CHAPTER 5

Jesus in Q

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The title of this chapter, when placed alongside the titles of other chapters in this section of the volume, i.e., “Jesus in the New Testament,” which includes essays on Jesus in texts such as the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, demands at least some brief explanation before we attempt to tackle the issue of the chapter’s contents. Unlike the four gospels, Q is not a document that we have extant in any form as such; least of all is it a document in the collection we call the “New Testament.” In some ways, Q is a scholarly construct.

The theory of the existence of an entity called Q arises from the problem of seeking to explain the agreements between the three synoptic gospels. As is well known, there is extensive agreement, both in wording and in order, between all three synoptic gospels taken together; and this is frequently explained by the theory of “Markan priority,” i.e., the theory that Mark’s gospel was written first and was then used by Matthew and Luke independently. This theory, however, only explains the agreements between Matthew and Luke where there is a Markan parallel. It is well known that the Matthew–Luke agreements are considerably more extensive than those which can be explained by dependence on Mark. Thus at times, Matthew and Luke agree almost verbatim in their Greek texts: cf., for example, the accounts of Matthew 3:7–10//Luke 3:7–9 (the words of John the Baptist’s preaching) or Matthew 7:7–8//Luke 11:9–10 (Jesus’ teaching about asking and receiving). In these instances, the Matthew–Luke agreements cannot be explained by dependence on Mark since there is no Markan parallel. For a variety of reasons, many scholars have argued that the agreements here are best explained by the theory that, rather than one gospel being directly dependent on the other, both depend on a common source, or tradition, and that source is usually known as Q.

There is no space here to discuss this theory in any detail. Full treatments of the issues concerned can be found elsewhere (see Catchpole 1993, 1–59; Tuckett 1996, 1–39; Kloppenborg 2000, 11–54, and 2008, 1–40). Also it needs to be

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acknowledged fully that the theory of the existence of such a Q source is by no means universally accepted by scholars today. Some would argue that the Matthew–Luke agreements are better explained by a theory of direct dependence (usually in the form of Luke being directly dependent on Matthew: see Goulder 1989, 3–71; Goodacre 2002). Others would argue that such a neat theory of synoptic origins is too simplistic and there may have been a much more complex set of relations between the gospels. Nevertheless, some form of Q hypothesis is widely held today. Further, many would argue that Q is not merely a body of amorphous tradition shared by Matthew and Luke; rather, it may have been a more unified body of material, perhaps a single unified source that may have been available to Matthew and Luke in written form, probably in Greek (to explain the verbatim agreements in Greek, which are such a striking feature of the agreements generally). The reasons for these judgments can again be found elsewhere (e.g., Kloppenborg 2000, 56–80), and there is no time to go into the arguments in detail in this context.

I shall therefore assume that Q was a written document, probably written in Greek, which served as a source for Matthew and Luke when they came to write their gospels. It has certainly been a feature of much recent study of Q that the material contained in Q might have a distinctive theological profile, i.e., that there might be something we could reasonable identify as a “theology of Q.” Indeed, it might be the case (in part) that, if such a distinctive profile could be found, this in turn might help to strengthen the case that Q did indeed exist as a document in its own right at some stage in the development of early Christianity, and that it might make more sense to think of Q as a unified whole, rather than just as an amorphous mass of unrelated traditions that only came together for the first time when they were used by Matthew and Luke (see Catchpole 1993, 5; Tuckett 1996, 37–38). And in this search for a possible “Q theology,” the issue of “christology” generally, i.e., the ideas implied concerning the identity of Jesus, has always played an important role.

One other issue should be mentioned briefly. In any reconstruction of the contents of Q, most scholars have restricted themselves to the traditions where Matthew and Luke are closely parallel and where their agreements with each other cannot be explained by dependence on Mark. However, it is a well-known feature of the Markan material in the gospels that, although most of it is contained in Matthew and Luke, some is contained in only one of the other gospels (and a little is contained in neither): at times Matthew and Luke must have omitted material from Mark. A priori there is no reason why the same might not have happened with Q materials: hence it might be that some material in Matthew and/or Luke alone might be Q material that the other evangelist has omitted (see Tuckett 1996, 93–96). In turn, the inclusion of such material in the body of what is taken to be Q could have a significant effect on one’s assessment of Q’s theology and/or christology (cf. below). On the other hand, such theories are inherently somewhat speculative, and arguments about whether a particular passage unique to Matthew or Luke belonged to Q or not might become rather circular in the present context. For the most part, I will therefore avoid including such material in any assessment of Q’s christology and
confine attention to those materials which are “unquestionably” Q (at least for those who accept some form of Q theory), i.e., materials that are parallel in Matthew and Luke and cannot be explained by common dependence on Mark. What then can we say about Q’s christology? Are there distinctive and/or characteristic features of the portrayal of the figure of “Jesus in Q”?

Implicit Christology in Q

That Jesus is in some way “special” for Q is perhaps trite, but important. (In one way, of course, such a claim applies to all parts of any group claiming to view the figure of Jesus positively, i.e., to be regarded as “Christian” in some sense, however one defines that term.) In terms of content, a large proportion of the Q tradition comprises teaching by Jesus. The very fact that this is the teaching of Jesus is then significant simply for this fact. Moreover, there is in some sense a striking silence in Q about any justification being claimed by the Jesus of Q for having the right, or authority, to teach in the way he does. It is simply assumed that the teaching of Jesus has an almost innate claim to be taken with the utmost seriousness without any need to provide warrant or supporting authority for it. As we shall see shortly, one possible “category” in which the Jesus of Q might be placed is that of a “prophetic” figure; but it is very striking that nowhere does the Jesus of Q introduce any of his teaching with the typically prophetic introduction, “Thus says the Lord …,” with its implicit claim to be speaking with divine authority. The Jesus of Q is assumed to be his own authority with no need for any external support or validation.

Further, it is noteworthy that at many points in Q sayings, it is assumed that the time of Jesus constitutes a time of eschatological fulfillment, at least in some sense. For example, in Q 7:22 (= Luke 7:22 and the Matthean parallel; it has become conventional to refer to Q verses by their chapter and verse numbering Luke), Jesus replies to the messengers of John the Baptist by referring to his activity in his own ministry (“the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the dead are raised, and the poor have the good news preached to them”); but it is also significant that this is stated in terms that clearly recall a number of prophecies from Isaiah, probably about a future eschatological age (Isa 29:18–19; 35:5; 61:1). The implication is clear: the time of Jesus is the time of the fulfillment of these eschatological hopes, and hence Jesus’ actions in his ministry (of curing various sick people and “preaching the good news” to the “poor”) constitute the fulfillment of important aspects of hopes by (some) Jews for the new age. Q 10:23–24 is similar (though set in slightly more general terms): the future longed for by prophets and others in the past, the things that many people in the past desired to see and encounter, is now being experienced by the disciples of Jesus (“you”) in the present.

Perhaps the clearest example of this comes in Q 11:20: “If I by the Spirit/finger of God cast out devils, then the Kingdom of God has come upon you.” The activity of Jesus in exorcising is claimed here to be equivalent to the arrival and
presence of the kingdom itself. (It is universally agreed that the Greek verb translated “has come” here implies the arrival and presence of the kingdom, not merely as something that is imminent but not quite present yet.)

Similarly, in Q 11:31–32 (the threats of coming judgment against “this generation” and the comparisons made between this generation and the Ninevites who encountered Jonah and the “Queen of the South”) culminate in the claim that “something greater than” both Jonah and Solomon is “here” now. Nothing is said that is explicitly christological as such (it is “something greater,” not someone). But the implication is not far away: the “something” is, in context, clearly tied up, and intimately connected, with the work and ministry of Jesus himself. Hence the time of Jesus is claimed to be a time of eschatological fulfillment. (For similar ideas, cf. too Q 12:51–53; 13:18–21; 16:16. For more details, see Tuckett 1996, 209–212.)

Thus deeply embedded in the Q tradition is what one might call an “implicit christology,” an assumption that in and through the life and ministry of Jesus, something of profound significance is happening, especially when viewed through a lens of Jewish eschatological hopes for the future. By implication Jesus is thus considered to be “special” in a very real way. What is not stated explicitly here is just how “special” he is. How, if at all, can one be more precise?

### Christological Categories in Q

The question of how one can/should introduce more precision into a discussion of New Testament christology has been debated many times. In particular, there has been debate about the merits (or otherwise) of focusing on christological “titles” to gain greater precision in any understanding of New Testament christology. An (almost exclusive) focus on such “titles” was a feature of a number of older treatments of New Testament christology (e.g., Cullmann 1959; Fuller 1965). Such an approach has been radically questioned in more recent study (see especially Keck 1986), partly because such an approach may work with too rigid an idea of what any supposed “title” may have meant at the time, and also because it may miss other vitally important pieces of evidence that contribute to the overall picture of how Jesus is presented and/or what Jesus is claimed to be. These factors may be particularly relevant for study of Q, since there is something of a dearth of christological “titles” in Q! Q expresses the significance of the person of Jesus very often in other ways than using grand titles or explicit descriptions.

There is too the problem, particularly acute in study of a “text” such as Q, of knowing how to interpret what appear to be “gaps” in the tradition as we have it. Does the Q that we can access (in any case only indirectly, via Matthew’s and Luke’s use of Q) give us anything approaching a full and complete set of evidence for the picture of Jesus that those who preserved and compiled the Q collection may have held? This is a particularly acute problem in relation to the slightly broader theological question of the significance attached by Q to the death of Jesus. As far as our evidence will allow us to determine, it seems that Q did not contain a passion nar-
rative. Did this mean that the person or persons responsible for collecting and preserving the Q material had no ("theological") interest in the death of Jesus? Very different answers have been given to this question! Some have argued that Q indeed does represent a distinctive stream within primitive Christianity that, unlike say Paul, saw little if any positive significance in the death of Jesus (e.g., Mack 1993). Others have argued equally strongly that an argument from silence is particularly dangerous here: we do not have anything approaching a full, comprehensive statement of the beliefs and practices of whoever it was that assembled the Q materials into a single text, and hence we cannot deduce anything from an (apparent) absence of a passion narrative in Q in relation to theories about broader claims relating to the significance (or otherwise) of the death of Jesus for "Q Christians" (see, e.g., Hengel 1983, 37; cf. too Manson 1949, 16).

Nevertheless, despite these caveats, a focus on "titles" may be at least partly relevant in determining the christology of a writer or group (though bearing in mind the danger of arguing from silence in relation to any absence of titles). I start with two "titles" that may be all but absent in Q.

**Christ**

The term "Christ" (Greek christos, corresponding to the Hebrew mashiah = "Messiah") is, as far as one can tell, completely absent from Q. There is no Q text where one can say with any certainty that the term "Christ" is mentioned in Q. Matthew 11:2 mentions John the Baptist in prison hearing about "the works of the Messiah," but this is widely regarded as Matthew’s redaction of a vaguer Q wording, perhaps more accurately reflected in Luke’s parallel, which speaks only of John hearing about "all these things" (Luke 7:18).

The evidence of 1 Corinthians 15:3, "Christ died for our sins" (almost certainly a pre-Pauline formulation cited here by Paul, hence pre-dating Paul by some time), suggests that the term "Christ" was applied very early to Jesus, and indeed by this very early date had already been attached so firmly to Jesus that it lost its definite article ("the Christ") and hence perhaps its original significance (where "Christ/Messiah" is a description of a role) and became virtually just another proper name, which here has even displaced the name "Jesus." Further, the category of messiah-ship is one that is at home, and only at home, within a Jewish context. Given that Q appears to have been a very "Jewish" kind of text, and indeed arguably stemming from Galilee (so Kloppenborg 2000 and 2008), it is quite surprising that Q gives no instance of Jesus being referred to, either by himself or by others, as "Christ/Messiah."

**Lord**

The other christological "title" that is frequently used in other parts of primitive Christianity is the term "Lord" (Greek kyrios). For example, Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:3 appears to assume that it is the sine qua non of any Christian confession: anyone
who calls Jesus “Lord” possesses the Spirit of God; and conversely, no one can say the polar opposite (“Jesus is cursed”) through the Spirit. Again perhaps surprisingly, Q rarely seems to imply that Jesus is thought of as “Lord.” The evidence is not entirely clear.

In Q 7:6, the centurion addresses Jesus as “Lord” with the vocative case (kyrie). However, the vocative of kyrios is notoriously ambiguous and can be used as simply a polite form of address (as “Sir!” can be used in slightly older-style English, without implying that the person addressed has received a knighthood!). At the end of the Great Sermon in Q, Jesus bemoans those who call him “Lord, Lord,” but do not put his teaching into practice in their ethical conduct (Q 6:46: the rest of the saying is very different in wording in Matthew and Luke, but there is enough agreement in the meaning, as well as the opening reference to such people calling Jesus “Lord, Lord,” to be fairly sure that this is indeed part of Q.) It would seem then that invoking Jesus as “Lord” is clearly regarded as in some sense a “standard” activity by Jesus’ followers; but the thrust of the saying is to call into question radically the sufficiency of such an invocation (and hence Q 6:46 is the diametrical opposite of 1 Corinthians 12:3 in this respect!). What is far more important than any “title” being ascribed to Jesus is that his teaching be taken seriously and be obeyed.

Prophet

It is clear from other parts of Q that Jesus’ teaching is not considered in isolation from the rest of his ministry; and in part, this broader picture of Jesus’ activity may implicitly place him in a slightly more precise category, viz., that of a “prophetic” figure.

In the section Q 7:18–23, the question of Jesus’ identity is raised by the question posed by John the Baptist in prison: is Jesus the “coming one” or should one be looking for another figure? The reply that the Jesus of Q gives comes in Q 7:22–23. As noted above, this reply alludes to the language used in a number of passages from Isaiah (Isa 29, 35, 61), but its prime reference is to the activity of Jesus himself in various acts of healing the blind, the lame, lepers, and so on. Thus the claim is being made that, in Jesus’ miracle-working activity of healing, the longed-for new age is present.

The climax of the reply comes in the last clause: “the poor are evangelized.” This is universally accepted as an allusion to the language of the prophecy of Isaiah 61:1, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me, he has sent me to bring good news to the poor” (Greek lit. “evangelize the poor”). The implicit claim being made by the Jesus of Q 7:22 is thus that his own preaching (as well as his healing activity) constitutes the fulfillment of this Isaianic expectation. Moreover, in Isaiah it is almost certainly the case that the figure described there is thought of as having a prophetic role. Q 7:22 thus implicitly claims that a vitally important aspect of Jesus’ activity is to fulfill this prophetic role in his preaching and teaching. Jesus is thus the prophet of Isaiah 61.
The same may well also be implied by the beatitudes, which appear at the start of the Great Sermon in Q 6:20–21. Matthew and Luke differ in wording here, so one cannot be certain of the Q wording in detail. Nevertheless, a strong case can be made for claiming that the beatitudes in Q pronounced a blessing on the “poor” (Luke 6:20; Matthew’s “poor in spirit” [Matt 5:3] may be Matthew’s change to Q), and promised “comfort” to those who “mourn” (Matt 5:4; Luke’s slightly different wording may be secondary. For details, see Tuckett 1996, 223–225.) This is then very close indeed to the language of Isaiah 61:1–2, which claims that the task of the prophetic figure is to preach the good news to the “poor” (v. 1) and to “comfort all who mourn” (v. 2). Thus right at the start of Jesus’ preaching in Q, Jesus is made to claim implicitly that the program set out in Isaiah 61:1–2 is being put into practice in his own preaching and ministry.

We may also note that some of the activities mentioned in Q 7:22 are hard to explain wholly from the Isaianic texts. In particular, the reference to healing lepers is not mentioned in Isaiah. So too the motif of raising the dead is not so easy to parallel (though cf. Isa 26:19). However, in the Old Testament the two figures most distinctively associated with these activities are Elisha (healing Naaman the leper in 2 Kings 5) and Elijah (bringing the widow of Zarephath’s son back to life in 1 Kings 17). Jesus is thus being presented in Q as acting in very similar ways to these “classic” prophets of the Jewish tradition. (There is also a striking parallel between the language of Q 7:22 and one of the Qumran scrolls, viz., 4Q521, which may well be referring to the work of an Elijah-type figure; see Collins 1995, 117–122.)

This general idea (of Jesus as an eschatological prophetic figure) would be strongly confirmed if it could be shown that Luke 4:16–30, the account of Jesus’ rejection in Nazareth, where he is portrayed as explicitly citing the text from Isaiah 61:1–2 and claiming that it is being fulfilled in his own present, were also part of Q. Claiming that a passage in Matthew or Luke alone might have been part of Q is always an uncertain process (see above). A case can be made in this instance for taking the citation of Isaiah 61 as part of Q (see further Tuckett 1996, 226–236). For example, it is striking that both Matthew and Luke give the name of the village in the form “Nazara” (Matt 4:13; Luke 4:16), perhaps then reflecting the existence of a tradition common to Matthew and Luke here, i.e., Q. Further, while it is widely argued that the citation of Isaiah 61 in Luke 4 acts as a programmatic summary for the Lukan story to come (and hence many argue its presence here is due entirely to Lukan redaction), there are some features that make it hard to see as a redactional creation in toto. For example, the unusual form of the citation combines a phrase from Isaiah 58:6 in the middle of the lines from Isaiah 61:1. These passages are linked via common use of the Greek word ἀφέσις, which here must be taken in a non-Lukan sense as meaning something like “release” (from bondage or illness). Elsewhere in Luke–Acts, the word is used frequently, but with the meaning “forgiveness” (of sins). It may be then that the text form, and the presence of the text itself at this point, comes to Luke from an earlier tradition and, given the agreement with Matthew in the form of the name Nazara, that source may be Q. If so, then the
explicit application of the citation from Isaiah 61 to Jesus confirms the importance of the category of (eschatological) prophet for the Jesus of Q. (It is also noteworthy that in Luke 4:25–27, reference is made to the figures of Elijah and Elisha as implicitly prefiguring the fate of Jesus: this would then link with the parallels noted earlier between what is said in Q 7:22 and the Elijah–Elisha stories.)

Wisdom and the prophets

This same theme is reinforced by a related complex of ideas that appears to be highly distinctive within the Q tradition. This concerns the theme of the figure of (personified) Wisdom sending prophets who regularly then experience rejection and suffer violence. The theme of personified Wisdom is one that appears in a number of Old Testament passages (cf. Prov 1, 8, etc.). So too, there is a well attested theme in a number of Old Testament (and later) texts of (all) the prophets being sent to recalcitrant Israel but all being rejected and suffering violence (see Neh 9:26; cf. also 1 Kings 18:4, 13; 19:10, 14; 2 Chron 36:14–16). There is of course a strong element within the Wisdom tradition whereby Wisdom herself is a figure who is rejected and finds no welcome (cf. 1 Enoch 42). But what is distinctive in the Q tradition is that these two themes coalesce (apparently for the first time) so that Wisdom becomes the agent who sends out the prophets, all of whom then suffer violence and rejection. This is clearest perhaps in the doom oracle of Q 11:49, where Luke is widely regarded as preserving the Q wording most accurately: here Jesus says that “the Wisdom of God said ‘I will send them prophets … some of whom they will persecute and kill.’” (Matthew characteristically equates Jesus himself with the figure of Wisdom and has the saying in the first person: Jesus himself says “I will send you prophets … ”) A similar network of ideas occurs in the lament over Jerusalem in Q 13:34–35: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who were sent to you ….” Taken on its own, the Wisdom reference is not explicit, though the saying is redolent of wisdom motifs. In any case, the two sayings are contiguous in Matthew (Matt 23:34–36 + 37–39), so that if Matthew’s ordering of the Q material is original here (which is at least possible), it may be that for Q the two sayings were assumed to be by the same speaker, viz., Wisdom.

Elsewhere in the Q tradition, similar ideas emerge. The saying in Q 9:58 (“the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head”) is strongly reminiscent of the passage in 1 Enoch 42, which talks of Wisdom seeking a home but finding none. And in Q 7:35 (“Wisdom is justified by her children”) the figure of Wisdom is associated with figures who suffer hostility and rejection (cf. the criticisms of Jesus and John the Baptist reflected in Q 7:33–34).

In part, many of these sayings relate to Jesus’ followers: they will experience rejection and suffering akin to the prophets (explicitly in the final beatitude in Q 6:22–23; also Q 11:49). But equally, by implication, it seems that this rejection and hostility is also experienced by Jesus himself (cf. Q 9:58, where the “Son of Man” for Q almost certainly means Jesus and Jesus alone; also Q 7:34 before Q 7:35: the reference to
Wisdom is preceded by a note recalling how Jesus receives no welcome but is rejected as a “glutton and a wine-bibber, a friend of tax-collectors and sinners”). It would seem then that in one way a relatively “low” christological outlook is being expressed here, in that Jesus is not necessarily being distinguished from his followers. He, and they, will experience the same fate as the prophets. The pattern of rejection of God’s prophetic messengers is reaching its climax in the events surrounding Jesus and his followers.

Yet Jesus is being given (as are his followers) a significant status in the overall dispensation envisaged here: they are akin to prophets. Thus Jesus is implicitly being given a prophetic role here. It is also noteworthy that, via this scheme, Q does appear to give some measure of “interpretation” to the hostility experienced by Jesus and hence, perhaps by implication, to his passion and death. Q may very well not have a passion narrative as such (see above). But that does not necessarily mean that Q ignores the suffering of Jesus completely and gives no evaluation of it: rather, Q may well envisage the death of Jesus within this broad schema of the violence suffered by the prophets. This may be very different from other New Testament passages that develop ideas about Jesus’ suffering being “vicarious” (“for us”) in some sense (cf. the creedal summary cited by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:3; the general theme is very prominent elsewhere in Paul’s writings). Q may not have any idea (at least explicitly) of Jesus’ death as atoning. Indeed it is not entirely clear that Q thinks of the suffering of Jesus as “unique” in being qualitatively different from the suffering endured by others: the model assumed here seems to presuppose that the suffering of Jesus is in a line of direct continuity with the suffering of others, past and present. Nevertheless, Q does have a scheme, or a model, in which the death of Jesus is interpreted and given some positive significance.

Son of Man

It is striking that in many of the Q passages considered above linking ideas of Wisdom and her (suffering) prophetic messengers, there is as often as not a reference to Jesus as “Son of Man.” Thus in Q 9:58, Jesus says that “the Son of Man” has nowhere to lay his head. The Wisdom saying in Q 7:35 is preceded by the saying in Q 7:34, which talks about “the Son of Man” coming, eating and drinking, and experiencing hostility and rejection. In the beatitude of Q 6:22–23, the followers of Jesus are said to be suffering “for the sake of the Son of Man.” (Matthew’s first person “for my sake” is probably due to Matthew himself, and Luke most likely preserves the Q wording here: see Tuckett 1996, 180 with further references.)

The problems surrounding the use of the term “Son of Man” in the gospels are enormous, and it is probably fair to say that “the Son of Man problem” is one of the most intractable in all aspects of gospel studies today. Nevertheless, it is probably fair to say that much of “the problem” about the use of the term “Son of Man” in the gospels has focused on the issue of what Jesus himself may have meant if/when he used the phrase, probably in Aramaic. Various theories have been proposed that
at an earlier stage in the tradition, perhaps at the level of the historical Jesus, the “Son of Man” figure was thought of as a figure other than Jesus (see, e.g., Bultmann 1951, 28–31; survey in Burkett 1999, 37–39). Alternatively it has been argued that in the Aramaic that underlies our Greek gospel tradition, the equivalent phrase, bar nash or bar nasha, may have meant simply “a man,” or “someone,” or had some such quasi-“generic” meaning (see, e.g., Casey 1979; Lindars 1983; survey in Burkett 1999, ch. 8). However, by the time one gets to the stage of the gospel writers writing in Greek, and even perhaps also Q (if Q was in Greek), the situation may be clearer. As far as the evangelists are concerned, it seems that they are convinced that the “Son of Man” figure is none other than Jesus and Jesus alone.

Further, in the gospels, it is clear that the reference to the figure of the “Son of Man” is directly related to the language and imagery of Daniel 7:13 and the vision that “Daniel” has of a figure who has the appearance of “one like a son of man.” We know that that vision, and the figure of the “one like a son of man,” caught the imagination of a number of writers, Christian and non-Christian, in the period, and various literary developments of the tradition are now clearly evidenced (in texts such as 1 Enoch, 4 Ezra, as well as the New Testament gospels: cf. Collins 1995, ch. 8). Whether Q represents the same development is not absolutely certain but seems very likely. (There are no absolutely clear echoes of Danielic language in the Q sayings, unlike, e.g., Mark 13:26; 14:62, where the reference to the Son of Man figure “coming on the clouds” is widely taken as a verbal allusion to the vision of Daniel 7.)

The interpretation of the figure of the vision of Daniel 7 is disputed: whether he is an angelic figure, a human figure, or whatever is debated. Further, there is no unanimity about whether one should regard the figure as a suffering figure or not. The vision comes from a time when loyal Jews are suffering intense persecution during the time of Antiochus Epiphanes (just before the Maccabean revolt) for their commitment to their true religion and their refusal to compromise their religious beliefs and practices in any way. The vision then provides them with encouragement, in that the “Son of Man” figure of the vision receives vindication and reward at the heavenly throne: he “represents” them in some way so that the vision serves to provide reassurance and encouragement to the loyal suffering Jews that they too will be rewarded. In the vision itself, the Son of Man figure is (simply) a glorious figure who receives the favorable judgment in the heavenly court and is as a result given a highly privileged position himself. But in the context of Daniel 7, it may be implied that the figure who is glorified in this way is precisely one who has experienced prior suffering. Otherwise, the vision fails to communicate hope and encouragement to its readers. Thus inherent in the vision of Daniel 7 may be the twin themes of suffering and subsequent vindication. Such twin themes clearly fit well with the body of Son of Man sayings in the Gospel of Mark, where Jesus qua Son of Man is one who must suffer (cf. all the passion predictions in Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:33–34, which are all couched in terms of Jesus as Son of Man) but who will come on the clouds of heaven at the end of time (Mark 13:26; 14:62).
What is striking is that the same pattern seems to be present in the Q Son of Man sayings as well. Jesus qua Son of Man in Q is one who experiences hostility and rejection, and hence by implication suffering (see Q 7:34; 9:58, though there is no explicit reference in these sayings to the suffering or death of Jesus). But equally there is another side to the coin. And just as in Mark, so too in Q, Jesus will exercise a significant eschatological role. He will act as witness in the final judgment, speaking on behalf of (“confessing”) those who have been true to him (“confessed him”) on earth (Q 12:8). He will come like a “thief in the night” (Q 12:42) on his “day,” which will arrive with terrifying suddenness and which will mean disaster for those who are unprepared (Q 17:22–37). In this then, unlike some of the other evidence considered so far, Jesus seems to be ascribed a role that is somewhat “higher” than that for other human beings. He and he alone will confess those who have confessed him, and indeed he is the one who is in a position to be “confessed” (Q 12:8); and the language of the “day of the Son of Man” (Q 17) seems to be a deliberate allusion, and parallel, to language in the Jewish Bible about the “Day of the Lord.” Thus many would see this as a distinctive feature of a “Q christology” here, so that it is appropriate to say that Q has a “Son of Man christology” (cf. Tödt 1965, and many others since).

Yet it is also worth noting that even this exalted language about Jesus in Q serves as much to unite Jesus with his followers as it does to exalt him over and above them. As noted above, the verbal picture of Jesus as the rejected Son of Man serves in a significant way to act as a paradigm or example for his followers, who are told to expect the same rejection and hostility. For example, the saying in Q 9:58 (“The Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head”) acts in Q as a quasi-“heading” for the mission charge that probably follows in Q (Q 10:1–16), where Jesus warns his followers that they too may experience hostility and rejection.

But equally the more exalted language associated with the eschatological activity of Jesus qua Son of Man does not serve necessarily to distinguish Jesus from his followers. For in what is probably the final (and hence probable climactic) saying of Q, Jesus tells the disciples that they themselves will “sit on the thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Q 22:30). Thus even in the most exalted role of exercising final judgment itself, the role of Jesus is one that, according to the Q tradition, he shares with his disciples. Any “christology” here then is one that serves to unite Jesus with his followers, rather than to distinguish him from them.

Son of God

The same may also apply in the case of the other christological “title” that occurs occasionally in Q, viz., “Son of God.” The phrase occurs in two Q passages, viz., the temptation narrative of Q 4:1–13 and the so-called “Johannine thunderbolt” of Q 10:21–22. Both passages have been seen as slightly unusual within the rest of Q, in part precisely because of their references to Jesus as Son of God: and as such, they have sometimes been regarded as later additions to Q (cf. Kloppenborg 1987 and
others). However, it may be that these passages fit well with the general pattern emerging from the rest of Q, where Jesus is seen as united with his followers, rather than distinct from them.

In the temptation narrative, the force of the story may be in part to set up the figure of Jesus as a model figure who is obedient to God’s word and who refuses to rely on anyone other than God (Tuckett 1992). Thus, precisely as Son of God, Jesus is portrayed as obedient to God: when confronted by the Devil and addressed there with “If you are the Son of God ...,” Jesus stands firm, citing scripture back at the Devil and refusing to put God to the test or to worship anyone or anything other than God himself. This pattern of divine sonship as implying obedience serves to align the Q temptation narrative with other parts of Q where Jesus’ followers are also sons or daughters of God too. They are to be “merciful,” just as their heavenly “Father” is merciful (Q 6:36); they are to address God as their “Father” in prayer (Q 11:2); and they can rely on God as their Father who knows all their needs to care for them (Q 12:30). The fact then that Jesus is the “son” of God, or correlatively that God is the “Father” of Jesus, is something that serves to unite Jesus with his followers quite as much as to distinguish him.

The “Johannine thunderbolt” (Q 10:21–22) is an extremely complex passage. Its popular description as a “thunderbolt” reflects the view of many that the saying is somewhat out of line with much of the rest of the synoptic tradition (not only Q), and more “Johannine” in its ideas (including the category of divine sonship and the apparently extremely “high” christology implied here). Many have argued that Wisdom ideas are here very prominent, though with Jesus implicitly being presented not just as the envoy of Wisdom but as Wisdom herself. Thus the exclusive mutual knowledge of the Father and the Son (“no one knows the Father except the Son, and no one knows the Son except the Father”) can be paralleled in sayings from the Wisdom tradition about God knowing Wisdom (Job 28; Sir 1:6, 8) and Wisdom knowing God (Prov 8:12; Wis 7:25ff.), as well as Wisdom revealing God to others (e.g., Wis 7:21; Sir 4:18).

The first phrase in Q 10:22, “all things have been delivered to me by my Father,” is however more reminiscent of “apocalyptic” language, especially language associated with the figure of the Son of Man (cf. Dan 7:14: “to him was given dominion and glory and kingship”). Further, the “title” used of Jesus here is not “wisdom” but “son.” In fact the language of the saying may have closer links with some of the sonship language used in Wis 2–5 (which in any case may be related to the Son of Man tradition), where it is the righteous sufferer, and perhaps the follower of Wisdom, who is the “son” of God (Wis 2:16) and who may also be thought to have (or to claim to have) “knowledge of God” (cf. the taunt by opponents in Wis 2:13: “he claims to have knowledge of God”). It may therefore be wrong to try to press the saying here into a single christological mould or category. In any case, the saying may be closer to some of the other Q traditions than some have allowed in the past (it may be less of a “thunderbolt” than some have suggested!) and may be presenting Jesus in ways similar to other parts of Q, viz., as one who is obedient to God and who shares his status of sonship, and his position of possessing close knowledge of God, with others.
References


Further Reading

