings to be included in Q and arranging them in such a way as to match their own ideological interests and outlook on the world. Further, on this second view, Jesus may or may not have spoken all of the teachings in Q, but some of his early followers nevertheless connected them to his legacy. The Q 'movement', then, refers to the Jesus movement represented by the Q source, which, as discussed in more detail below, was probably headquartered in Roman Galilee and arose in the 50s or 60s CE.

The activities and development of the movement are also unclear. The legends of Jesus in the canonical Gospels depict him as travelling throughout the villages, healing the sick, driving out demons, and teaching his ideas about the Kingdom of God. It is hard to be certain what, if any, of these things the Q people actually engaged in. The text simply represents a collection of ideas and important teachings that the authors sought to feature centrally. At minimum, these significant teachings entail wise ethical sayings and apocalyptic pronouncements. It is reasonable to assume that adherents to the ideology may have done some sort of deliberate activity to promote their ethos. Realistically, this promotion (i.e. the 'mission' of Q) was likely just moving within localized village networks to disseminate their ideas. The other main practice that this Jesus movement engaged in was obviously text production and redaction (editing). These are admittedly relatively tame practices compared to the activities that other apocalyptic movements throughout history have engaged in: revolts, coups, death cults, public terrorism, and the like. Yet, the intellectual activities that sustain apocalyptic movements are equally as important as their revolutionary activities.

Does it make sense to speak of the 'termination' of the movement behind Q? In some ways, yes. As discussed in more detail below, it commonly argued that Q contains at least two major 'layers' of material in the text and that those added at a secondary stage express an ethos of disappointment and resentment at the negative reception to the Q people's ideas about Jesus. Based on this observation, some scholars have argued that the original social vision expressed in Q was essentially a failure (Mack 1993; Arnal 2004). Moreover, the ways that Matthew and Luke adapt Q material often neuter its radical sentiments or reframe its original sentiment. And of course, it was also a failure in that its apocalyptic predictions about the return of Jesus heralding God's judgment did not materialize. In that sense, the Q movement can be considered both a failure and a success. It was a failure in that its original social vision was never realized in any long-lasting way. Yet it was simultaneously a success, because its intellectual resources survived—albeit in slightly altered forms—in literature that was eventually deemed central to the Christian tradition in nearly all its diverse expressions.

Geographical, Political, and Social Context of the Q Movement

Since the time of Karl Marx (1818–83), it has become increasingly popular for historians to examine the way that socioeconomic conditions affect the kinds of ideologies and worldviews expressed by different groups. In the case of Q, we learn a great deal from situating the text in its social, historical, and political context. In fact, one of the most enigmatic concepts in Q—the Kingdom of God—seems to be a direct reaction to the authors' specific socioeconomic experiences. Most scholars believe that Q was written down before the year 70 CE, because the text shows no explicit knowledge of the violent events of the Jewish War with Rome (66–70 CE), especially the traumatic siege of Jerusalem and destruction of the Jewish Temple in the year 70 CE. It is hard to be more precise than that about its date of composition. Though it is common to date the text in the 50s or 60s CE, its ideas were certainly influenced by the changes in Roman Galilee in the previous decades.

Anchoring the Q movement in Galilee is based mainly on the geographical references within the text, which is admittedly a very speculative strategy. While Q references a range of cities and towns, the only *realistic* ones are in and around northern Galilee. Many of the other locations mentioned in the text, such as Jerusalem and Nineveh, are mentioned mainly for their rhetorical or symbolic import. More to the point, the text seems to be aware of *specific*, localized village networks involving Capernaum, Bethsaida, and Chorazin within Galilee. For instance, in one of its most vitriolic announcements of apocalyptic judgment, Q (10:13) pronounces woes upon the cities of Chorazin and Bethsaida for their unresponsiveness to the Q people's teaching and wonder-working. Jesus proclaims, 'If the wonders performed in you had taken place in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, in sackcloth and ashes. Yet for Tyre and Sidon it shall be more bearable at the judgment than for you.' He continues, focusing in on Capernaum specifically, 'And you, Capernaum, up to heaven will you be exalted? Into Hades shall you come down!' The deliberate attention given to these relatively small Galilean settlements suggests that Q's authors held grudges against their particular inhabitants. Thus, when it comes to the *actual* settlements that the Q people may have frequented, a Galilean circuit seems most promising (Kloppenborg 1991; Reed 1995).

Roman Galilee in the mid-first century of the common era was a politically unstable place. When Jesus was born, Galilee, Judaea, and other Jewish territories were ruled by a native king, Herod the Great. The Herodian dynasty had been installed as a 'client kingship' under the auspices of the Roman Empire, and so

the region was not politically autonomous. When Herod the Great died in 4 BCE, his territories were split among his three sons: Herod Philip, Herod Antipas, and Herod Archelaus. Archelaus was such a flawed ruler over Judaea that the local Jewish population petitioned to Rome to intervene again. Rome acquiesced and replaced him with a Roman governor, which was why Pontius Pilate was the local ruler of Judaea during Jesus's adult life. Herod Antipas (who is the Herod mentioned in the Passion Narrative of the canonical Gospels) ruled Galilee (and another region called Perea) during most of Jesus's youth and life. This political arrangement had a significant impact on the local population and economy. Villagers who had once only produced enough food for themselves and perhaps a bit more to sell locally for profit were suddenly expected to produce far more to meet the demands of Roman taxation and the taxes levied by the Jerusalem temple. Antipas's building projects at Tiberias and Sepphoris in Galilee and monetization of the local economy further facilitated the economic extraction of the rural countryside (Arnal 2001, 97–155). The populations of Galilee and Judaea during this period were primarily made up of Jewish peasants, and they bore the brunt of these economic demands. We know from the historian Josephus that in the lead-up to the Jewish War with Rome, there were several smaller uprisings, strikes, and protests against the Romans' presence in the region and their economic policies; in addition, there were several apocalyptic preachers and messianic figures who emerged during this time to criticize their contemporaries (Hanson and Horsley 1985). This means that Jesus's apocalyptic sayings in Q are actually not unique in their regional context.

This political and economic terrain provides an important backdrop to understanding the social movement envisioned in Q and its connection with related issues of eschatology, judgment, and what we might generally label 'apocalypticism'. For one, the document shows clear awareness of a social scape marked by structural inequality. For example, Q 6:20–21 blesses the poor and hungry and assures them of future recompense. It is followed by Q 6:24–26, which is a set of woes directed again wealthy elites, promising that though they have satisfaction now, they will endure future punishment and suffering. Q later counsels against storing up riches on earth (Q 12:33–34), orienting one instead to 'treasures in heaven' (Q 12:33). The Parable of the Rich Fool (Q 12:16–21) wages a similar critique and devalues the accumulation of material wealth on the grounds that it cannot help one have the correct relationship with God. Even the literary imagery and metaphors of Q presuppose this world. For instance, though focused on establishing a practice of selfless giving, Q 6:29–30 uses examples of a person being struck, and thus humiliated, in public and a person whose most basic possessions (their clothes) are rent from them as a consequence of a court case. These experiences are not those of the elite but rather those of the socioeconomically disadvantaged, who routinely experienced such situations of powerlessness. In the same vein, Q 12:22–31 counsels about the anxiety of daily life, comforting those who might be unsure where their food, drink, and clothing might come from—an experience arguably only touching non-elite populations. Q assuages the listener's concerns (perhaps in a somewhat underwhelming fashion) by announcing that if a person seeks God's 'kingdom', these things will automatically appear (Q 12:31). Indeed, the Kingdom of God is a kind of reverse mirror image of the socioeconomic world that the Q people seem to have experienced in their daily life: the kingdom features a reversed social hierarchy (Q 10:15; 14:11; 17:33; and elsewhere), as opposed to one privileging wealthy elites, and offers the fulfilment of all of a person's basic needs (Q 11:2–13; 12:22–31). All of these passages from Q thus show that the authors were interested in interrogating the world that they inhabited, built as it was on problematic status markers and the unquestioned assumptions of the importance of wealth. Using the teachings of Jesus, Q questions those values and assumptions.

Moreover, Q clearly has the Herodian and Judaean elite in view for criticism as well. Several sayings of Jesus establish a clear distance between those allied with Jesus and elite royals. For instance, Jesus speaks to the crowds who have come out to see John the Baptist and questions them regarding what they expected to find: 'What did you go out to see? A person arrayed in finery? Look, those wearing finery are in kings' houses' (Q 7:25). Some verses later, Jesus critiques prophets and kings who did not discern the truth that his followers have (Q 10:24). In addition to royal elites, political elites are critiqued too. In a famous passage, developed at length by the author of the Gospel of Matthew (Matthew 23), Q lists a series of 'woes' aimed at the Pharisees; these woes accuse them of flawed purity practices, of hypocrisy, and of failing in their leadership of the people (Q 11:39,41–44). Following these lambasts, Q turns to the scribes or legal experts, accusing them not only of making religious practices difficult for the common people (Q 11:46) but also of being descendants of those who rejected and killed the prophets of God (Q 11:47). And later, the texts target Jerusalem itself, almost certainly a cipher for its sociopolitical elite. Again, the charge is that Jerusalem killed the prophets of God who had been sent to the people (Q 13:34–35). These elite figures, Q promises, will suffer the impending apocalyptic judgment when Jesus returns. Such vitriol helps us place the Q people on the social landscape of ancient Galilee, because they see themselves in opposition to these rulers and aristocrats.

Overall, then, the text speaks from a relatively vulnerable position and imagines Jesus returning to reward his followers who live out his ethos. The vulnerable experiences mobilized in such passages as Q 6:21–23 have already been noted above. Several other passages speak specifically of 'persecution', rejection, or something similar (Q 6:23,27; 10:10–12). Q 12:11–12 then envisions the Q people being taken before the synagogue and asked to defend themselves. As I have shown elsewhere, much of this language of 'persecution' is ambiguous and could point to all sorts of social experiences (Rollens 2015). Even without identifying the precise experiences that lie behind such language, we can at least surmise that the Q people saw themselves as marginal, vulnerable figures who were shut out of the mechanisms of power in their world. Such a mentality reflecting a continual struggle to make ends meet, an uncertainty about the future, and a general disruption of daily life makes very good sense in the midst of the sociopolitical tensions and inequalities in Galilee before the Jewish War with Rome (66–70 CE). Though we should not necessarily suppose that the Q people themselves were on the lowest rungs of the social ladder or were the peasant villagers who made up the majority of the Galilean population, by collecting and framing the teachings of Jesus as they did, they nevertheless took note of the peasants' plight and highlighted their socioeconomic experiences through the text (Rollens 2014, 143–98).

Central Beliefs of Q

Jesus's sayings in Q primarily fall into two categories: wisdom sayings and apocalyptic pronouncements. The wisdom teachings tend to be those that imagine a society without the widespread inequality and economic exploitation that, as we have seen, marked Roman Galilee in the early first century CE. For instance, the Q's 'Sermon' (Matthew 5–7//Luke 6:1–49) comforts those who suffer hunger and persecution and advocates practising impartiality and eschewing judgment of others (Q 6:21–49) before recommending that one love one's enemies in imitation of God. Q also supposes that if one relies on God to provide, then one's needs will be met, as in the famous Lord's Prayer, where Jesus teaches people how to pray (Q 11:2–4) and then immediately assures them that their requests will be met (Q 11:9–13). The idea is reinforced later, when a larger unit about the anxieties of daily life ends with the following maxim:

‘Seek his kingdom, and [all these things] shall be granted to you’ (Q 12:31). These sayings imagine an ideal set of social relationships that operate on transparency, equity, and sound judgment, as well as a kind of confidence in God that he will provide for his followers’ basic needs. If we can confidently speak of any sort of ‘social program’ that Q advocated, it would likely be behaviour that follows these guidelines and tries to enact this worldview.

Yet Q also has another kind of material in it: apocalyptic/judgment sayings. Arguably in the history of the reception of the Jesus tradition, these apocalyptic ideas have been emphasized far more than the ethical instructions for daily life. The apocalyptic traditions in Q are characterized by a decidedly pessimistic view of the world. Whereas the wisdom traditions embodied a kind of confidence in humans’ abilities to change and enhance their own lives, the apocalyptic traditions assume humanity’s fate is already sealed and that Jesus—or ‘the son of humanity’ (Q 6:22; 7:34; 9:58; 11:30; 12:8–10,40; 17:24,26–27) (note that Jesus is never specifically referred to as the messiah in Q)—is coming soon with judgment; his future appearance is often enigmatically referred to in Q simply as ‘the day’ (Q 10:12; 12:46; 17:24,30). This apocalyptic framework is evident in the opening sayings of Q, spoken by John the Baptist, who appears in the wilderness and announces an impending judgment on those who presume to hold an elect status as ‘children of Abraham’ (Q 3:7–9). John furthers warns of the ‘one who is to come’ after him (Jesus), who is prepared to ‘clear his threshing floor and gather the wheat into his granary, but the chaff he will burn on a fire that can never be put out’ (Q 3:16–17). This saying assumes that the judgment is already in motion and that it is only a matter of time before the useless ‘chaff’ will receive its due. It is, parenthetically, quite common to use agricultural imagery in apocalyptic literature (e.g. Joel 3:13–14; Mark 4:26–29; James 5:7; Revelation 14:14–19).

Apocalyptic threats and teachings are evident in Jesus’s teachings in Q as well. His apocalyptic judgment is aimed at many of the wealthy social and political elites already discussed. In the Parable of the Rich Fool in Q 12:16–21, for instance, Jesus warns the rich man that accumulating land and crops will not ensure one’s safety during one’s future judgment, which God states will come on the ‘night [his] soul is required of [him]’ (Q 12:20). This is just one of several parables that Jesus uses to explain what will happen when Jesus returns to judge humanity. The Parable of the Faithful and Unfaithful Slave (12:42–46), the Parable of the Great Banquet (Q 14:16–23), and the Parable of the Entrusted Money (Q 19:12–26) likewise use metaphors to explore ‘the day of the son of humanity’ and the apocalyptic judgment that will accompany it.

Many apocalyptic texts divide history into a series of epochs that humanity is moving through, often from a pristine Golden Age in the past through a problematic, morally corrupt present to a future restoration. Q is no different, though its ideas are slightly underdeveloped in comparison to texts such as Revelation or 4 Ezra. A chronological trajectory is initially established by the relationship between Jesus and John the Baptist (on John the Baptist in Q, see Cotter 1995; Rothschild 2005). John appears in history first and sets the stage for Jesus (Q 3:7–9)—both are linked to prior prophets who appeared in the past. When Jesus appears, he classifies John’s time as a distinct stage in history. ‘The law and the prophets were until John,’ he explains; ‘from then on the kingdom of God is violated and the violent plunder it’ (Q 16:16). Furthermore, as we have seen, Q anticipates a future resurrection and judgment (Q 11:31) accompanying Jesus’s return, which will come unexpectedly (Q 12:39–40,42–46; 17:26–30,34–35). It even projects a further moment of reconciliation and restoration, wherein the elect are rewarded by being allowed to join Jesus in judgment. ‘You who have followed me,’ Jesus says in the final saying of Q, ‘will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel’ (Q 22:28,30). These elect will no doubt also be invited to ‘recline with

Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of God' (Q 13:28–29).

There are two apocalyptic sayings in Q that stand out for their especially vivid imagery. First, Q 11:49–51 bemoans the killing of prophets and sages by those to whom they were sent. It elaborates on the significance of these deaths by describing 'the blood of all the prophets poured out from the founding of the world … from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, murdered between the sacrificial altar and the house' (Q 11:50–51). The saying then promises in classic apocalyptic style that 'an accounting will be required of this generation' for these crimes. The second vivid passage is Q 13:34–35, which similarly accuses Jerusalem of stoning and killing the prophets that had been sent to the city. Using curiously maternal imagery, Jesus laments, 'How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her nestlings under her wings, and you were not willing. Look, your house is forsaken!' (Q 13:34–35). This saying reflects the apocalyptic pessimism of a hopeless world. It ends by promising that 'Jerusalem' will not see Jesus again until the future day of judgment (Q 13:35).

That some of these sayings were added at a secondary stage was mentioned in passing already. Here, we may be more specific and perhaps suggest a relationship between textual composition and social experience. Those who have analysed Q's composition have argued that the wisdom teachings were the earliest materials presented in Q (Kloppenborg 1987). The wisdom materials preserve a rather confident worldview that envisions humans successfully intervening in their world to enact change and to create a just world. However, the sayings concerned with apocalyptic ideas and prophetic judgment are generally agreed to be a later addition to the document, placed at key 'framing' points in the text (Jacobson 1982; Kloppenborg 1987). While it is not wise to automatically equate the compositional history of a document with the social history of the group behind it or to suppose that the secondary material was somehow unknown to the authors at the formative stage of composition, we can propose a tentative hypothesis. For whatever reason, the apocalyptic and judgment-oriented materials were not relevant or necessary to the document when the Q people put the initial collection of sayings together. Rather, apocalyptic materials were added as a secondary stage and reflect the disillusionment and resentment of the Q people when their ideas were not embraced. In addition, the rhetorical force of the specific placement of the apocalyptic/judgment material, in many cases, underscores the urgency of accepting the teachings of Jesus.

If Q's original social vision was meant to enact a sort of reform of socioeconomic relationships, does it drastically conflict with established cultural traditions, namely Judaism? While the canonical Gospels would have one believe that the Jesus movement was distinct and at odds with contemporary Judaism (often caricatured in the New Testament as the Pharisees' brand of Judaism), in reality Q fits seamlessly within the diversity of Judaism of the Second Temple period (Arnal 2007; Rollens 2012). Indeed, many of the issues that Q debates and disputes are theological issues *within* Second Temple Judaism (e.g. Q 11:39–44). Furthermore, many scholars have argued that the social vision that Q promotes is, in fact, an idealization of ancient Israelite village life (Horsley with Draper 1999), not a movement away from it. And finally, Q is apocalyptic akin to other Second Temple texts, such as 4 Enoch and 2 Baruch, while its prophetic critique sounds just like post-exilic texts, such as Jeremiah. For all these reasons, it does not make sense to speak of the social movement imagined in Q as somehow distinct from Second Temple Judaism.

Q and the Role of Prophecy

We can say even more about the function of prophecy within Q. As noted, many of the teachings within Q sound as if they could have been taken straight from Jeremiah or another prophetic book from the Hebrew Bible. Indeed, that is just what the Q people would have wanted the reader to think: one central organizing motif of the text is that the authors of the text, as followers of Jesus, are also prophets, who stand at the end of a long line of rejected prophets that extends back hundreds of years. Like those former prophets sent to Israel, the Q people feel rejected that their contemporaries have not embraced the Jesus movement with them. For instance, the text explicitly aligns the Q people's experiences of 'persecution' with the rejection of the prophets in the past: 'Blessed are you when they insult and persecute you … for this is how they persecuted the prophets who were before you' (Q 6:22–23). Q also places a great premium on properly responding to such prophetic revelations (Q 7:31–35; 10:23–24; 11:29–32; 13:25–27) and recognizing the signs that indicate where humanity is on the apocalyptic timeline (Q 11:30; 12:54–56). It speaks of several past prophets who have been rejected or misunderstood (Q 6:23; 11:47,49–50; 13:34). In short, though Q is largely a sayings collection, it is also a prophetic text, in that (1) it presents Jesus's apocalyptic prophecies about the end time and (2) the imagined community of the Q people sees itself as the most recent prophets of God sent to reform his people.

Scholarly Debates and Unresolved Questions

When a religious, social, or political movement is itself hypothesized on the basis of a 'hypothetical' text, there will always be significant scholarly debates regarding its content. Both the reconstructed contents of and the extent of the reconstruction of Q are still contested. Some scholars refuse to affirm the existence of Q at all, though they tend to be the minority in Synoptic studies. In addition, as is apparent from the discussion above about who the Q people were, their social identity remains debated. While several monographs have aligned them with mid-level scribal figures (Arnal 2001; Rollens 2014; Bazzana 2015), those with theological proclivities often prefer to think of Q as emerging among a community of Jesus's disciples, perhaps even connected to the Jerusalem church (Pearson 2004). It likewise remains up for debate the extent to which the Q source should be connected to the historical Jesus. For some, Q represents the earliest collection of teaching that Jesus *actually* spoke, though a few sayings may have been inventions of his followers (Robinson 2005). For others, such as myself, while the traditions in Q might have emerged quite early, I maintain that we cannot definitively connect them to Jesus without operating on a number of problematic, usually theologically motivated, assumptions.

Other unresolved issues involve the larger compositional theory of which Q is a part. Numerous critics of the Two-Source Hypothesis and Q have accused Q advocates of relying far too much on Q to reconstruct the earliest Jesus movement. Those criticisms are fair, but they can easily be addressed with reference to the hypothetical nature of so many aspects of first-century Christianity. We do not 'have' the original copy of *any* New Testament manuscript and operate on the hypothesis that the originals bear some resemblance to the versions that we have. In addition, if one treats the proposal about Q representing some form of an early Jesus movement (even if it is only a network of interested intellectuals) as *open to revision* should more persuasive evidence surface—a position the majority of Q advocates take—then some of the critiques lose their persuasiveness.

More specific unresolved questions include the following: Was there indeed a coherent social movement that was organized around the Q document, or does the document just represent the abstract, textual experimentation of a handful of intellectuals? Does Q stem directly from a group of people associated with Jesus, thus rendering the apocalyptic teachings likely to come straight from his mouth, or does it represent a later group of followers who attributed these teachings to Jesus (and indeed may have invented them themselves)? Such questions indicate the important work that remains to be done on Q.

Concluding Remarks

In short, in the long history of Christianity, Q is perhaps the earliest evidence for the tradition's apocalyptic mentality. Though the ideas are limited and underdeveloped, the contours of apocalypticism are clear: the text speaks from a mid-point between the death of Jesus and his imminent return and promises apocalyptic punishment for those who fail to heed his teachings. Yet, like many other apocalyptic texts that evince a strict dualism between good/evil, right/wrong, or righteous/unrighteous, Q also offers a future reward for those who do properly and positively respond to its message. When Q was taken up into Luke's and Matthew's Gospels and then further received into various forms of Christianity, these nascent ideas were developed and refined, feeding into some of the apocalyptic beliefs that still exist in Christianity today.

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