Matthew 11:19b / Luke 7:35:
A Test Case for the Bearing of Q Christology on the Synoptic Problem

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As is well known, the Q hypothesis depends on the validity of the argument for the priority of Mark. Conversely, where other arguments over the Synoptic problem appear fairly evenly matched, support for the existence of some form of Q is easily taken as support for the priority of Mark. The complex questions surrounding both Q and the Synoptic problem lie beyond the constraints imposed on this essay; I propose to examine only Matt 11:19b / Luke 7:35, a test case as it were. This pair of passages is frequently taken as a clear instance of Q is easily taken as support for the priority of Mark. The complex questions surrounding both Q and the Synoptic problem lie beyond the constraints imposed on this essay; I propose to examine only Matt 11:19b / Luke 7:35, a test case as it were. This pair of passages is frequently taken as a clear instance of Q as an independent source. The argument, in brief, runs like this. The verb ἐκκαίρισθη picks up ἐκκαίρισθαι in v 29, already judged on other grounds to be pre-Lukan. Since the usage in v 35 cannot easily be seen to be a Lukan redaction of Matt 11:19 (for reasons still to be seen), v 35 is likely also to be pre-Lukan (and thus, granted the parallel with Matthew, presumably Q). Comparison of v 29 with v 35 also suggests that "children" (v 35) is more original than Matthew’s "works": a personal subject is demanded for the "justifying" if the alleged parallel between the two verses is to stand. In this view, Luke 7:35 offers a contrast with the immediately preceding verses (the initial αἱ is usually understood to have adversative force), but links up powerfully with vv 29-30; that is, unlike those who despise the style of both the Baptist and of Jesus (vv 33-34), all Wisdom’s children (v 35) justify Wisdom, just as "all the people, even the tax collectors," justify God in vv 29-30.

The link between v 29 and v 35 is judged to be so strong that most scholars conclude that in Luke Wisdom’s children are "all the people, even the tax collectors," over against the religious authorities who listened to neither the Baptist nor Jesus. Two features, it is argued, make it unlikely that Wisdom’s "children" in v 35 refers to John and Jesus. First, παιδεύω (attested in most manuscripts and possibly redactional) makes it unlikely there are only two "children"; second, it is often pointed out that in Wisdom literature, on which this saying is modeled, Wisdom’s "sons" are those who listen to and obey her...

Supporters of the Griesbach hypothesis have argued that Matt 11:2-19 / Luke 7:18-35 is one of many pairs of passages exhibiting "the kind of verbal similarity . . . which suggests the possibility of direct copying" — the assumption being, of course, that Luke has copied from Matthew. But close study has convinced a majority of scholars that copying has gone the other way — or, more precisely, that both Matthew and Luke used Q, but that Luke shows few signs of having edited Q while Matthew shows rather more signs of having done so. 

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2. In this essay I use "Q" to refer to Q-material, material common to Matthew and Luke, without prejudice as to whether or not such material ever constituted a single document, and, apart from contextually determined occurrences, without prejudice as to whether or not Q ever existed in any written form.
4. Here, however, I. H. Marshall, The Gospel of Luke, NIGTC (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1978) 303, is among those who think the verb has been introduced into v 29 under the influence of v 35.
5. It is absent from D L Θ ψ f 1 28 700 1241 α; it ends the phrase in many manuscripts (A Q Byz). Support for the Αναθεμάτων reading comes from B W f 13 892. The reading παιδεύω τῶν ἑρμηνευτῶν finds support only in the second corrector of K.
call, rather than those who preach it. Fitzmyer is an exception in that he lumps together John the Baptist, Jesus, and all those who listen to either of them, as Wisdom's children.

There are many variations on and refinements to the interpretation just outlined, and a few scholars who take quite a different view. Some of these options I shall briefly discuss below. For the moment it is only necessary to mention that, by contrast with the Lukan parallel, Matt 11:19 is thought to betray secondary features and a more developed Wisdom christology. In particular, Matthew's τῶν ἐργῶν (instead of Luke's πάντων τῶν τέχνων) is a self-conscious closing of the inclusio opened in Matt 11:2: John the Baptist heard in prison of τὰ ἔργα of the Christ. The works that justify Wisdom in 11:19 — in short, the works of Wisdom — are nothing other than the works of Christ. The implication is obvious: Wisdom has become personified, almost hypostatized, and Christ = Wisdom.

Could such an identification of Jesus with Wisdom already have been found in Q? If πάντων in Luke 7:35 is redactional (and certainly πάς is a Lukan word), then Wisdom's children in the Q source might have been John and Jesus; but in any case Matthew goes beyond this by making Wisdom = Jesus. If the "children" of Luke 7:35 referred in Q only to the disciples of John and Jesus (a stronger possibility if πάντων belonged to Q), then Wisdom still cannot be identified with Jesus since the entire context shows that both John and Jesus are envos of Wisdom, but not Wisdom itself. In other words, the close association of John and Jesus throughout the three preceding pericopae makes it unlikely that in the Q logion itself Jesus is identified with Wisdom. So Dunn concludes: "Where Q at most presented Jesus as the envoy of Wisdom and most probably as the child of Wisdom, Matthew clearly took the step of identifying Jesus as Wisdom herself." Dunn, of course, is interested in the development of christology, but his views on our pair of texts is widely shared, and, if sustained, obviously bears directly on the Synoptic problem.

uncontrolled. In this passage it turns on finding μαθηκός (cf. Matt 11:8 / Luke 7:25) and related terms in Cynic writers. Cameron fails to mention that the same word-group abounds in Philo, Josephus, and the LXX.


In what follows, I want to raise a number of points against this reconstruction. I shall begin with some reflections on Matthew, and then turn to Luke and Q.

(1) Whatever is said about John and Jesus being linked together in Luke 7, the same must be said, mutatis mutandis, regarding the link between them in Matthew 11.

The general flow of the preceding verses in both Luke and Matthew is the same. Emisaries from the Baptist approach Jesus, expressing the former's doubt and frankly asking whether or not Jesus is ὁ ἐρξαμένος (Luke 7:19; Matt 11:2). Jesus responds by summarizing his ministry, using the categories of Isa 55:5-6; 61:1-2 (omitting any mention of vengeance), and concluding with an aphorism designed to encourage perseverance on the part of the Baptist (and of later readers) (Luke 7:20-23; Matt 11:4-6). Then, just as John had borne witness to Jesus before the crowd (Luke 3:1-18; Matt 3:1-12), so also now Jesus bears witness to John before the crowds — though as we shall see, it is a peculiar witness that has the effect of pointing out his own unique importance. After a series of difficult rhetorical questions nominally addressed to the crowd, Jesus establishes that John the Baptist is more than a prophet by insisting that he is also someone concerning whom prophecy was uttered (Luke 7:24-27; Matt 11:7-10 — citing Mal 3:1 under influence from Exod 23:20 LXX). We cannot here explore each element in the citation. But even if Mal 3:1 had been exactly quoted, the flow of the argument in both Luke and Matthew demands that if John the Baptist is the prophesied Elijah who prepares the way for Yahweh (Luke 1:16; Matt 3:3) or for the Day of Yahweh (Mal 4:5-6), and John the Baptist is Jesus' forerunner, then Jesus himself is the manifestation of Yahweh and brings in the eschatological Day of Yahweh. From the perspective of both Luke and Matthew, John is more than a prophet: he is greater than any prophet in that he alone serves as the immediate forerunner of Yahweh's gracious self-disclosure in Jesus, preparing the way before him. From the perspective of both Luke and Matthew, the antecedent prophets had contributed to the corpus of revelation that pointed to the coming of Messiah (the "Christ" in Matt 11:2). But it was John alone who pointed him out and prepared his way directly. That leads to the conclusion expressed in the next verse: John the Baptist is the greatest person born of woman (the text presupposes "up to that time" or the like, or the rest of Luke 7:28 / Matt 11:11 makes no sense). John the Baptist is greater than...
Moses, greater than David, greater than Solomon, greater than Isaiah, simply because to him fell the inexpressible privilege of introducing the Messiah to the world. Thus Jesus’ witness to John becomes a dramatic way of drawing attention to his own unique identity.

In this light, ὁ μικρότερος in the kingdom who is greater than John is not a reference to Jesus as “the younger,” that is, “the lesser” in a purely temporal sense,15 as if the text is simply saying that Jesus, though younger than John, is in fact superior to him (cf. John 1:15). For that would mean that the greatness of ὁ μικρότερος relative to John is not established on the same basis as the greatness of John relative to the antecedent prophets, and so the flow of the passage would be badly disrupted. Indeed, many scholars affirm that the push to take ὁ μικρότερος to mean “the younger” finds primary impetus in nothing more than the fact that the passage is so difficult. Others hold that the kingdom is entirely future;16 the least in the kingdom then will be greater than John is now. But neither Luke nor Matthew deploys such categories in this passage, and in any case the basis for comparing the two patterns of relative greatness would again be destroyed. Many argue that Matthew (but not Luke) presupposes that John the Baptist is himself in the kingdom,17 largely on the basis of the strict identity between John’s message and Jesus’ message as reported in Matt 3:2-4:17. But this is to focus too narrowly on isolated verses without sufficiently observing their redactional contexts. When John announces the coming of the kingdom and calls for repentance, he does so in the context of anticipating the one who follows him (Matthew 3); when Jesus announces the coming of the kingdom and calls for repentance, he does so in the context of his fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah 9 that a great light would shine in Galilee (Matt 4:12-17)—and this takes place after John is imprisoned (Matt 4:12).

If we look for a way to understand our passage, such that the relative greatness of the least in the kingdom over John parallels the relative greatness of John over everyone before him, then a way forward presents itself. John is greater than everyone before him because (as we have seen) it was given to him to point out with greater clarity than had ever been done before the precise locus of God’s greatest self-disclosure—Jesus himself, and the dawning of the Day of Yahweh. But John does not envisage any delay in the prospect of apocalyptic judgment (Luke 3:16-17; Matt 3:11-12); that is the genesis of his doubt at the beginning of our passage. He has no theology of the cross (toward which all the Gospel writers press); he has no conception of a kingdom in which tares and wheat must grow together, in which the Spirit must come and empower lac.

17. E.g., W. Wink, John the Baptist in the Gospel Tradition (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1968) 33-35.

Messiah’s people before the awful climax. In that sense the least in the kingdom, the lowliest disciple living this side of the cross and resurrection, points out Jesus better than the Baptist; and that constitutes the greatness of the least in the kingdom.

Thus Jesus has explained (according to both Luke and Matthew) the role of the Baptist in the stream of redemptive history, but in such a way that he himself is the unique and climactic self-disclosure of God. Then, in the verses immediately before the text that is the focus of this essay, Jesus compares “this generation” with children in the marketplace who call out to others to join them in their play, and find them unresponsive. Jesus then makes an application to the Baptist and himself, an application still to be explored (Luke 7:31-34; Matt 11:16-19a). Our text follows (Luke 7:35; Matt 11:19b).

Of course, I have neglected to comment on the peculiarities in Luke and Matthew. In particular, Luke draws a contrast between the readiness of the people to hear Jesus’ words and the rejection of God’s purpose by the Pharisees and scribes (Luke 7:29-30); Matthew includes a difficult logion about the advancing kingdom and John’s place in it, returning to the link with the promised Elijah who was to come (Matt 11:12-14; cf. Luke 16:16). In addition, Matthew (as we have seen) incorporates τὰ ἐργα in the initial question (11:2). But the point of this recital of the main thrusts of both Luke and Matthew is to stress how similar they are. Throughout both passages Jesus is utterly without peer; at the same time, John is highly praised, located within the stream of redemptive history, and assigned his status because of his relationship to Jesus. And “this generation” is condemned for rejecting both John and Jesus (no matter how the difficult parable of the children in the marketplace is understood).

What this means, I think, is that it is very difficult to conceive how an ordinary first-century reader (how much less an auditor!) could have associated Matt 11:19b with Jesus but not with John, with Matt 11:2 but not with 11:16-19a. To argue that 11:19b must refer exclusively to Jesus’ works (the necessary condition for the argument that Wisdom=Jesus) because of the one-word connection (in another case!) with “works” in 11:2, while ignoring the entire flow of the passage, is exegetically unjustified.18 This is the elevation of an old-fashioned and doctrinaire form of redaction criticism that makes all the meaning hang on changes, and none of it on the large mass of common material, let alone on the flow of the passage. The changes must not be ignored; I shall return to them. But when Matthew’s version is simply read as a flowing account, without reference to Luke, it is very difficult to see how the “works” of 11:19b are exclusively those of Jesus.

(2) Many have pointed out that τὰ ἐργα in Matt 11:2 has the effect of pointing backward to the carefully constructed series of works that Jesus performs

18. True, the thrust of the passage immediately establishes Jesus’ superiority over John, but not on the ground that Jesus = Wisdom.
in chs. 8-9, and therefore John the Baptist can be included with Jesus in 11:19 only if we assume that he too is performing kingdom works.\(^{19}\) Some, rightly, go farther: the expression in its context is broad enough to embrace not only the works of chs. 8-9 but also the teaching of chs. 5-7 and the mission of ch. 10.

All of these "works," however, are cast as the "fulfillment" of antecedent revelation, the coming of the eschatological kingdom. Thus in the Sermon on the Mount the purpose of Jesus' coming and the burden of his teaching fulfill the law and the prophets (5:17-20; 7:12). Obeying Moses' commands becomes a testimony to who Jesus is (8:1-4); exercising faith in Jesus associates the believer, whether Jew or not, with the patriarchs in the long-awaited kingdom (8:5-13); Jesus' healings fulfill Isa 53:4 (Matt 8:14-17). The coming of the Son of God prompts the demons to ask if he has come to torture them before the appointed time (8:29). Unlike John's disciples, who fast, Jesus' disciples enjoy the presence of the bridegroom (9:14-15 --- incidentally another bit of evidence that Matthew does not regard John as already in the kingdom). When the Twelve are sent out (ch. 10), it is because Jesus sees that the harvest-time has already come (9:35-38). What they preach is that the kingdom of heaven is near (10:7).

Much more evidence could be adduced, but the point seems clear enough. Matthew is careful to place Jesus' works in the appropriate place in the stream of redemptive history. But it is vital to recognize that he has already done the same for John the Baptist and his ministry. Not only does Matthew (in line with other Evangelists) point out that John came to fulfill the words of Isaiah (Matt 3:3), but alone among the Evangelists Matthew casts John's baptism of Jesus as a work by which both John and Jesus "fulfill all righteousness" (3:15). This does not jeopardize Jesus' uniqueness: the voice from heaven refers to Jesus alone when it declares, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased" (3:17).

That there is an inclusio created by τὰ ἔργα (11:2) and τῶν ἔργων (11:19b) we need not doubt; that these words were introduced as Matthean redaction is likely. But in the light of Matthew's emphasis on redemptive history, in the light of the intervening pericopae explaining John's place within that stream, in the light of the OT quotation used to declare that John himself fulfills Scripture, it is hard to see why the inclusio should be thought to exclude John from the works of 11:19b, or should be thought to label the Baptist's works with exactly the same kingdom significance as those of Jesus. The thought, rather, is that both John and Jesus have performed the works that God himself has assigned to them in their respective roles in redemptive history, and "this generation" responds negatively to both. John the Baptist is in this respect associated with Jesus, not driven from him.

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is the first to make the explicit identification of Jesus with Wisdom. Dunn sees the same pattern elsewhere, and if he is right then his interpretation of this passage might be judged to have more cogency. But in each case his arguments are less than convincing. When he compares Matt 11:25-30 with Luke 10:21-22,24 he rightly sides with those who do not see in the initial parallel (Matt 11:25-27 = Luke 20:21-22) a background in Wisdom, but rather in the identification of Jesus with Israel in (or of) the last days. The closest parallels are in OT election passages. Matthew 11:28-30, however, without parallel in Luke, is Matthew's addition to the Q passage, and this (Dunn and others25 argue) has been modeled on Sirach 51, especially vv 23-26, where the teacher of Wisdom invites pupils to put their necks under Wisdom's yoke, and offers his own testimony regarding the rest he himself has found in his labor under this yoke. But the differences between this passage and Matt 11:28-30 are at least as remarkable as the similarities. Ben Sira invites people to take on the yoke of Wisdom, which is nothing other than studying Torah, as the means of gaining acceptance and rest; Jesus offers eschatological rest, not to the student of Torah, but to the weary who come to him and adopt his teaching — and this teaching stands, as the next two pericopae show (12:1-8, 9-13), in some distinction to traditional understandings of Torah, and focuses on Jesus himself, the Lord of the Sabbath (rest). Thus Jesus replaces the centrality of Torah (cf. 5:17-20). Matthew's own context makes adequate sense, indeed better sense, without here reading in Jesus' identification with or fulfillment of Wisdom. True, Wisdom and Torah are tightly tied together in Sirach 51, and Matthew probably knew this passage. But the Evangelist is much closer to insisting on Jesus' identification with or fulfillment of Torah than of Wisdom.


(5) Although Wisdom is already personified in the OT (e.g., Job 28; Proverbs 1, 8) and certainly developed in Jewish tradition into a quasi-personal hypostasis expressing the mind of God,27 and although this background sometimes serves in the NT as a vehicle for christology, yethere Wisdom is best seen in its more common and traditional guise. The purpose of Matthew 11 is not to establish a Wisdom christology, but to set out the place of John the Baptist, and therefore a fortiori of Jesus, in the stream of redemptive history. The addition of Wisdom christology in v 19b would have added little to the argument.28

The proverb should be read in the light of the immediately preceding parable: God's Wisdom is vindicated (διδακτηρία) by her actions, which in the context refer to the respective lifestyles and ministries of both John and Jesus. Wisdom is much concerned with right livingunder God. Both John and Jesus have been roundly criticized for the way they live and for what they teach. But Wisdom has in fact been vindicated by her works; that is, both John with his asceticism and Jesus with his Weltoffenheit act in accord with God's Wisdom, and their respective lifestyles and emphases are acknowledged as hers (they are her works) and justify her claims. Wisdom is justified by her effects, and the effects are good in both cases. On this reading, Wisdom is not a personification of Jesus, and the thrust of Matthew's form of the logion is only a whisker away from that of Luke (as we shall see).

(6) Turning now to the parallel in Luke, once again another wonders if some of the interpretations of the proverb have depended rather too narrowly on certain redactional features at the expense of the entire text. The first of these features is the lengthy addition of Luke 7:29-30. As we have seen, many scholars draw a tight connection between v 29 and v 35, largely because both verses deploy the verb διδακτηρία. On this basis, “All the people, even the tax collectors” (v 29) becomes equivalent to “all her [i.e., Wisdom's] children” (v 35), set over against “this generation” (v 31) who are more narrowly identified with the Pharisees and scribes (v 30). Perhaps the strongest form of this argument has been put by du Plessis,29 who finds a basic chiastic parallelism in vv 29 and 35:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{v 29} & \quad \text{All the people . . . acknowledged that God's way was right} \\
\text{v 30} & \quad \text{But the Pharisees . . . rejected God's purpose for themselves} \\
\text{vv 31-34} & \quad \text{To what, then, can I compare the children of this generation} \\
\text{v 35} & \quad \text{But wisdom is proved right by all her children}
\end{align*}
\]

Du Plessis then notes the following formal parallels between v 29 and v 35:

Indeed, if one eliminates the common elements, du Plessis argues, not only must one argue that Wisdom’s children are “all the people” but that “God’s counsel” (v 30) = “Wisdom.”

Despite the formal plausibility of this approach, several factors weigh against it. The internal members of the chiasm are not parallel in tone, grammar, vocabulary, or thrust. The only point of comparison is the Pharisees (along with, presumably, the scribes) and “the people of this generation.” In any case, the sheer length of the third member makes the proposed chiasm suspect, unless there is powerful countervailing evidence. So what we have, then, is not a believable chiasm, but simply the parallels between v 29 and v 35 that have long been noted by scholars. Moreover, in the tight form of the parallelism that du Plessis proposes, there is a sleight of hand operating. Strictly speaking, on formal grounds we should conclude that God = Wisdom. The only reason why du Plessis can change this to the proposition that “God’s purpose” or “God’s counsel” = Wisdom is that he has drawn the bouλην τοῦ θεοῦ from v 30 back into v 29. Of course, if one “justifies” God’s purpose, presumably one also justifies God. The fact remains that the formal elements of the alleged parallelism are not as tight as first appears.

Granted that the passage moves on to include vv 31-34 before allowing v 35 to stand (with whatever degree of parallelism we might conclude it has with v 29), it seems best to discern a slightly different flow of thought from that which leaps so quickly from v 29 to v 35. It is true that “all the people, even the tax collectors,” justified God (v 29), while the Pharisees and scribes, representing the leaders and thus (under an essentially tribal covenant) the people as a whole, “the people of this generation,” rejected God’s counsel (v 30). This latter rejection is represented in the parable (vv 31-32) and then explained with reference to the rejection of both the Baptist and Jesus (vv 33-34). And (But?) Wisdom is justified by all her children — surely, in this sequence, not least by John and Jesus; perhaps, following v 29, a fortiori by John and Jesus.

(7) There are four minor exegetical details in Luke 7:35 that need weighing (namely, οἱ, πάντων, ἄτοι, and the aorist tense), but before turning to them, the parable itself and its interpretation (both similarly expressed in Luke and Matthew) must be considered. The overwhelming majority of interpreters hold that in both Gospels the children who play the flute and sing a dirge, inviting others to join them, represent Jesus and John respectively; the children who refuse to play represent “this generation” (Matthew) or “the people of this generation” (Luke). Most commentators who discuss the matter acknowledge that this alignment is (superficially at least) a trifle messy. The parable is introduced by asking what this generation is like; we are told, “They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling out to each other . . . .” But in the usual interpretation, They do not call out in dance and dirge, but sulkily refuse to cooperate. These difficulties have generated some negative comment. “The comparison is not exactly expressed,” writes Creed. “It is John and Jesus — not this generation — who are the counterparts to the children who invite their fellows to joy or to mourning — in each case without success.”30 Klostermann thinks the present text is corrupt;31 McNeile says of Matthew, “Strictly speaking ‘this generation’ was similar, not to the children who uttered their complaints but to those who refused to play; for the προσφωνοντας can hardly be the Pharisees, demanding this and that manner of life from the Baptist and Jesus: they made no such demand.”32

The usual way of avoiding this difficulty is by supposing that the οἱμετόρων / ἡμείς εἶχαν language reflects an Aramaic idiom meaning, “It is the case with X as with Y” — and “Y” may be the entire story.33 That is certainly how the introductions to many of the kingdom parables work. “The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field” (Matt 13:24); the kingdom of heaven is not like a man at all, but it is the case with the kingdom of heaven as with (the story of) the man who, etc. Even so, this explanation is perhaps less convincing in Matt 11:16-19 / Luke 7:31-34. It is a commonplace that “parable” covers an extraordinarily wide range of forms (including proverbs, maxims, similes, comparisons, stories embodying some truth, riddles, and more).34 By the same token, the way they are introduced may vary. Our text may be a more-or-less straightforward comparison, and if so it is essential to think clearly about what things (or people) are being compared. Moreover, unlike many of the kingdom parables where the nature of the comparison (an impersonal noun like “kingdom” coupled with a “man”) forces the interpreter to see the point of comparison lying between the kingdom and the thrust of the entire narrative, here there is no narrative (there is no plot line), and people are being compared with people.

In short, we are driven to weigh an alternative proposal, recently defended by O. Linton.35 In this interpretation, the people of this generation are represented by those who played the flute and sang a dirge; John the Baptist and Jesus are those who would not play their games. The children calling to the others are not demanding anything extraordinary or extravagant. They are simply demanding that John and Jesus join them for their feasts and festivals.

33. See J. Jeremias, The Parables of Jesus, 2d ed. (London: SCM, 1963) 100-101; M. Zerwick, Biblical Greek Illustrated by Examples (Rome: Biblical Institute, 1963) §65. This is the approach taken, e.g., by Gundry, Matthew, 212.
that is, that they fit in. Judith was praiseworthy because she fasted all the
days of her widowhood, save the eves of the sabbaths, and the sabbaths,
and the eves of the new moons and the new moons, and the feasts and joyful
days of the house of Israel” (Itd 8:6). In other words, she knew there was “a time
to weep and a time to laugh; a time to mourn and a time to dance” (Eccl 3:4).
Certainly there is evidence that Jesus and his disciples did not fast the way John
and the Pharisees and their disciples did (Mark 2:18-22; Matt 9:14-17; Luke
5:33-39); indeed, just before this evidence we are also told that Jesus was charged
with eating with tax collectors and sinners (Mark 2:16; Matt 9:11 [cf. Luke
5:30]). In short, Jesus did not behave as some people thought a pious Jew should.
As for John the Baptist, his obvious asceticism (remember his diet!) would not
have prepared him for joyous celebrations of feasts.

The feasting / fasting opposition is in any case probably symbolic of larger
questions of perceived appropriateness. John came and preached repentance,
and the severity of both his lifestyle and his message were judged “over the top.”
Jesus comes with much more Weltoffenheit, insisting fasting is unsuitable at
the wedding feast over which he presides. His conduct and his message demonstrate
that he cannot be domesticated.

And so the opposition sets in. John is invited to lighten up: “We played
the flute for you,” but he would not dance. Jesus is invited to the sobriety of
popular religion: “We sang a dirge,” but he would not mourn.36 The Jewish
authorities demand that both John and Jesus conform to the dictates of custom
that has all the force of religious mandate, but they will not oblige.

From the parable the text turns to the explanation of the criticism offered
by this generation. This generation is convinced it knows why John will not
lighten up: “He has a demon” (Matt 11:18; Luke 7:33). They also think they
know why Jesus will not toe the line: “Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend
of tax-collectors and sinners” (Matt 11:19; Luke 7:34). John and Jesus belong
together and can be dismissed together precisely because neither will conform
to religious expectations.

A number of details might support this interpretation.37 First, the historical
order, John the Baptist preceding Jesus, agrees with the order of the explana-
tion (Matt 11:18-19a; Luke 7:33-34), and we should perhaps expect it to occur
in the rhyme itself; on the traditional interpretation, it does not agree with
the rhyme. Of course, one might argue that the parable was a well-known couplet
that could not reasonably have been reversed, or that this is another example of
hysteron-proteron. Nevertheless, when the argument of the chapter turns on
who is first and who is second in chronological appearance, then all things being equal
that interpretation seems best which follows the same order in the rhyme: John
is attacked first, and then Jesus.

Second, when we compare the rhyme, where the entire content is nothing
other than what some children say (Luke: λέγετε; Matthew: λέγοντες), with the
application or explanation that follows, where the burden of the content again
lies in what the critics say (Luke: λέγετε; Matthew: λέγοντες), it appears that
"the tertium comparationis lies in the comments, in what the children say about
their comrades, and what people say about John and Jesus."38

Third, if the rhyme is a Greek rendering of an underlying Semitic couplet,
the parataxis must not mislead. The thought may well be (and is in any case
perfectly allowable even as the Greek stands), “When we played the flute for
you, you did not dance; when we sang a dirge, you did not cry.”

To be frank, I am not certain if this interpretation is correct. Certainly the
objections against it do not appear very substantial. For example, not a few
scholars have objected to this view on the ground that it makes John and Jesus
correspond to the passive participants in the parable, the active role being
reserved for the children who call out in the marketplaces and who represent
the people of this generation. But the fact that John and Jesus take the initiative
over against the religious establishment throughout the Gospels as a whole does
not mean they must take the initiative in every pericope. Again, Fitzmyer objects
to this interpretation on the ground that “it may be allegorizing the passage
more than is called for.”39 But that presupposes that there is some standard as
to how much “allegorizing” is allowed. Over against the rigid school of Jeremias,
recent parable research has shown that “allegorizing” of some elements in a
narrative parable provides no evidence for later development. Weder distin-
guishes parabolic (as opposed to allegorical) elements as those tied to the
narrative flow and therefore lacking independent existence both in the narrative
and its interpretation.40 In other words, where so-called “allegorizing” elements
are tied both to the parable and to its interpretation, contributing to the thrust
of the former and the power of the latter, they are better thought of as legitimate
parablic elements. By such standards no charge of undue allegorizing can be
brought against this passage. In any case such discussion applies primarily to
narrative parables; the present passage does not qualify. I can think of no reason
and know of no research that establishes this sort of comparison as too "allegorizing."41

36. Of course, we must not suppose the rhyme invites John and Jesus to reverse their roles.
That would be to confuse the parable and its application, to force the parable to run on all fours.
37. In part I follow Linton; here and there I diverge from him, nowhere more forcefully (as
we shall see) than in his treatment of Matt 11:19b / Luke 7:35.
40. H. Weder, Die Gleichnisse Jesu als Metaphern (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht,
1978) 69-75.
41. If it be objected that the word παραβολή is not used to refer to this passage, the
interpretation offered here is strengthened, for R. A. Edwards, A Theology of Q (Philadelphia:
Fortress, 1976) esp. 58-78, has drawn attention to the extraordinarily high concentration of “compar-
ison” utterances in Q material.
Even if this interpretation is not finally adopted, it makes the next step in my argument only marginally more difficult, and will not detract from my main points.

(8) On the reading I have advanced here, “this generation” has been venting its criticism of John and Jesus. But that is not the last word. The purpose of Matt 11:19b / Luke 7:35 is to cast the lifestyles of John and of Jesus in a different light. That brings us to the minor exegetical details to which I have already alluded:

(a) ξοι: The overwhelming majority of scholars detect adversative force in this conjunction, some comparing atque and drawing attention to parallels in the Fourth Gospel. At one level that approach is doubtless justified. Still, more needs to be said. It is an axiom of linguistics that no two words or expressions long occupy exactly the same semantic space. Differences in emphasis, overtone, associations, intensity, or the like are always to be found. We must therefore ask the paradigmatic question, Why is ξοι found in both Matthew and Luke, instead of ἀλλὰ or some other adversative? What does this choice signify, and how can it best be represented in English?

I have looked at every instance in the NT where the major grammars find alleged instances of adversative ξοι. Many of them are best translated by an English “but.” Nevertheless, I think I can detect a common element, a possible reasonwhy a word normally rendered “and” was chosen. The adversative force of what follows is usually ironic, or is a slightly distanced reflection, or is slightly aphoristic; alternatively, the adversative relationships between, say, two connected clauses, is established by the content of the clauses (as in Hebrew anti­thetic parallelism), such that a “but” would be a trifle heavy-handed whereas an “and” is more subtle and in such a context more suggestive and powerful.

So here. Perhaps in this case an appropriate English orthography to get across the same idea would be a new paragraph beginning with “And.” The new paragraph would signal not a new thought, but a dramatic conclusion. The movement of thought (on the assumption that the parable is to be interpreted as outlined above) would be as follows. The people of “this generation” criticize John and Jesus for their respective lifestyles and ministries, comparing them with unresponsive children. Their harsh judgments are recorded. Pause. New paragraph. “And Wisdom is justified in (all) her children / works.” Of course, the ξοι is logically adversative. Stylistically, however, the choice of ξοι means that the concluding proverb bears a subtle reevaluation of the same phenomena in John and Jesus that have been criticized by “this generation” — one that moves off in quite a different direction, and implicitly condemns the evaluation of “this generation.” (This approach to ξοι could also be adapted to more traditional interpretations of the parable and its explanation, though perhaps not with quite as much force.)

(b) πάντων: The text-critical question is difficult: the text of NA is not surely supported but becomes reasonably persuasive only because it is tangentially supported by the manuscript evidence that attests πάντων at the end of the verse. But how did it get there? If we suppose that it was displaced from its original location, represented by the NA text, by some stylist who thought it fit better at the end, then the support for inclusion is very strong. If instead we suppose that πάντων was a marginal gloss that a later copyist felt must be inserted somewhere, and chose the end of the clause, then the question becomes, How did the marginal gloss arise? If it arose because of someone’s theology (attempting a link with v 29? forcing the text to bear a more general application?), then support for inclusion is quite limited. But if the marginal gloss arose because an early copyist neglected to include it at its proper position (immediately after the preposition), and placed it in the margin so it would not be overlooked by the next copyist, then the evidence for inclusion returns to substantial strength. Several other possibilities come to mind.

If we assume that πάντων is original (whatever its location), we must ask what function it serves in the text as we have it before we can reasonably ask if it is redactional. The majority opinion among scholars today is that it rules out the view that Wisdom’s children are John and Jesus. Luke 7:35 thus gets tied to v 29, and Wisdom’s children are none other than δὸς ὡκόσιος and ξοι oii τελωνιοι, thus removing v 35 from any direct relevance to the immediately preceding verses (v 31-34).

But if the interpretation advocated in this essay is correct, we may not be forced to choose. Verse 35 is tied to both its context and to the earlier redactional statement (v 29-30). If v 35 is tied to the parable and its explanation, it provides, as we have seen, the counterpoint explanation of the lifestyles and ministries of John the Baptist and Jesus. If πάντων were not present, or if the text had read “both her children,” then it would have been most natural to link this concluding proverb exclusively to v 31-34. But with πάντων present the application of the proverb to John and Jesus is still just as effective as if it were not present, but the application cannot easily be limited to them. Thus the burden of the proverb and its location point unerringly to John and Jesus as Wisdom’s children; the inclusion of πάντων and the echoing link with v 29 suggests a further application to their disciples, and, implicitly, to the followers of Jesus among the readers of the book. It is always true that Wisdom is justified by her children, even if that truth is preeminently displayed in John and Jesus. As for those who have drawn attention to the fact that in the relevant literature Wisdom’s sons are those who listen to and obey her call, not those who preach it (Prov 8:32; Sir 4:11; 15:11) — and therefore conclude that in Luke 7:35 Wisdom’s children cannot be John and Jesus — on this interpret-


43. Cf. n. 4, supra.

44. Fitzmyer, Luke, 681, reaches similar conclusions on somewhat different grounds.

45. See n. 8, supra.
tion John and Jesus are not doing the “calling” or “preaching” in the market-places at all. Rather, it is their conduct that is being evaluated. Even on a more traditional interpretation of the parable and its explanation, it is not John and Jesus qua preachers who are being discussed, but John and Jesus qua Wisdom’s envos.

When we ask (still assuming that πάντων is part of the text) whether or not πάντων was part of Q (on the assumption of the existence of Q), we face the problem that if Q included πάντων we must explain why Matt 11:19b has dropped it, when on the face of it inclusion might have marginally strengthened Matthew’s argument (assuming πάντων would in that case have been modifying ἔργων). Someone might argue that Matthew has a tendency to abbreviate his sources (judging by what he does with Mark), and that in changing πάντων to ἔργων he dropped πάντων from his Q-source on these stylistic grounds. This sequence of judgments becomes unnecessary, of course, if we assume that Q (if it existed) did not include πάντων. In that case there is nothing to explain in Matthew; what must be explained is why Luke added it. Demonstrably Luke has a small penchant for πάντων. Coupled with his concern to make the double link of the proverb (i.e., both with John / Jesus and with v 29, which Luke has also added), this penchant justifies the tentative conclusion that πάντων was not in his source. But this tentative conclusion holds up whether his source was Q or Matthew. In other words, one could as readily infer from these judgments the priority of Matthew and Luke’s dependence on Matthew as the existence of Q.

(c) ὡς: Several have argued that this preposition must be taken in some Aramaic sense (either min, or min q‘dām): either “in view of,” “on account of” (which makes adequate sense of Matthew but not of Luke), or “in front of” and hence “over against” — that is, Wisdom is justified over against her children (= this generation), almost despite her children.46 Methodologically, however, it is a dubious procedure that makes an interpretation depend on a semitism (as opposed to a Semitic enhancement):47 one must assume that the translator / evangelist was incompetent. It is appropriate to appeal to a semitism if one cannot make sense of the passage any other way (which is not the case here): it is appropriate to appeal to a putative Aramaic underlay if what is at stake is no more than a Semitic enhancement (presupposed in the earlier discussion of

46. J. Jeremias, Parables, 164 n. 43, takes min q‘dām to mean “in view of,” citing J. Wellhausen, Das Evangelium Matthaei (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1904) 55. But the latter understands the Aramaic expression to mean “in front of / against.” In this he is followed by Linton, Children’s Games,” 177-78.

47. In current linguistic theory, a semitism in a Greek text is a word or expression or construction that does not make sense in Greek, but can be explained only by appealing to a putative Semitic underlay. A Semitic enhancement is a word or expression or construction that occurs in Greek (however rarely), that makes adequate sense in Greek, but that occurs much more frequently in the text than would have been the case if there had not been any possibility of Semitic underlay.

the ὡς word group). It is not appropriate to take ὡς in a sense utterly unknown to Greek readers, unless there really is no other reasonable choice.48 This factor surely eliminates the view that the “children” refer to this generation.49 Taking the preposition to mean “in view of” or “on account of” makes sense with Matthew’s “works” but not with Luke’s “children.” On the ground that the simplest explanation is best (all other things being equal), it seems wiser to take ὡς in its well-attested sense of “by,” occasionally used in Hellenistic Greek in a sense not easily distinguishable from ὡς (with the passive) to express agency and sometimes means.50

Wisdom is justified, vindicated, by her effects — whether the “works” of John and Jesus (Matthew) or her children and their lifestyles and ministries (primarily John and Jesus, but derivatively all those who hear Jesus’ words and acknowledge that God’s way as expressed in those words is right — so Luke).46

(d) Many scholars have argued that the aorist ἔργων is gnostic — that is, that it is timeless, not past-referring.51 That is doubtless correct, but in itself it cannot establish that Matt 11:19b / Luke 7:35 was originally an independent legion. Even if this proverb had been attached to the parable and its explanation from its inception, it would still be best to take it in a “gnomic” sense, since the ostensible setting of the utterance places John in the past but Jesus in the present. Besides, even when proverbs are applied to concrete historical settings they are usually cast in a timeless structure. In short, although it is entirely plausible that the proverb led an independent existence, we have no evidence for it except what we have here, where it is firmly attached to what precedes it. The alignment of the order of the pericopae in Matt 11:2-19 and Luke 7:18-35 (redactional insertions aside), including the final proverb, forcefully argues either for direct borrowing or for a common source.

(9) Finally, we must weigh the common judgment that τῶν ἔργων in Matt

49. Cf. the preceding two notes. Perhaps I should add that, whether one is thinking of Matt 11:19b or of Luke 7:35, the interpretation of W. J. Cotter, “Children Sitting in the Agora: Q (Luke) 7:31-35,” Forum 5 (1989) 63-82 — that “the seemingly opposite roads to [sic] wisdom which John and Jesus represent in the unit, are blessed as two viable and sure routes to [sic] their one Mother [= Wisdom]” — is contextually unattached and syntactically unjustified. Equally difficult to defend is the view of R. Leivestad, “An Interpretation of Matt 11:19,” JBL 71 (1952) 179-81, to the effect that the “works” performed are those of the Jews, and the σοφία is not divine wisdom but the wisdom of the Jews: the utterance is ironic, such that “wisdom is justified by her deeds” is roughly equivalent to “the tree is known by its fruit.” Leivestad acknowledges there is no parallel use of σοφία in the NT, but compares Job 12:2 (“No doubt but you are the people, and wisdom shall die with you”).
51. Some recent grammarians have argued that the aorist tense is not temporally determined in any mood, including the indicative. Whether the action is past-, present-, or future-referring is established on other grounds than the morphology of the verb. Cf. esp. S. E. Porter, Verbal Aspect in the Greek of the New Testament, with Reference to Tense and Mood (Bern: Peter Lang, 1989).
11:19b is secondary and was generated by the use of τὸ ἔργα in Matt 11:2, leaving τῶν τέσσεραν in Luke 7:35 to be the original by default. Since virtually no one holds that Matthew copied from Luke, and if direct borrowing from Matthew to Luke is ruled out by the conclusion that Matthew’s form is secondary, we are driven back to Q, and the assumption that Luke has preserved Q at this point.

If we may leave aside the proposal that an Aramaic original was variously pointed “servants” and “works” (if for no other reason than that τέσσεραν is an odd way to render “servants”), we must ask if a plausible case can be made for Luke adapting Matthew as his source — that is, for Luke changing τὸν ἔργον to τῶν τέσσεραν. One might argue that τῶν τέσσεραν was introduced to establish a connection of persons (as opposed to “works”) with vv 29-30. But there is no use of τέσσεραν in vv 29-30, and in any case we have already found substantial reasons for seeing the primary link lying between v 35 and vv 31-34, not between v 35 and vv 29-30. It has also been suggested that Luke was influenced by παντίδοτι in v 32. The hypothesis is hard to disprove, but the least that must be said against it is that (a) Matthew also had that word before him, or (b) if Luke had been set on making a connection between v 35 and v 32 it is strange that he did not choose the same word.

On balance, then, it is somewhat more likely, so far as this word is concerned, that Matthew is secondary, and to that extent there is an implicit support for Q.

Quite apart from any contribution to the exegesis of Matt 11:19b / Luke 7:35 that this essay makes, its bearing on the Synoptic problem can now be briefly stated.

Methodologically speaking, the emphasis in this discussion has been on the importance of the large-scale movement of the flow of thought in Matthew 11 and Luke 7 when trying to evaluate the contribution of minute scraps of data — and vice versa.

The meanings of the two passages are remarkably similar; Luke probably sees an extension of the application of the proverb beyond John and Jesus to those who hear Jesus’ words and perceive that God’s way, expressed in Jesus, is right — but this is a secondary application. Arguments for a fully-fledged Wisdom christology in Matthew — arguments which by implication would make Matthew secondary, and therefore support the Q-hypothesis — are exceedingly weak. Matthew appears more primitive in the omission of πάντως; Luke appears more primitive in his use of τέσσεραν. But as we have seen, the Q-hypothesis applied to this pair of passages allows for both claims of primitiveness; it is marginally more difficult for a theory of Matthean priority to do so. But the margin is slight.

52. This essay is offered to Professor Howard Marshall with enormous appreciation for the masterly way he combines meticulous attention to detail, large-scale vision, and transparent concern for the well-being of other believers. In multos annos!