

**Restoring the Reputation of Q**  
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Since October 28, 2017, the world, especially the Western part of it, has seen a steady evolution of public and private discussion centered on the term “Q.” That was the day a person, posted in a thread called “Calm Before the Storm” on the “/pol/” (i.e., politically incorrect) section of 4chan, an anonymous, Internet bulletin board. The unidentified poster, self-designated as “Q Clearance Patriot,” apparently intended to imply that he or she had “Q Clearance,” a high-level US Department of Energy security clearance required to access secret information on nuclear weapons and related matters. This seems to have provided the elements of Q and Anonymous for the term “QAnon” to describe the poster and the content of this and subsequent posts. The original post referred to Donald Trump’s description of his meeting with US military leaders as “the calm before the storm.” For Q and the QAnon followers, the “Storm” refers to an imminent event when thousands will be arrested, imprisoned, and executed for being pedophiles who eat children.

This entirely unfounded conspiracy has spread widely among right-wing organizations and like-minded individuals. Most QAnon adherents passionately supported Donald Trump as president and continue to do. When reporters asked him on August 19, 2020 about QAnon, Trump claimed, “well I don’t know much about the movement other than I understand they like me very much, which I appreciate.” Not only were some of the insurrectionists who stormed Congress on January 6, 2021 followers of the QAnon conspiracy, but some current members of Congress are also avowed adherents.

So, when a person mentions the term “Q” today, it will likely be assumed that he or she is referring to “Q” of the QAnon conspiracy and that such a reference carries all its related baggage. However, this is incredibly unfortunate. Besides simply being the seventeenth letter in the alphabet, “Q” is widely used in many areas of society and branches of learning and has been so, in some cases, for many centuries.

To get some idea of the range of uses of “Q,” I looked at “Q (disambiguation)” in Wikipedia. It lists a total of 129 uses (111 for Q, 10 for QQ, 5 for QQQ, and 3 for QQQQ). Besides the alphabet letter, the single term “Q” is used (1) as a name, pseudonym, or nickname for people; (2) for fictional entities; (3) in literature; (4) in music; (5) in broadcast media; (6) in other titled works and entities; (7) in business and government; (8) in computing and computer games; (9) in engineering; (10) in linguistics; (11) in mathematics; (12) in biology and chemistry; (13) in physics and astronomy; (14) in sports; (15) in transportation; and (16) for other things.

Only one of these uses refers to the conspiracy theory “QAnon”! Therefore, we must reclaim the overwhelmingly and historically-established noble use of Q and restore its dignity and reputation.

Practitioners and scholars associated with all the honorable societal and academic uses of Q should come to the defense of Q’s place in their world. As a student of the New Testament and early Christian literature, I will attempt to do so in mine.

I am looking at a book entitled, *The Sayings Gospel Q in Greek and English*. This has nothing to do with QAnon. In fact, this particular use of “Q” refers to a German word and stems from the nineteenth century. Let me explain.

For many centuries, readers of the New Testament, especially the Gospels, noticed that Matthew, Mark, and Luke were not only very different from John but also were very much alike in many respects. Because of their broad similarities they came to be known as the Synoptic Gospels, i.e., they viewed the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth similarly and shared the same general outline. Some of the shared material includes sections of identical wording.

These observations understandably spawned discussions about how these similarities and, of course, also the differences—sometimes even contradictory—among the Synoptic Gospels had occurred. Was this simply coincidental? Did the three writers all independently use a common source? Did they in some way use each other’s writings? If the latter, what was the pattern and order of such usage?

The earliest assumption was that Matthew had written first. Since a person named Matthew was among Jesus’ disciples—his closest and earliest followers, unlike Mark or Luke—it is understandable why, for early Christians, the Gospel of Matthew was both the most beloved and first listed.

By the fifth century, Christian leaders had come to account for the Synoptic Gospels through a combination of this veneration for Matthew and a general use theory. As expressed by Augustine of Hippo, Matthew wrote first, Mark used Matthew, and Luke used both. This hypothesis dominated scholarly thinking on the subject until the late eighteenth century, when some, while retaining the priority of Matthew, argued that Luke used Matthew and Mark used them both.

In the nineteenth century, especially in Germany, scholars began to propose the notion that Mark, not Matthew, wrote first and that Matthew and Luke independently used Mark. However, unlike the Augustinian hypothesis and its eighteenth-century variation, this did not account for the large amount of material shared by Matthew and Luke that is not found in Mark. Accordingly, these scholars proposed a hypothetical source, which, because most of this non-Markan material in Matthew and Luke consisted of saying of Jesus, they generally called the Sayings Source. One person proposed calling this source  $\Lambda$ , the Greek *lambda* for the word *logia* (λόγια). According to this hypothesis, Matthew and Luke independently used both Mark and the Sayings Source. By the end of the century, this Sayings Source had come to be designated *Quelle*, a German word for “source,” and thereafter simply “Q.” Building on this model in the early twentieth century, the hypothesis expanded to include the sources for the unique materials in Matthew (M) and Luke (L). This view proposed to account for the Synoptic Gospels as follows: Matthew used Mark, Q, and M; Luke used Mark, Q, and L.

Some scholars continue to support one or the other iteration of the Augustinian hypothesis based on the priority of Matthew. A few propose other solutions to the Synoptic Gospel issue. However, I am among the majority of current New Testament scholars who account for the similarities and differences among the Synoptic Gospels by holding that Matthew and Luke

independently used Mark and Q. Like most of them, I view Q as a sayings document, originally written in Greek, and consider it among the earliest sources of material concerning Jesus of Nazareth and the teachings and practices of his first followers.

So, you can see why I don't want the current furor over the Q of QAnon to become the dominant and lasting representation of Q. The term Q has had a noble and useful place in numerous aspects of society and in many branches of learning for centuries and continues to do so. Let us not allow the irrational, baseless and hopefully transient conspiracy theories associated with QAnon to overwhelm the many legitimate uses of this term.