PARABLE AND CHREIA: FROM Q TO NARRATIVE GOSPEL

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ABSTRACT

In Gospel Against Parable I argued in cursory fashion that the narrative gospel was the outcome of an interaction of two forms from different worlds of meaning: the Hellenistic bios or biography of the divinely gifted man or immortal, and the parable so closely associated with Jesus in the primitive Christian tradition. Here I step back into a prior stage of the tradition and analyze the function and interrelation of two of the three dominant forms of speech in Q: the parable and the chreia. (The third is parenesis, which is not as determinative of the final form of Q and the formation of the narrative gospel.)

In Q the chief characteristic of much of the parabolic material (parables, parabolic sayings, metaphorical sayings, near-parables, and near-parabolic sayings) is intensification, both theological (Beardslee) and literary (Alter and Kugel). The “pronouncement story” or chreia is a form that carries with it a biographical impulse. Many of the chreiai identified, of which ten are about Jesus and one about John the Baptist, emphasize the meaning of the kingdom of God as revealed in the divine character and deeds of Jesus.

As for the relation of parable and chreia in Q, the chreiai that contain parables and those closely related to parables have the effect of making Jesus himself the subject of his own parables. There is, moreover, a metaphorical vitality in many of the chreiai that shows the literary influence of the parables that were brought into conjunction with the chreiai.

I conclude therefore that Q is neither a collection of the sayings of the wise (Kloppenborg) nor a prophetic document (Boring), but a parable-chreia collection that is well on its way toward the form of the narrative gospel. Q is closer to the canonical narrative gospels than to the Gospel of Thomas. In the Q-
Gospel trajectory Jesus becomes the center of the story and the voice of divine wisdom. In Thomas, Jesus is not the subject of a story but the very Wisdom that stands against all worldly stories and structures. The theology of a tradition according to the Thomas pattern cannot be written but must be formulated in the interaction of a community with the leader who in the instructional situation represents the "living Jesus." In the Q-Gospel pattern the leaders of the community have to accede in principle to the pastness of the biographical aspect of the gospel form, and this pastness is reinforced by the very paradigm of pastness: writing. However, both these patterns are modified somewhat in the other direction. In Thomas there is a minimal limit on the contemporizing tendency of the oral situation by virtue of the understanding that Jesus "spoke" to his alter, the twin Thomas (the community). In the synoptic gospels the parabolic aspect of the gospel form gives it a certain contemporary, polyvalent potential.

In this essay I am concerned chiefly with the relation of parables and parabolic forms to the emerging narrative gospel. In other words, I begin with a form of the fourth question that we posed for contributors to this issue (see Preface). On the basis of this initial study I move on to the question of gospel as genre and the theological implications that I draw from this discussion.

The process began for me in the interpretive work that resulted in my book Gospel Against Parable. There I argued that Mark's peculiar language, which I call a "language of mystery," is in large part determined by the tension between the contextualization involved in creating a larger narrative ("myth," if one wishes) and the lack of contextualization or literary world-making involved in parabolic forms. In an addendum to the main body of the work I maintained that the narrative gospel as we know it from the New Testament synoptic gospels was the result of a metaphoric process, a creative interaction of two forms from different worlds of meaning and different understandings of existence: the Hellenistic bios of the divinely gifted man or immortal (see Talbert) and the parable so closely associated with Jesus in the early tradition of the Jesus communities. Here I wish to develop and refine that thesis by stepping back into Q, the so-called sayings source, and looking at the interaction of parabolic forms and a rhetorical form that may well have been the seed of the biography in classical Antiquity, the chreia or "pronouncement story."

My procedure will be first to engage in literary analysis of parables and chreiai in Q and take note of how the two are related to each other. I shall simply presuppose a general consensus of what constitutes Q as it can be marked out from Luke and Matthew (and occasionally Mark).
Moreover, in part II of the study I will list its contents for the sake of making a judgment about its overall literary form. That will be the second step, to arrive at a conclusion about Q’s literary form and its place in a trajectory that issued in the narrative gospel. The third and final section of the essay will present some of the theological implications of the study. These implications will revolve around the contrast between the Q-Gospel tradition and the Thomas tradition.

1. Parable and Chreia in Q

Recent studies of Q have highlighted its variety of literary forms within the broad category of “sayings.” There are parables, pronouncement stories, eschatological utterances, prophetic sayings, and parenetic forms (see Kloppenborg; Edwards; Carlston; Boring). By any accounting, both parables and pronouncement stories are important in Q.

A. Parables

I would identify the following as Q parables:

11:24–26, unclean spirit that returns
12:36–38, 42–46 (Thom. 21), watchful servants
13:18–19 (Thom. 20), the kingdom of God like a mustard seed
13:20–21 (Thom. 96), the kingdom of God like leaven
13:25–27, householder shuts door
14:16–23 (Thom. 64), the great supper
15:4–6 (Thom. 107), lost sheep
19:12–13, 15–26 (cf. Gospel of Nazoreans 18), entrusted money

There are also parabolic sayings. These are not quite the short narrative forms we associate with the word “parable” in English, yet they exhibit a certain narrativity (Alter: 171–72). Narrativity in this case means an action sequence, however compact, and a problem, lack, or conflict that must be remedied. The action sequence and narrative tension could readily become a story if the slightest narrative development occurred. I have found three of these in Q:

9:58 (Thom. 86), foxes have holes
12:2–3, what is covered and revealed
12:6–7, hairs of the head numbered

In addition, there are some passages that are very close to having the features of a parable or parabolic saying. There is a form that is centered in metaphor, as parable necessarily is, but does not exhibit the narrativity of parabolic saying or the narrative development of parable. I locate three of these, which Bultmann called metaphorical sayings: 6:43–45; 6:47–49; 11:33–34. 6:43–45 compares moral intentions and deeds to the fruit of
trees. 6:47–49 contains two minute narratives, but the point is really the comparison and contrast of two character types. 11:33–34 compares human insight and moral decision to a lamp.

There are other instances where one can easily imagine an underlying parable or how the passage in question could be formed into a parable. The saying about John the Baptist and the Son of man in Luke 7:33–35 has the vivid metaphors of parable and allow, if not invite, the reader to understand it as a "likely story" or "true fiction" (see Williams, 1985:41) except for the references to John and the Son of man. Matthew's version, with "they say" rather than "you say" (Matt. 11:18–19) may be closer to the original Q wording; in any case the third person form would be more appropriate to a parable, if it was such. The command to the disciples in Matthew 10:16 (Lk. 10:3) would be a parabolic saying except for the "you" of direct address and the narrative setting. It reads: "Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves." The second verset is not found in Luke 10:3 and so is not usually considered to be from Q. However, the Matthean version forms a striking chiasm that follows an ancient Judaic poetic pattern:

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sheep      wolves
serpents   doves
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"Doves and sheep are associated with innocence and are offered in sacrifice. The wolf and the serpent are known as sly hunters" (Williams 1981:61). Finally, Matthew 7:9–10 could be a parabolic saying in the form of a rhetorical question except for the direct address. (Compare Lk. 11:11–12, which by putting the scorpion after the serpent softens the effect of the saying.) With a slight shift of wording we have: "What one (anthrōpos)—or father (pater)—gives his son a stone if he asks for bread/ or a serpent if he asks for fish?" It is easy to imagine how this saying might become a parable: "The kingdom of God is like a man whose son has worked in the field all morning, and so by noon he's famished; he says to his father, 'Father, I'm about to die with hunger. Let me have my lunch of bread and fish.' The man gives his son not only the son's share, but his lunch also."

A list of all the material:

Parable and Chreia


Near-Parables: Wisdom’s Different Children, 7:33–35; How a Father Treats His Son, Matt. 7:9–10 (Lk. 11:11–12).

Near-Parabolic Sayings: How a Father Treats His Son, Matt. 7:9–10; Wise As Serpents and Harmless As Doves, Matt. 10:16 (Lk. 10:3).

If all these sayings be accepted as relevant to a consideration of parables in Q, then we find 18 or 19 parabolic forms (one overlap, Matt. 7:9–10). It is interesting to examine them for what is there and what is not there. We find a few instances of metaphor functioning paradoxically (Mustard Seed, Banquet, Serpents and Doves), but only one of these instances, the Banquet, really exhibits what Ricoeur has called “extravagance,” an extravagance that “transforms the poetics of the parables into a poetics of faith” (Ricoeur:118). Rhetorical exaggeration or hyperbole is the necessary condition of parabolic extravagance, and there are four instances of hyperbole (Foxes Have Holes, Covered and Revealed, Banquet, and How Father Treats Son). Four occurrences do not make, of course, a higher percentage. The relatively non-paradoxical, inextravagant character of Q becomes even clearer when we note those sayings that may be typified as “ordinary wisdom.” That is, those which present typical instances of human behavior and character, and which of themselves do not call any world into question that we could easily determine or imagine for either a Jewish or a Hellenistic setting. These parables are the metaphorical sayings, Tree and Its Fruit, Wise and Foolish Builders, and Eye and Light, and the narrative parables, Return of Unclean Spirit and Entrusted Money. A good tree bears good fruit, etc. A house should be built on solid foundations. Life and character depend on the “light” that one has. The cure can be worse than the disease. Money and property should be used to the profit of the possessor, not put in profitless safekeeping. These sayings are all “proverbial.” In a certain setting they could conceivably become radicalized, but in and of themselves they are not remarkable. However, attached to the lamp parable is a saying that reads like a paradox: “So be careful lest the light in you be darkness” (11:35). The Matthean form may not only be a paradox, but an enhancement of the image: “If the light in you is darkness, how great the darkness?” (Matt. 6:23). This enhancement is closely related to intensification.

Intensification seems to be the one feature of the Q parables and
parabolic sayings that stands out and provides a bridge to some of the non-Q parables which are known for their paradox and hyperbole. "Intensification" is a dynamic that functions as much at the level of content as of form. It was proposed by William Beardslee as a way of understanding the "proverbial insight" of Jesus' sayings. For example, concerning the "Golden Rule," Luke 6:31, he says that

In its setting in Q the rule takes man's own situation as the presupposition for his understanding of his neighbor's in such a way that what can be a merely prudential rule becomes a complete transposition of the "little history" within which each man lives: one must die to his own little history, and thereby that of his neighbor is exposed as the object of true, free concern (39).

He says further, "The proverb in Q calls one out of his framework of security to be at the disposal of the concrete encounter" (41). For Beardslee, therefore, intensification is a phenomenon that depends on an understanding of the setting, in this case the Q "text" and the community of Q. In parts II and III of this paper I will indicate how I myself view Q as a whole.

I think it is useful also to employ the term "intensification" in a literary manner "as two basic operations of specification and heightening" (Alter: 62; see also Kugel, ch. 1). Alter applies specification and heightening to parallel verses in biblical Hebrew poetry, but with proper qualifications they are also pertinent to the Q material. Some sayings represent literary intensification or certainly lend themselves to such. I have identified seven, of which three are parables, 13:25–27 (Householder Locking Door), 15:4–6 (Lost Sheep), and 7:33–35 (Wisdom's Different Children), and four are parabolic sayings, 9:58 (Foxes Have Holes), 12:2–3 (Covered and Revealed), 12:6–7 (Hairs of the Head Numbered), and Matthew 7:9–10 (reconstructed as How Father Treats Son).

What Alter means by specification is the tendency to move from the general to the specific instance.

I shall put an end in the cities of Judah/
and in the streets of Jerusalem/
to the sound of gladness and joy,/
the sound of bridegroom and bride
(Jer. 7:34; Alter's example: 19).

Alter cites this verse in Jeremiah as an instance of spatial or geographical specification, but it applies also to mood or emotions in the second line. There is a movement from the general assertion of removal of the sound of gladness and joy to an attachment of that sound to the celebration of bridegroom and bride.
Specification and heightening are often interwoven and so must be understood as overlapping terms. Heightening will more often than not employ specification in a dramatic focusing or hyperbolic stepping-up of a key term.

Face to the dust they will bow to you,/  
they will lick the dust of your feet  
(Isa. 49:23; Alter's example: 21).

The four parabolic sayings are good examples of the operations of intensification. Q 9:58 in particular could be construed as coming directly out of the stylistic tradition of ancient Hebrew poetry.

Foxes have holes and birds of the sky nests,/  
but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head.

This is an antithetical aphorism (Tannehill:88-101), not a line in synonymous parallelism such as Alter's examples. However, the functions are basically the same. The general observation of the first half-line or verset is attached in the second verset to a specific figure in his concrete circumstances, and there is a movement from the image of dwellings to the picture of someone trying to lie down on a bed, mat, or perhaps even the ground. The versets are antithetical, not synonymous because the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head. This may be read also as hyperbole, and in actual instances there is often a fine line between hyperbole and intensification.

In 12:2-3 we find these operations somewhat expanded.

Nothing is covered that will not be revealed/  
or hidden that will not be known.//  
For whatever you have said in the dark  
in the light shall be heard/  
and what you have whispered in private rooms  
shall be proclaimed on the housetops.

This is somewhat prolix for an aphorism in the ancient Hebrew style—although my translation has more words than the Greek. I have translated ἀνθ'ήσων at the beginning of the second line "for" rather than "therefore" as in the Revised Standard Version. It sometimes means "because," as in Luke 1:20, 19:44, and Acts 12:23. This line thus reads like the motive clause of Hebrew instruction proverbs that begins with ki "for" or "because." The explanatory line, 12:3, not only becomes rather expansive in the use of words, but employs the second person plural address, which is a departure from the biblical proverb tradition. The second person was used in instructions carrying a command or prohibi-
tion, but not for an assertion or indicative statement. But even if 12:3 is not a pure form in the Hebrew aphoristic tradition, it certainly exhibits intensification. The general truth of the first line, which could be construed as ordinary or traditional wisdom, is directed to the reader or hearer in the second. Not only that, but what is covered up is specified as "what you have said in the dark," and even more, it is "what you have whispered in private rooms." There is thus a hyperbolic stepping-up in the dramatic contrast between secrets shared in a private room and the denouement of a revelation in full light of day.

Q 12:6–7 is different from the others in that it begins in the form of a rhetorical question.

Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies?/
And not one of them is forgotten before God./
But even the hairs of your head are all numbered./
Fear not: you are worth more than many sparrows.

This saying is unusual in form, but a close inspection shows the features of Hebrew contrastive parallelism. It is framed as a chiasm:

sparrows not forgotten
numbered sparrows

The first line departs from the style of specification in that a general assertion is made in the second verset. (On rarer instances of movement from specific to general see Alter: 22.) However, the second verset of line one expresses reassurance, which is the function in a more intense form of the second verset of line two. And the specification and dramatic heightening in line two as contrasted to line one are obvious. If even the sparrow is not forgotten (= is valuable) before God, how much more valuable are the members of the community addressed, all of whose hairs of the head are numbered (= known and valued) by God!

Matthew 7:9–10 does not contain specification, but it is a good example of dramatic heightening. The parabolic saying as I have reconstructed it:

What father gives his son a stone if he asks for bread/
Or a serpent if he asks for fish?

The version of this saying in Luke is wordier and puts the deadly animal (scorpion) in the first verset. Unless one holds that Matthew characteristically improved Q's literary style, I think the Matthean form of the
saying should be considered closer to Q. There is an exaggeration of an unlikely situation as one imagines a father giving his son a stone instead of bread to eat—which is bad enough. But then instead of a fish he passes him a serpent!

My comments on the three parables will be briefer. The householder who shuts the door, 13:25-27, presupposes an opening line or two that was presumably in an original form of the parable. Servants or guests have gone away for the evening, apparently in an impolite manner (at least they shouldn’t have returned so late!). Those barred from the house knock and call at the door, but the householder pretends not to know them (v. 25). Those outside protest that they even ate and drank with the master of the house (v. 26). The exaggerated intensification of the impasse reaches a climax when the master of the house adds insult to injury by calling those outside “workers of iniquity” (v. 27)!

The parable of the lost sheep, 15:4-6, does not work by specification, but there is a dramatic heightening effect through a series of extreme contrasts: leaving the 99 sheep to go after the lost one; a shepherd pastoring the flock but carrying the lost one on his shoulders; flock in the wilderness and shepherd rejoicing at home over the sheep that was found. These contrasts lose their heightening effect in Thomas’ version of the parable. In Thomas 107 the lost sheep is the largest, and the shepherd tells the lost sheep that he cares for it more than for the ninety-nine. Someone hearing the Thomas version of the parable could say, “Well of course, it seemed strange that the shepherd would go to all that trouble and leave the rest of the flock in danger—but if it was his largest sheep and he was more fond of it than of the rest. . . .”

As for Luke 7:33-35 (= Matt. 11:18-19), it is clearly not a parable as it stands, but I would call it “parabolic.” It is difficult to tell whether the response to John the Baptist and Jesus was cast in a parabolic mode, or a parable about the public’s inability to respond to prophets and teachers of wisdom became attached to John and Jesus. What strikes me about the contrasting images of the two is that the rejection of John is rather general and conventional (“He has a demon!”), whereas the abusive epithets about the Son of man1 are heaped up. That he would be caricatured as a glutton and “wino” (oinopotês) is bad enough. “A friend of tax-collectors and sinners” (= adulterers, prostitutes, and pimps) is really insulting! “And Wisdom is justified by all her children,” i.e., Wisdom may accomplish her ends in ways the public does not expect. As a matter of fact, one could conceive of an original parable in which Chokmah or Sophia, wisdom personified, sends out two servants, or two of her “children,” prophets who are rejected.

To summarize the findings so far, a preliminary survey shows a great deal of parabolic material, in the form both of short narratives and aphorisms. Although any definition of parable would have to include the
vital metaphor, some of the other literary characteristics that contemporary interpreters tend to ascribe to parables are not in such prominent display. Although one finds instances of paradox, as well as the sort of hyperbole that may easily move into the "extravagance" perceived by Ricoeur, I cannot conclude that these terms are the best ones for describing parables in Q. **Intensification** is the one feature that is both characteristic and provides a bridge to some of the favorite non-Q parables of modern hermeneuts.\(^2\) Intensification, as defined literarily by Robert Alter in terms of specification and heightening in biblical Hebrew poetry, is nicely exhibited in three parabolic sayings, 9:58, 12:2–3, and 12:6–7. I also detect it in two parables, 13:25–27 (your origins are unknown → workers of iniquity) and Luke 7:33–35 (demon → glutton and drunkard → friend of tax-collectors and sinners). Dramatic heightening is found in the reconstructed parabolic saying, Matt. 7:9–10, as well as in the short parable, Q 15:4–6. We found an intensifying of the picture of the Son of man’s homelessness in the world, of the full disclosure of God’s judgment, of the divine care for members of the Jesus community, of the confidence children (members of the community) may place in the divine Parent, of the fate of those who do not act as good guests or servants, of the concern of the shepherd for the lost sheep, and of the inability of most humans to perceive and accept true wisdom. Although the focus was on literary analysis, by taking these seven passages together we can already begin to form a picture of Q’s theology. We begin, indeed, to construct a continuum between these literary results and Beardslee’s point that in the context of Q, the sayings of Jesus call “one out of his framework of security in order to be at the disposal of concrete encounter” with God through Jesus the Son of the man and with God through the neighbor, who is likewise the object of God’s care.

B. Pronouncement Stories

Another form of speech in Q almost as common as parable and **parenesis** is one that exegetes usually call the “pronouncement story” since Taylor coined the term (Taylor: 29–30, 63–87). This refers more or less to the same form that Bultmann called “apophthegm” (Bultmann: 11–69), and it overlaps with Dibelius “paradigm” (Dibelius: 26, 37–69). In Hellenistic rhetoric it was called **chreia** (see Hock, and Butts on Theon). In the chreia a great personage, usually a sage who is viewed as “divine” or “immortal,” teaches by issuing a pronouncement in response to a question or state of affairs in a setting that may be only vaguely described, if at all. The primary interest lies in the **character** of the teacher, whose authority is presupposed. Very often his wit turns the situation into an occasion to display his wisdom or offer his audience a memorably stated insight. His sayings characterize him.
It is said that Plato, seeing someone playing at dice, rebuked him. And when the other protested that he played only for trifles, he said, "But character (ethos) is not a trifle" (Diog. Laert., III. 38, trans. modified).

Here Plato's ethos as a philosopher is shown. He is able to discern the ethos, the character or pattern of behavior that lies behind someone's actions.

The chreia carries with it a biographical impulse and may have been the seed of the bios, life or biography. The example given above is, in Tannehill's terminology, an "objection story" (1981a:6-7). Tannehill surveys all the chreiai or pronouncement stories in the synoptic gospels and constructs a typology:

1. **Correction stories**: "By action, by outright statement, or by implication from something said, someone has taken a position as to what is right or expedient, and the responder corrects that position" (7).

2. **Commendation stories**: "... In commendations the responder commends rather than corrects the other person" (7).

3. **Objection stories**: "Objection stories, like correction stories, present a situation of conflict. However, in corrections the conflict is first indicated by the response, while in objections it is created by an objection to the behavior or views of the responder [the teacher or great personage] or his followers" (8). I should note in passing that the example given previously in Plato from the Lives of Diogenes Laertius is more complex than the classification as stated by Tannehill. Plato first objects to someone's playing at dice, and then when this person objects to the reprimand, Plato makes his pronouncement.

4. **Quest stories**: A person on a quest asks a question to which the teacher responds. This response determines the success or failure of the quest. This is a more elaborate pronouncement story, and the person asking the question has a more important role than in most of the chreiai (9).

5. **Inquiry stories**: "An inquiry story moves from a question or request for information to the answer to that question or request" (10). The responder does not correct the questioner, nor does the questioner object to the behavior or views of the responder.

6. **Description stories**: "Description stories begin with a general indication of the situation to which the pronouncement relates."
This provides the setting for a comment in which the responder describes the situation . . . The speaker is saying, ' . . . this is the way it is'" (10–11).

Using Tannehill's survey of the varieties of synoptic pronouncement stories (1981b), I find eleven chreiai in Q. Here is a tabulation thereof, with an indication of the type of story:

3:7–8: John the Baptist's exhortation—correction
7:1–10: The centurion's dying slave—correction (also objection?)
7:18–23: Messengers from the John the Baptist—inquiry
7:24–35: On John the Baptist—correction
9:57–58: On following Jesus—correction
9:59–60: On burying the dead—correction
11:14–26: On exorcism—objection
11:29–32: The sign of Jonah—correction
11:45–52: Against the lawyers—objection
13:22–30: On entering by the narrow door—inquiry
17:5–6: The apostles' request for increased faith—inquiry

The correction story dominates, with six occurrences. There are two (or three?) objection stories and three inquiry stories.

What do these chreiai communicate about the character of Jesus? A considerable number of them emphasize his divine works. His deeds are of God, they display and confirm the good news. Immediately after the great sermon (6:20–49) he accedes to a request a heal a Roman centurion's slave (7:1–10). This episode is followed by the request of John through his messengers that Jesus confirm his divine mission. Luke 7:21 is perhaps Luke's own insertion into the Q pericope (missing in Matthew): "In that hour he cured many of diseases and plagues and evil spirits, and many of the blind he graced with sight." Jesus's response to the messengers is a summary of the good news:

Go tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind see again, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor receive good news. And blessed is the one taking no offense at me (7:22–23).

The Beelzebul controversy, 11:14–26, deals with conflict about Jesus' source of power and authority over the demonic. The parable of the unclean spirit that returns to someone with "seven other spirits more evil than himself" (11:26) reads in the Q context as a tale responding to the objection of opponents. To wit, as if to say, "Just as you know a tree by its fruits, you can tell by examining those I have healed whether their health and their deeds show God's work or Satan's." It is interesting that in the same context Matthew uses the Q material differently, placing Jesus'
teaching on a tree and its fruits between the Beelzebul controversy and the demand for a sign:

Matt. 12:22-32/Lk. 11:14-23—Beelzebul controversy
Matt. 12:33-37/Lk. 6:43-45—a tree and its fruits
Matt. 12:38-42/Lk. 11:16, 29-32—demand for a sign
Matt. 12:43-45/Lk. 11:24-26—unclean spirit that returns

I would suppose that Luke stays closer to the Q order, but that Matthew, sensing what was at stake in the Beelzebul controversy, placed the teaching on good and bad fruit immediately after it. Jesus is not demonic because his fruits are good, as seen in those he heals and exorcizes. Q 11:29–32, the demand for a sign, is also a works chreia. Jesus as Son of man is the sign because his deeds show that he is wiser than Solomon and a greater proclaimer of repentance than Jonah. As I shall point out in part II on the literary form of Q, this sign chreia could be taken as paradigmatic of Q as a whole.

The focus on the divinely authorized and empowered deeds of Jesus is probably also a concern in the woes against the lawyers, 11:45–52. The implication is that in “this generation” (11:51) Jesus is the last in the line of prophets and apostles sent by the Wisdom of God (11:49). Matthew transforms this implication by having Jesus himself speak as the voice of divine wisdom (Matt. 23:34). As will be indicated in part III on theological implications of this study, Matthew’s rendering of Jesus into the divine subject, the divine wisdom as such, is what happens in Thomas, but in Thomas Jesus is not contextualized (or made narratively contingent) by being born, growing up, dying, and being raised from the dead.

Q 17:5–6 is by implication a deeds chreia. When the apostles ask that their faith be increased, Jesus gives an answer that stresses the wonders that faith can work. By implication he is an exemplar of such faith.

So five of the ten chreiai about Jesus set his divine character in bold relief by pointing to his deeds. (One of the eleven is about John, 3:7–8). It is also worth noting that Q includes the story of Jesus overcoming the basic temptations that the devil is thought to pose to all humans: the desire for miracles, the desire for power and prestige, and the desire for safety from danger and death. Although the temptation story, 4:1–13, is a real narrative with a beginning moving through engagement and conflict to an end, one can see how each episode of testing could have been built out of a chreia. In any case, in the present form of Q Jesus’ character is displayed at the outset, and it undergirds the authority of what he teaches as well as reinforcing the chreiai that follow. If biography is character, as it evidently was in the ancient world, then we can see already in Q a biographical element. Yet it is also “parabolic,” so I must next examine the relation of chreiai to parables to Q.
C. The Relation of Chreia and Parable in Q

There are two ways in which parables are related to chreiai in Q: They are included in some chreiai, and there is a close, thematic or consequential relation in other instances. These forms of relationship will be taken up in order.

There are two chreiai that include parables (11:14–26, 13:22–30), and one that includes what I have termed a "near-parable" (7:24–35). There is also a chreia that includes a parabolic saying (9:57–58). In addition to these four instances I want also to note how Luke provides a setting for the Banquet and the Lost Sheep (14:15–24 and 15:1–7).

The parable of the unclean spirit that returns (11:14–26) could just as appropriately have been placed in a warning to the disciples about mechanical or unconcerned exorcism on which the exorcist does not follow through in a proper pastoral manner. Making it part of a controversy implies two things, both very important: (1) The Q community was involved in controversies with opponents about healings and exorcisms. (2) The parables associated with Jesus were of such weight in the primitive tradition that the tendency was already to use them even in settings where the "fit" was not obvious.

We find the same lack of obvious connection to the context in the relation of the parable of the householder that shuts the door, 13:25–27, to the chreia that ends with a pronouncement on the Kingdom in 13:22–30. These dicta at the end assert that the outside audience, presumably the Jews who are hostile, will not enter into the kingdom of God (13:28–30). However, if one focused on the parable itself, its more obvious point could be construed as the need to act as good guests or servants; not to be slack, but to bear fruit showing faith in God.

The near-parable about Wisdom's Different Children, 7:33–35, is very intriguing in relation to the entire passage, 7:24–35, which could be read as a long chreia. It is intriguing in great part because one has no absolute proof that it is the adaptation of some parable to this context. I would, however, be surprised if there were not some such mashal or parabole circulating in a Jewish or Hellenistic context. See, for example, the biblical mashal about the lovers of Language who eat of her fruits in Proverbs 18:21, a proverb closely related in its imagery and possible meaning to the lovers of Wisdom in Proverbs 8:17, 21. The point I would make about Wisdom's Different Children is that one of two options would best explain the parabolic form in context: (1) A parabolic saying was composed to bring the comparison of Jesus and John to a fitting conclusion. (2) A parable already known was adapted to the needs of the chreia. In any event, one of the primary motifs of Q is that both John and Jesus represent the divine voice. Given the parabolic quality of much of Q, Wisdom's Different Children is an apt climax to the questions that Q presupposes and addresses about the mission and deeds of John and Jesus.
Q 14:16–23 and 15:3–6 are not chreiai in Q. Luke, however, very easily changes them into such by introducing a setting. The parable of the lost sheep thus becomes a moving rejoinder to the Pharisees (15:1–2).

Of course, this parable about the good shepherd searching for his sheep does not have to be imagined in a controversy setting. As for the Banquet, 14:16–23, there is some tension between the form of the parable in Luke and the exclamation that occasions it: “Blessed is whoever eats bread in the kingdom of God!” (14:15). The Lukan version emphasizes the mission, the repetition of the effort to bring in people of all sorts from the highways and byways. The parable as it stands in Luke seems to have been revised according to Luke’s theology of salvation history, although much of the Q material already represented as kind of “deuteronomistic theology” (Kloppenborg, drawing upon Jacobson). Thomas’ version (Thom. 64), which presents only two trips of the servant, may be closer to an earlier form of the parable, even though it reflects the style and theology of Thomas in other respects (Williams, 1985: 164–165).

Concerning the parabolic saying, 9:58, I find it difficult to conceive a better conjunction of occasion and saying. I would say the same about the connection of 9:59 and 9:60, except the latter is parenetic, not parabolic: “Leave the dead to bury their dead.”

So in four of these six instances the fit of the parable with the chreia is not tight. It is difficult to arrive at a judgment about Wisdom’s Different Children since it is not certain the saying had a prehistory. In all six instances the parable functions to reveal the character of Jesus or his mission—a mission that includes his relation to John’s mission in 7:33–35. Indeed, something quite interesting occurs in four of the six: the effect of the chreia is to make Jesus the subject of the parable. That “the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head” is something the potential follower of Jesus must understand (9:57; cf. 9:59). Whatever his opponents may charge, Jesus’ exorcism is the work of God, not Beelzebul (11:14–26). Jesus, like John, is one of Wisdom’s children (or according to Matt. 11:19, does her works). And in the chreia Lukes makes of the Q parable, Jesus, who eats with sinners, is the shepherd who goes out searching for the one sheep that is lost (15:1–7).

In the other two chreia passages, 13:22–30 (Q) and 14:15–24 (Luke), the Kingdom or the preaching of the Kingdom remains the subject of the parable within the chreia.

There are also chreiai that are related in some consequential way to parables not included in the pronouncement stories themselves. Two of these are among the five passages discussed above:

13:22–30 related to 13:18–21
Also these:

3:7–8 related to 4:1–13;
6:43–49;
12:36–38, 42–46; 19:12–13, 15–26
7:18–23 related to 7:24–35

The parable of the lamp, 11:33–34, bears no apparent connection to the preceding chreia, but placed as it is it functions as part of an exhortation to sound judgment in evaluating what is God’s work in the world and what is not. The mustard seed and the leaven that a woman hid in flour read like introductions to 13:22–30, a chreia on exclusion from the Kingdom. Or it could be viewed vice-versa, the episode of the narrow entrance being a kind of commentary on the previous two parables. The work of the Kingdom has small beginnings and not everyone is able or called to participate. This connection between the two parables in 13:18–21 and the chreia is made more explicit by Luke’s addition of 13:23: “And some of them said to him, ‘Lord, will those who are saved be few?’”

The consecutive chreiai, 7:18–23 and 7:24–35, deal with the works of Jesus, and as already discussed, these are capped with the parable-like saying in 7:33–35. Like 11:33–34, 7:33–35 is an expression of the tendency to identify Jesus as the subject of his own parables.

Of the chreiai related to parables, the episode of John’s preaching, 3:7–8, seems to have an internal thematic connection with the greatest number of parables. If it was the beginning of the Q document, the Q writer probably sensed this connection. The saying attributed to John:

O brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruits worthy of repentance, and don’t begin to say among yourselves, “We have Abraham as our father.” For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham.

Whatever the intention of the Q writer, doing deeds worthy of repentance seems to be confirmed in various ways in passages that follow. Jesus shows himself to be the one who is to come (3:16–17) by resisting the temptations of the devil (4:1–13). The proclamation of John and the temptation story prepare the way for Jesus’ teaching about a tree and its fruit (6:43–45), men building a house (6:46–49), the faithful servant (12:36–38, 42–46), and the money entrusted to servants (19:11–12, 15–26).” To “bear fruit worthy of metanoias (“mind-changing” or repentance) is the parenetic theme of Q, just as the relation of Jesus’ sayings and works to himself as the messenger of the Kingdom is Q’s proclamatory theme.
The initial stages of a tendency to move Jesus himself into the center of what he teaches is the most significant finding of this examination of chreiai and parables. Both the parables within chreiai and the consequential relation of parables and chreiai signify that Jesus is the one who is to come, whose message and works represent the metanoia of the rule of God.

A more difficult question is whether the literary form of the parable had a reciprocal effect on the chreia. Can we find a vivid metaphoric pattern and a central element of intensification in the chreiai? Given the biographical impulse of the chreia and the corresponding tendency to make Jesus himself the subject of the parables ascribed to him, are the metaphoric vitality and level of intensification in the chreiai the effect of the biographical impulse that was undoubtedly fed by the centrality of Jesus in the early tradition? Or did the parables themselves help to create this metaphoric vitality? It is hard for either the social or the literary historian to disentangle these factors, which were probably interacting. Let me observe that the Hellenistic biographies that I have read do not maintain either the metaphoric quality or the intensification that the Q chreiai communicate. The Q tales relate a certain unconventional quality and summon the hearer to a radical discipleship. At least six of them deal with how Jesus should be viewed or what discipleship entails. Jesus concludes his reply to John's messengers, "And blessed is the one who takes no offense at me" (7:23). In the next episode he says that even though John is great, "yet the least in the kingdom of God is greater than he" (7:28). Taken in conjunction with 7:27, about John as the messenger "who shall prepare the way before you," the intention of the chreia is to justify the ministry of Jesus. Q 9:57-60 is a combination of two chreiai to which the author of Luke has evidently added a third, 9:61–62. The three pronouncements are noteworthy:

Foxes have holes, and birds of the sky nests, but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head.

Leave the dead to buy their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.

No one putting his hand to the plow and looking back is suited for the kingdom of God.

The homeless Son of man—departure from conventional society—not looking back once one has started the task: these form a picture of discipleship centered in Jesus as Son of man that brings together various forms of intensification, sociological, theological, and literary. One might characterize this picture by saying that the Son of man without a place for
his head is a literary image giving focus to radical commitment to God and an itinerant ministry.

The parable of the returning unclean spirit, 11:24–26, apparently functions to reinforce the pronouncement at the conclusion of the Beelzebul controversy: “Whoever is not with me is against me, and who does not gather with me scatters” (11:23). The point of the demand for a sign, 11:29–32, is that “a greater than Solomon is here” and “a greater than Jonah is here” (11:31, 32).

The Q pattern we see in these six chreiai is continued by Luke, as in 15:1–2. The Q saying in 15:7, “there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents,” etc., justifies Jesus against opponents as Luke has set the frame of reference.

When we consider also the healing of the centurion’s servant (7:1–10) and one of Jesus’ teachings on faith (17:5–6), a twofold pattern emerges in the Q chreiai: Jesus’ deeds are wonderful and marvelous and his teaching is a radical call to commit oneself to service of the Kingdom. Do we find anything comparable in the Hellenistic sources?

Scholars with more expertise in these sources than I will have to speak to the question, but on the basis of what I have read I would say the answer is yes and no. On the one hand, the biographers wanted to present the unusual virtue of their subjects’ deeds and teachings. Socrates, according to Diogenes Laertius, was remarkable even in old age. He learned to play the lyre, “declaring that he saw no absurdity in learning a new accomplishment.” All his life he was divinely guided:

He used to say the divine (to daimonion) warned him beforehand of what was to come (11.32, trans. modified).

Philostratus describes Apollonius’ discourse as wise and oracular:

“How then,” O Apollonius, “should the sage converse?” Again he told him, “Like a law-giver, for it is necessary that the law-giver give to others the instructions of whose truth he is persuaded” (I.XVII, trans. modified).

On the other hand, the tendency of the biographers seems to have been to integrate the sage’s teaching into the conventional and ordinary. The literary and social function of the chreia in biographies was not to jar the mind and inculcate any radical notion concerning following the sage, but to explain and instruct in terms of what was commonly known. When Apollonius was asked why he did not write a book, he replied, “I have not yet kept silence” (I.XIV). If left like that, the pronouncement could be a paradox giving rise to thought: in order to write one must first observe silence. However, the effect is dispelled with the biographer’s subsequent description of the teacher’s five years of silence (I.XIV, XV). In
other words, the biographer is not satisfied unless he offers conventional description and explanation.

Diogenes’ tales of Socrates are so relaxed—the contrary of the typical quality of intensification in the Jesus tradition—that the reader is bound to assimilate the narratives simply as items of knowledge that are interesting to learn about the great philosopher, not as presentations of a marvelous and inspired model.

He used to say that he most enjoyed the food which was least in need of condiment, and the drink which made him feel the least hankering for some other drink; and that he was nearest to the gods in that he had the fewest wants (11.27).

To conclude this subsection of the paper, what we find in a study of the relation of parable and chreia are two phenomena which are especially important in this context: (1) The tendency of the chreia is to shift Jesus from parable-speaker to parable-referent. (2) Many of the Q chreiai reveal a degree of metaphoric patterning and a high level of intensification like a number of the parables.

II. The Literary Form of Q


Finally, Kloppenborg contends that the Temptation was added as the latest development of Q. Its effect was definitely to shift Q towards a biographical forming of the sayings of Jesus.

Kloppenborg’s thesis has the merit of trying to establish the literary genre of Q, and this means also its implied readers. It is of interest in this
paper to compare his thesis to the diametrically opposed position argued by Eugene Boring.


It will be noticed that some of these sayings are ones that Kloppenborg identifies as sapiential. I think that Kloppenborg is right about 6:22–23a, for the macarism is a wisdom form. However, that proves nothing in itself because we know that the ancient Israelite prophets used many different forms of speech, including both macarisms and woes—both of which may have had their original life-setting in the wisdom tradition (see book of Amos and Crenshaw, 1967; bibliography in Crenshaw, 1969). On the other hand, it appears to me that Boring is more correct concerning 10:1–16. This speech on the mission of the disciples clearly has wisdom elements in it (e.g., 10:3), but I find it difficult to follow Kloppenborg's delineation of 10:2–11 as part of a sapiential stratum. That is, unless one could validly picture the seventy sent out as something like Cynic teachers of wisdom, yet simultaneously as proclaimers of the approach of the kingdom of God.

Of course, 10:1–16 is a "community-directed speech," which is characteristic of all the passages that Kloppenborg places in the formative wisdom form of Q. However, the criterion of I-You speeches will not suffice to support the formative character of these so-called sapiential logoi. For one thing, in prophetic works we often find an alternation between community-directed speech and third person proclamation. See, for example, the prophet's command to bind up the testimony in Isaiah 8:16–20 in relation to the oracle of the word against Israel in Isaiah 9:7–17. The latter is, as far as we know, just as integral to the formation of the Isaiah scroll as the former, which is a "community-directed" oracle. Indeed, the first person I-Thou or I-You address may be a fiction that masks other speakers in the persona of the prophet. It may be a way of legitimating what the community believes to be true by seeing it as the prophetic or divine word. The same thing could have happened in the formation of Q: Jesus' words, refracted and revised in the primitive tradition, would have been incorporated in order to justify the life-style of those who were beginning to find themselves in bitter conflict with Jewish or non-Jewish contemporaries.

I said that Boring is more correct about the particular pericope 10:2–16. I would say that his total argument is finally untenable because its
literary critical grounds are shaky. He devotes a chapter to formal characteristics of prophetic speech (126–135), discussing the following topics: oracles in poetry, speaking for the risen Lord in the first person, Käsemann’s “sentences of holy law” and the “eschatological correlative,” the formula “truly I say to you (amén legeo humin/soi),” and blessing and curse.

It has already been indicated that blessing and curse are not sure signs of prophetic discourse apart from additional information about the literary and historical context. But the most serious problem with Boring’s argument is that we do not have sufficient evidence to know how to determine when a given speech ascribed to Jesus has its origin in the speaking of a prophet in the Jesus tradition who identifies his “I” with the “I” of the risen Lord.

In any case, even if one accepted all the formal features of prophetic speech presented by Boring, it would, I think, be difficult to apply them to Q and arrive at the conclusion that it is a prophetic document. There is indeed a noteworthy prophetic element in Q, both in terms of concern with the function of John, Jesus, or Jesus’ followers as prophets and with the relation of this prophetic proclamation to Israel’s past rejection of the prophets. However, the prophetic elements do not form a “prophetic document.” I have already noted that the number and extent of prophetic oracles in Q is uncertain. Moreover, some of the basic features of the prophet as homo religiosus (81–94) cannot be located in Q with any certainty. A prophetic document in the Jewish tradition would presumably include a narration of the prophet’s calling or a reference to it. Is there an allusion to Jesus’ vocation in Q 10:21–22 (“All things have been delivered to me by my Father,” etc.)? Or is this a concealed reference to the Christian prophet’s vocation, the implied logic of which would be the word from Father to Son to prophet? We do not know. Another problem is that prophets do not tend to write. The process of literary formation would have to be dealt with if one were to argue Q is a “prophetic document.” In sum, a sharper answer to the question of what constitutes a prophetic document is needed.

Now as for the contrary argument put forth by Kloppenborg, that Q’s formative stratum was an instructional genre, there is no doubt that much of Q is made up of wisdom material. There may even be a thematic connection between the opening of some of the speeches and what follows (6:20b–22 in relation to the rest of the great sermon is a good example). It is, however, an imposition of modern assumptions about form and genre to conclude that clusters of an identifiable type in a text represent a different stratum of redaction. Although I find Kloppenborg’s thesis attractive in some respects, I tend to the view that there is not a firm basis for delineating redactional strata in Q. It is problematic enough when we have an extant work! For example, catchword associations there clearly are in Q. But the method of catchword association could occur in
one and the same compositional process. Let us say that the Q author had at hand some sapiential sayings ascribed to Jesus; perhaps they were already thematized in the manner indicated by Kloppenborg. In any case, the author places them at appropriate points in a work already begun. Where prophetic or deuteronomistic material was added by catchword association, that could have been simply in order to harmonize the wisdom teachings with the rest of the work.

Some such process seems to make more sense than an original wisdom composition, for when one looks at what we have of Q Kloppenborg's easily discernible wisdom blocks do not appear to dominate. Here is an outline, with the sapiential blocks in upper case letters. I shall place a question mark after those units that are not, in my view, dominated by wisdom forms. It will also be useful to indicate whether a given pericope may be marked as a chreia (C) or contains parabolic material (P).

John's Coming and Preaching 3:2–3, 7–9, 15–17 (C) in vv. 7–9
The Temptations 4:1–13
DISCOURSE: Beatitudes 6:20b–23
  Woes 6:24–26
  Love of Enemies 6:27–36
  On judging 6:37–42
  Bearing Fruits 6:43–45 (P)
  House on Rock 6:46–49 (P)
Healing Centurion's Slave 7:1–10 (C)
Jesus Answers John's Question 7:18–23 (C)
Jesus' Witness to John 7:24–35 (C)(P) in vv. 31–35
ON FOLLOWING JESUS 9:57–60 [61–62?] (C)(C) [(C)] (P)
COMMISSIONING THE SEVENTY ? 10:1–12 (P)
WOES ON GALILEAN TOWNS 10:13–15
WHO HEARS YOU, HEARS ME 10:16
Sons Thanks Father, Blessedness of Disciples 10:21–24
HOW TO PRAY (The Our Father)? 11:2–4
PERSISTENCE IN PRAYER 11:9–13 (P)
The Beelzebul Controversy 11:14–23 (C)
Return of Unclean Spirit 11:24–26 (Not identified by Kloppenborg as a wisdom form of speech, but it could be so construed.) (P)
Sign of Jonah 11:29–32 C)
LAMP OF THE BODY 11:33–36 (P)
Against the Pharisees 11:37–54 (C) in vv. 45–52
APOCALYPSE AND FEARLESS CONFESSION? 12:2–12 (P)(P)
ON ANXIETY 12:22–31
TREASURES IN HEAVEN 12:33–34
Watchfulness and Faithfulness 12:35–48 (P)
Troubles and Signs in the Last Times 12:49–59
The Mustard Seed 13:18–19 (This and the following parable are not among Kloppenborg's instructional sayings, but they could be so viewed.) (P)
Kingdom of God Like Leaven 13:20–21
Exclusion from the Kingdom 13:22–30 (C) (P) in vv. 25–27
Lament over Jerusalem 13:34–35
The Great Banquet 14:16–23 (P)
Conditions of Discipleship 14:25–33
Salt 14:34–35 (Wisdom)
The Lost Sheep 15:3–7 (P)
On Having Two Masters 16:13 (Wisdom)
Law and Prophets Till John 16:16–17
On Faith 17:5–6 (C)
When the Son of Man Is Revealed 17:22–37
Parable of the Pounds 19:11–27 (P)
Precedence in the Kingdom 22:28–30

I think that any such glance at the topics and forms in Q should suffice to indicate that "instructions of the wise" played a definite but not formative role in Q. Prophecy too must have had some part, but we should keep in mind the problems and unknown factors I have already mentioned in the presentation of Boring's thesis. What takes form in my view is a tendency to bring parabolic material and chreiai together, as already discussed in part I. The findings were as follows:

(1) There are two chreiai that include parables (11:14–26, 13:22–30), one that includes a "near-parable" (7:24–35), and one that includes a parabolic saying (9:57–58). There are two other Q parables that Luke easily turns into chreiai (14:16–23, 15:3–6). In four of these there is not an obvious fit of parable and chreia. (As indicated, the function of Wisdom's Different Children in the formation of 7:24–35 is uncertain.) The real exception is 9:57–58, where the conjunction of occasion and saying is perfect. In four of the six chreiai the effect is to make Jesus himself the subject of the parable.

(2) There are chreiai closely related to parables (or parabolic material) not included within them. Three of these are instrumental in two complexes that change Jesus into the subject of his own message. The first is simply a sequence: 7:18–23 → 7:24–35 (7:33–35). The second I would term a "network": 3:7–8 with (16–17) ↔ 6:43–49; 12:36–38, 42–46; 19:11–12, 15–26. As previously stated, both sets of relations signify that he is the one to come; his message and works represent the required transformation of heart and mind that happens when God's rule is fulfilled.

(3) There is a metaphorical vitality in many of the chreiai that may well have been literarily influenced by the parables that were brought into
conjunction with them in the tradition. The parable-chreia relation that had perhaps already emerged in the tradition was then exploited by the writer responsible for the final form of Q.

What probably occurred—and I realize this is little more than conjecture concerning the actual process of literary formation—was the use of the chreia or pronouncement story by some author in order to delineate Jesus' relation to John the Baptist and to promote a view of Jesus' character and deeds that would have been understandable in a Hellenistic setting. The various parabolic forms that I have discerned as part of a network related to John's preaching of metanoia serve to show that Jesus continues this proclamation. The "string" of chreia passages in Luke 7 indicate that in relation to John Jesus is ho erchomenos, the Coming One, and these passages are undoubtedly related to Q 11:29-32 and 16:16-17. In fact, the "sign of Jonah" pericope is a kind of mediating passage which may be paradigmatic of the process: in its present form it is a pronouncement story that enunciates interest in both the wisdom of Jesus and his prophetic proclamation of repentance. And even though the primary sign is the proclamation of metanoia, the "greater than" formula is evidence that the proclaiming himself is becoming the sign of God's reign.

When the crowds were increasing he began to say, "This generation is an evil generation. It seeks a sign, but a sign shall not be given to it except the sign of Jonah. For just as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so the Son of man shall be to this generation. The Queen of the South will arise at the judgment with those of this generation and condemn them, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, a greater than Solomon is here. The Ninevites will arise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, a greater than Jonah is here."

In my book Gospel Against Parable I included an addendum in which I argued that a metaphorical process lay behind the creation of a new literary form, the narrative gospel. In speaking of "metaphoric process" I drew upon the argument of Gerhart and Russell that metaphor is properly understood as a shorthand term for a process in which two previously separate understandings from different fields of meaning are brought together into a new pattern or "world of meaning." I went on to present the thesis, in a very cursory form, that one can discern this metaphorical process at different literary levels in the gospel tradition: in the parables,
in the relations of parables to their settings, and in the formation of the gospel as narrative.

Concerning the formation of the gospel as narrative, I proposed that two literary forms from seemingly incongruous settings were brought together and seen as equivalent in early Christianity: the biography of the great person and the type of parable attributed to Jesus. My conclusion:

In the resulting form we know as the narrative gospel the [central structuring element of the parable, the likeness] transforms biography so that it functions as an image of God's rule, and the [central structuring element of biography, the life of the immortal] renders parable so that it functions as a kind of "history." Thus gospel as a new genre (213–214).

I believe I was on the right track with this argument, but I would now refine it to a generically prior stage. It was the chreia with its biographical impulse that early Christian interpreters began to play against the various parabolic forms integral to the early Jesus tradition—integral for two reasons: (1) Because Jesus himself surely characteristically taught in parables, parabolic sayings, and metaphorical utterances. (2) Jesus' way of using language and the life-setting of many followers inspired the creation and development of parabolic language. If the relation of parable and chreia in Q is anything approximating what I have concluded in my analysis, then at the heart of the narrative gospel was a process in which parabolic forms, whose distinguishing literary feature is intensification, were drawn into chreiai, whose distinguishing literary feature is the pronouncement of the great man who offers guidance for life. The parabolic forms, in their turn, affected the chreiai from within.

III. Theological Implications

My conclusion about Q is that it is not a collection of sayings of the wise but parable-chreia collection that is well on its way toward the form of the narrative gospel. It is still a kind of blend or mixture in a way that the Gospel of Mark, for example, is not. Jesus, particularly through the chreiai, is becoming the referent of his own sayings, and the effect of the chreia is to diminish the contemporizing effect of sayings and speeches that are allowed to stand in their own right. The so-called "sayings source" is thus much less an expression of orality than Werner Kelber contends in The Oral and the Written Gospel. However, two aspects of orality remain. One is the fiction of the present Lord addressing his community. Even though that is a fiction, there are fictions that will carry readers into the oral situation if they are persuaded to follow the text.
The other aspect of orality comes from the historical Jesus tradition itself: the parables (including parabolic sayings and metaphorical sayings), which as Kelber has pointed out are a transitional, mediating form between orality and writing. They demand interpretation, yet they are polyvalent and can be narratively contextualized in different ways.

The concrete historical problematic of the community to which Q was addressed must have included two interrelated conditions: frequent, if not persistent persecution, and the need to legitimate the Jesus community in a world requiring license and authority. Q did not develop all the marks required for this validation in the Graeco-Roman world, but the seeds were there. John the Baptist as predecessor, Jesus overcoming the tests of Satan, disciples who are blessed and sent out by the Master, the wise sayings and prophetic pronouncements of the Master—these together make up the seminal form of the narrative gospel. I would say that Q is therefore considerably closer to the canonical narrative gospels, particularly Mark, than to the Gospel of Thomas.

In the Q-Gospel trajectory the protagonist of the text, the prophet, story-teller and sage, becomes the center of the story and the voice of divine wisdom. The story itself becomes the target of attention, as we can see especially in Matthew and Luke. Q does not give a full story, being still a form very much in transition. Mark offers a plotted narrative, but partially undercuts the gospel story through the theme of the mystery of the Kingdom that is conveyed in the parables, above all the parable of the sower.6

As for the Gospel of Thomas, it is an interesting fact that not one of the chreiai I have identified in Q is so used for sayings. Indeed, where there are signs of the chreia genre it is nonetheless greatly attenuated. Pheme Perkins has pointed out that the literary and religious context of Thomas "cannot appreciate the dynamic interaction of the synoptic proclamation story, since it lacks the imaginative realism of the synoptic tradition" (121). The tendency in this trajectory of the Christian tradition is to assimilate sayings material into a larger dialogue form. Whether or not Thomas is "Gnostic," as Perkins holds in her 1981 article, the dialogue rather than full narrative was the vehicle of the later gnostic communities. Even in Thomas Jesus is not made out to be the referent of his own sayings, but the very reality of divine wisdom speaking from "another world," so to say. The sayings spoken by "the living Jesus" to Didymos Judas Thomas will enable the knower or believer not to experience death if he or she finds their interpretation (Thom. Incipit and 1).

Jesus is not a prophet or sage or storyteller in Thomas, but the very Wisdom that stands against all worldly stories and structures. Orality is evidently much more important for the Thomas community than writing because the true wisdom is always contemporary, coming through the living Jesus. In the actual social setting this means the wisdom has to be
mediated by the teachers of the community. Its true, esoteric character could be maintained only through oral interpretation. I infer that the problematic of the Thomas community must have centered in justifying the esoteric wisdom of the living Jesus community as it sought liberation from everything involved in worldly license and authority. Its life setting and theological concerns thus took expression in a very different form from the Q-Gospel tradition.

The theology of a tradition according to the Thomas pattern cannot be written but must be formulated in the interaction of a community with the leader who in the instructional situation represents the “living Jesus.” However, the understanding that Jesus “spoke,” in the past, to his alter, the twin Thomas who stands for the community, means that the tradition and the written text place at least a minimal limit on the contemporizing tendency of the oral situation.

By contrast, the theological pattern of those whose canon is the synoptic Gospels leads inevitably to writing the further logoi theou of the tradition, inasmuch as the leaders have to accede in principle to the pastness of the biographical aspect of the gospel form. The paradigm of pastness is writing, this pastness is renewed in the present by further writing. Yet in spite of this “historicizing” tendency, the parabolic aspect of the gospel form gives it a certain contemporary, polyvalent potential.

To you has been given the mystery of the kingdom of God, but for outsiders everything is in parables.

NOTES

1 On the occurrences of the title “Son of man” in Q, see Edwards 39–43. There are six references to the Son of man in the future (11:30, 12:8–9, 12:40, 17:24, 26, 28) and three references to his present activity (7:34, 12:10, 9:58). More than likely Q, at every point, assumes Jesus to be the Son of man. See also Boring 239–250.

2 E.g., Lk 10:30–35 (the Samaritan), 16:1–8a (the Unjust Steward), and Mk 4:25 par (Having and Not-Having).

3 I do not know a single unarguable instance in the ancient world of a prophet writing as part of his or her vocation. That prophets related and even dictated oracles and other material to disciples is well known. In the Hebrew Scriptures see Isa 8:1, 16, 30:8 and Jer 36. Also Muhammad, known in the Muslim tradition as illiterate, dictated the ayat or revelations to companions.

4 I do not intend to imply that Q was composed in a Hellenistic setting outside of Palestine. It may have been, but it remains an open question as far as I am concerned. We know that not only Jerusalem but also “numerous cities throughout Palestine” were subject to Hellenistic influences (Perrin and Duhng 78). It is difficult to determine whether the primitive Jesus tradition would have already begun, say before 50 C.E., to utilize Hellenistic ideas and genres in the Palestinian Jewish context. Some of the recent studies indicate a relative paucity of chreiai in the Jewish literature from the second century B.C.E. to the second century C.E. (see Vanderkam, Greenspoon, Porton, also Neusner on the “biographical apophthegm” in the Pharisaic-rabbinic
literature). But again, there were Hellenistic influences in Palestine, so the possibility of a Palestinian provenance for the literary formation of Q cannot be excluded.

5 Although "a greater," *pleion*, is neuter, the sign is the work to be associated with the Son of Man, i.e., Jesus.

6 See Williams, 1985: 10-11 and 196-199.

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