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THE Q HYPOTHESIS AND THE FARRER THEORY: A COMPARATIVE SYNOPTIC ANALYSIS

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Introduction: The Synoptic Problem remains a central question in New Testament scholarship, particularly regarding the literary relationship between Matthew, Mark, and Luke. The hypothetical Q source, proposed to explain material shared by Matthew and Luke but absent from Mark, continues to be debated in relation to alternative explanations, especially the Farrer hypothesis.

Aim: This study aims to evaluate the explanatory strength of the Two-Source and Farrer hypotheses through a comparative examination of selected Greek synoptic passages, identifying which model more convincingly accounts for their textual agreements, differences, and editorial characteristics.

Materials and Methods: The research employs qualitative textual comparison, literary criticism, and redaction criticism. Five selected synoptic comparisons are examined, including John the Baptist's preaching, the Lord's Prayer, the parables of the talents and minas, a minor agreement between Matthew and Luke against Mark, and Mark–Q overlap. The analysis considers verbal correspondence, narrative context, textual variation, and possible editorial tendencies, alongside relevant classical and recent scholarship.

Results: The comparisons reveal varying degrees of explanatory strength. The Two-Source hypothesis offers a plausible explanation for substantial agreement within the double tradition, particularly John the Baptist's preaching. However, the Farrer hypothesis provides a more economical account of certain editorial differences, minor agreements, and Mark–Q overlap by allowing Luke direct access to Matthew. The Lord's Prayer remains compatible with both models. Overall, the selected evidence indicates a limited comparative advantage for Farrer without conclusively disproving Q.

Conclusion: The findings demonstrate that shared synoptic material does not independently establish the existence of Q. Although both hypotheses remain viable, the Farrer model explains several examined textual phenomena with fewer additional source assumptions. The study contributes a focused, evidence-based comparison while emphasizing the methodological limits of reconstructing an unattested document.

Keywords: synoptic problem; Q Hypothesis; Farrer Hypothesis; Two-Source Hypothesis; synoptic gospels; redaction criticism

INTRODUCTION

The literary relationship between the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke constitutes one of the most extensively debated questions in New Testament scholarship. Traditionally designated as the Synoptic Gospels, these three writings exhibit substantial similarities in

their narrative content, the sequence of events, and the wording of numerous passages, while simultaneously preserving distinctive theological emphases and literary characteristics. Such correspondences have prompted scholars to investigate whether the evangelists drew upon common written sources, shared oral traditions, or directly utilized one another's compositions. The central difficulty, commonly referred to as the Synoptic Problem, therefore concerns not merely the identification of similarities and differences among the three Gospels, but the reconstruction of the literary relationships and compositional processes that may account for them (Goodacre M. S., 2001).

The textual relationships among the Synoptic Gospels are commonly examined through several categories of shared and distinctive material. The *triple tradition* comprises passages found in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, including narratives concerning Jesus' baptism, public ministry, miracles, and Passion. The *double tradition*, by contrast, consists of material shared by Matthew and Luke but absent from Mark, particularly sayings and teachings such as the Beatitudes (Matt. 5:3–12; Luke 6:20–23) and the Lord's Prayer (Matt. 6:9–13; Luke 11:2–4). In addition, the terms *Special Matthew* (M) and *Special Luke* (L) designate material distinctive to each respective Gospel. These classifications provide a descriptive framework for examining the distribution of common and distinctive traditions without necessarily establishing their literary origins (Goodacre M. S., 2001). Selected examples of the triple tradition are presented in Table 1.

Although agreements in wording, narrative sequence, and the arrangement of individual traditions may suggest literary dependence, their interpretation requires consideration of the broader literary and redactional characteristics of each Gospel. This distinction becomes particularly significant when examining the material shared by Matthew and Luke but absent from Mark. Within the framework of the Two-Source Hypothesis, these correspondences are generally explained through the independent use of a hypothetical common source, conventionally designated Q, alongside the Gospel of Mark. Alternatively, the Farrer Hypothesis (Farrer, 1955, pp. 55–88) proposes that Luke used both Mark and Matthew, thereby accounting for the double tradition without requiring an additional written source.

Consequently, the double tradition constitutes a textual phenomenon requiring critical explanation rather than independent proof of the existence of Q (Goodacre M. S., 2001) (Watson, 2009).

The priority of Mark represents a central premise in both the Two-Source and Farrer hypotheses. According to this position, Mark preceded Matthew and Luke and served as a literary source for both evangelists. Arguments supporting Markan priority include patterns of narrative sequence, the distribution of shared and distinctive material, and the redactional difficulties involved in explaining Mark as a later composition dependent upon Matthew and Luke. Goodacre, for example, examines whether the omissions and additions attributed to Mark under competing models produce a coherent account of the evangelist's literary activity (Goodacre M. S., 2001). Nevertheless, Markan priority remains a scholarly hypothesis rather than an uncontested historical fact. Alternative approaches, particularly the Two-Gospel Hypothesis associated with the Griesbach tradition (Griesbach, 1789–1790), propose a different sequence of literary dependence. The present study adopts Markan priority as a working premise for comparing the Two-Source and Farrer hypotheses, without treating this premise as sufficient evidence for Q.

The historical development of the Q hypothesis reflects successive attempts to explain the material shared by Matthew and Luke. An important stage in this discussion emerged in 1832, when Friedrich Schleiermacher (Schleiermacher, 1832, pp. 735–768) interpreted the testimony of Papias concerning Matthew's compilation of the *logia* as potentially referring to a collection of Jesus' sayings. However, the testimony preserved by Eusebius (*Historia ecclesiastica*, 3.39.16) cannot be regarded as direct evidence for the existence of

the reconstructed Q source. In 1838, Christian Hermann Weisse (Weisse, 1838) developed a model combining Markan priority with a second source of sayings, while Heinrich Julius Holtzmann's (Holtzmann, 1863) work of 1863 contributed significantly to the subsequent development of this explanation. The hypothesis received a particularly influential formulation in B. H. Streeter's *The Four Gospels* (1924) (Streeter, 1924), which distinguished Mark and Q from material associated specifically with Matthew and Luke. These developments established the historical foundations of the Two-Source Hypothesis while leaving open questions concerning the existence, literary character, and reconstruction of Q.

The hypothesis nevertheless remains contested in contemporary scholarship. Supporters of Q have sought to reconstruct the common source and explain the distinctive arrangement of shared traditions in Matthew and Luke, whereas critics have questioned whether the postulation of a lost document is necessary to account for the available evidence. The Farrer approach, initially articulated by Austin Farrer and subsequently developed by other scholars, offers an alternative explanation based on Luke's direct use of Matthew. Within this debate, particular importance attaches to the so-called minor agreements of Matthew and Luke against Mark, the possible overlap between Markan and Q material, and the different arrangements of shared sayings. Watson (2009, p. 399) argues that the Q hypothesis must be evaluated through a systematic comparison of the redactional procedures implied by competing models, rather than through the assumption that Luke's dependence on Matthew is inherently improbable. This methodological perspective provides an important foundation for the present investigation.

The aim of the present study is to assess the explanatory capacities of the Two-Source and Farrer hypotheses through a comparative analysis of selected Synoptic parallels. The investigation focuses primarily on Matthew 3:7–10 and Luke 3:7–9, whose exceptionally close verbal correspondence is discussed by Watson (2009, p. 400), and on Matthew 6:9–13 and Luke 11:2–4, which Watson examines in connection with the different literary arrangements of shared material (2009, pp. 404–406). A further comparative case concerns the parables of the talents and the minas (Matt. 25:14–30; Luke 19:11–27), discussed by Goodacre (2001, Chapter 6), whose literary relationship requires separate consideration rather than an automatic classification as material derived from Q. The analysis will examine verbal correspondences, narrative contexts, and possible redactional procedures, evaluating the extent to which each hypothesis offers a coherent explanation of the available textual evidence. Following Watson's methodological proposal (2009, p. 399), the study seeks to compare the explanatory consequences of the competing models without presupposing either the existence or the nonexistence of Q.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present study employs a qualitative, comparative methodology grounded in textual criticism, source criticism, and redaction criticism to investigate the literary relationships among the Synoptic Gospels, with particular attention to the material shared by Matthew and Luke but absent from Mark. Building upon the historical and theoretical framework outlined in the Introduction, the investigation seeks to assess the explanatory adequacy of the Q hypothesis through a direct examination of selected Gospel parallels. Rather than treating the existence of the double tradition as sufficient evidence for a lost written source, the study considers how the textual agreements and differences between the evangelists may be explained through alternative models of literary dependence. Its primary objective is therefore not to reconstruct Q as an independently established historical document, but to evaluate the redactional procedures that its existence would imply.

The methodological framework proceeds from the working assumption of Markan

priority, according to which the Gospel of Mark preceded and was used by Matthew and Luke. This assumption provides a common point of comparison for two competing explanations of the double tradition. The Two-Source Hypothesis maintains that Matthew and Luke independently employed Mark and a second written source, conventionally designated Q, whereas the Farrer Hypothesis explains the same material through Luke's direct literary dependence on Matthew alongside Mark. Although alternative solutions to the Synoptic Problem, including the Two-Gospel Hypothesis, remain relevant to the wider scholarly debate, the present investigation concentrates on the Two-Source and Farrer models because both accept Markan priority while differing fundamentally in their explanation of the Matthean–Lukan material. This comparative approach follows Watson's (2009, pp. 397–399) methodological argument that the Q hypothesis must be evaluated through a systematic reconstruction of the redactional procedures required by competing explanations, rather than through an initial assumption that Luke's dependence on Matthew is improbable.

The primary textual basis of the investigation is the Greek text of the Gospels of

Matthew, Mark, and Luke as presented in the twenty-seventh revised edition of the *Novum Testamentum Graece*. This edition provides a consistent critical text for identifying lexical, grammatical, and syntactical correspondences among the Synoptic passages, while its critical apparatus allows relevant textual variants to be considered. The analysis distinguishes between differences arising from the evangelists' literary composition and differences potentially resulting from the subsequent manuscript transmission of the Gospel texts. This distinction is necessary because a variant introduced during textual transmission should not automatically be interpreted as evidence of an evangelist's redactional activity.

For this reason, the textual comparison is supplemented by Bruce M. Metzger's *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (1971), which provides explanations of selected variant readings and the textual-critical considerations underlying editorial decisions. The commentary is employed specifically to assess whether significant differences or agreements in the selected passages may be affected by textual variation. Particular attention is given to the transmission of the Lord's Prayer, for which Metzger discusses readings in Matthew 6:9 and 6:13 (pp. 15–16). Since Metzger's commentary accompanies the third edition of the United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament rather than NA27, its observations are used as supplementary textual-critical evidence and are checked against the apparatus of the Greek edition adopted for the present study. The commentary is not employed as direct evidence for the existence of Q or for the direction of literary dependence between Matthew and Luke.

The selection of Synoptic passages follows three principal criteria: their relevance to the double tradition, the diversity of their verbal and structural correspondences, and their capacity to illuminate different redactional explanations. The first principal comparison concerns the preaching of John the Baptist in Matthew 3:7–10 and Luke 3:7–9. This passage provides an opportunity to examine extensive verbal agreement within material that appears in distinct narrative contexts. The second comparison examines the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6:9–13 and Luke 11:2–4, where shared theological content is accompanied by differences in formulation, length, and literary placement. The third comparison concerns the parable of the talents in Matthew 25:14–30 and the parable of the minas in Luke 19:11–27. Unlike the preceding examples, this pair presents substantial differences in narrative development despite its recognizable thematic and structural correspondences. Its inclusion is treated as a comparative case of disputed source classification rather than as an undisputed instance of the double tradition. The relevance of this comparison to the question of Luke's possible use of Matthew has been discussed by Goodacre (1998, pp. 54–58).

The three principal comparisons are supplemented by the examination of two addi-

tional phenomena relevant to the Synoptic Problem. First, a selected minor agreement between Matthew and Luke against Mark is considered to assess the difficulties such agreements may present for the assumption of their complete literary independence. Second, a possible instance of Mark–Q overlap is examined to determine how material exhibiting connections with both Markan and non-Markan traditions may be interpreted under the competing models. These supplementary comparisons are not treated as independent demonstrations of either hypothesis. Instead, they serve to test whether the explanatory procedures proposed for the double tradition remain coherent when applied to related Synoptic phenomena.

Each selected passage is examined through a parallel arrangement of the relevant Greek texts. The analysis proceeds by identifying corresponding lexical items, repeated expressions, grammatical constructions, variations in word order, omissions, additions, and differences in the arrangement of individual units. The comparison distinguishes between exact verbal agreements and broader semantic or thematic similarities, since passages may communicate comparable content without reproducing identical wording. Differences in literary context are also examined, particularly where Matthew and Luke integrate corresponding material into different narrative or discursive settings. The degree of verbal agreement is assessed descriptively through the extent and continuity of shared Greek wording, rather than through an unsupported numerical classification. Where quantitative observations are introduced, the counting criteria and the treatment of inflected forms are specified so that the comparison remains reproducible.

Following the initial textual comparison, the study applies a redaction-critical analysis to the selected passages. Under the Two-Source Hypothesis, the investigation considers what editorial procedures Matthew and Luke would have undertaken independently when incorporating material from Mark and the hypothetical Q source. Particular attention is given to the possibility of abbreviation, expansion, reformulation, and relocation of inherited material. Under the Farrer Hypothesis, the same textual phenomena are examined in relation to the possibility that Luke selected, modified, and rearranged material already present in Matthew. In both cases, the proposed redactional procedures are evaluated in relation to the literary characteristics and compositional tendencies observable within the canonical Gospels.

An additional analytical criterion concerns the phenomenon of editorial fatigue, discussed by Goodacre (1998, pp. 45–58). This phenomenon describes cases in which an evangelist appears to introduce a modification to an earlier narrative but subsequently retains wording or details that are more readily explained by the presumed source. Within the present study, editorial fatigue is considered as a possible indicator of literary dependence rather than as an automatically decisive criterion. Its application to the double tradition requires caution, since an apparent inconsistency in Luke may be explained differently depending on whether Matthew or a hypothetical common source is assumed to have preceded him. Consequently, the investigation considers whether the proposed instances of editorial fatigue provide genuinely distinctive support for one model or remain compatible with both.

The evaluation of the competing hypotheses is based on their relative explanatory coherence rather than on the mere identification of textual similarities. For each selected passage, the analysis considers whether the proposed model accounts for the observed verbal agreements, differences in wording, literary placement, and redactional developments without relying on unsupported assumptions about the evangelists' intentions. The comparison also examines whether the editorial procedures attributed to Matthew and Luke are consistent across the selected passages. This procedure is intended to avoid treating individual examples in isolation or employing different standards of plausibility for the two hypotheses. Following Watson (2009), the explanatory value of Q is therefore

assessed in relation to the plausibility of the redactional reconstruction it requires when compared with the alternative explanation of Luke's direct use of Matthew.

The investigation also recognizes the methodological limitations inherent in the study of hypothetical Gospel sources. No independently preserved manuscript of Q is available, and any reconstruction of its wording or literary arrangement depends upon interpretations of the surviving Matthean and Lukan texts. Accordingly, reconstructed Q material is distinguished from the primary textual evidence and is not treated as an independently verified witness. Furthermore, verbal agreement alone cannot establish the precise direction of literary dependence, while differences between parallel passages may reflect a combination of literary revision, textual transmission, and earlier traditional developments. Although oral tradition remains relevant to the broader historical formation of the Gospels, the present study does not attempt to reconstruct its independent stages or to test an oral-transmission model systematically. Its conclusions are consequently restricted to the relative explanatory strengths and limitations of the literary hypotheses examined.

Through this combination of Greek textual comparison, textual-critical control, and redaction-critical evaluation, the study seeks to move beyond a descriptive presentation of the Q hypothesis toward a more focused assessment of the evidence on which competing explanations of the double tradition depend. The results of the individual comparisons are presented in the following section, while their broader implications for the historical plausibility and methodological status of Q are considered in the Discussion.

RESULTS

Overview of the comparisons

The five selected comparisons display different configurations of verbal correspondence and literary arrangement. The warning attributed to John the Baptist contains sustained agreement between Matthew and Luke; the Lord's Prayer retains a shared sequence of petitions despite differences in length and narrative setting; and the parables of the talents and the minas combine recognizable narrative correspondences with extensive reworking. Two supplementary examples—a Matthean–Lukan agreement against Mark and a passage commonly discussed as Mark–Q overlap—test the explanatory reach of the competing models beyond the double tradition. The selected Greek expressions and analytical observations are presented in Tables 2–6. The tables document diagnostic comparison units rather than a word-by-word transcription of every verse; consequently, no numerical percentage of verbal agreement is claimed.

John the Baptist's warning (Matt. 3:7–10 // Luke 3:7–9)

Matthew and Luke share the striking address γεννήματα ἐχιδνῶν and the question τίς ὑπέδειξεν ὑμῖν φυγεῖν ἀπὸ τῆς μελλούσης ὀργῆς; (Matt. 3:7 // Luke 3:7). The subsequent sequence likewise moves from the demand for fruit appropriate to repentance to the warning against appealing to Abrahamic descent and finally to the image of the axe at the root of the trees (Matt. 3:8–10 // Luke 3:8–9). The correspondence is therefore not limited to a common topic: distinctive formulations recur in a closely matching order (Table 2). Watson (2009, pp. 400–401) discusses this material in connection with the difficulty of assigning the Baptist tradition to discrete literary sources.

The principal observable divergence concerns the addressees. Matthew introduces Pharisees and Sadducees approaching John's baptism (Matt. 3:7); Luke addresses the crowds coming to be baptized (Luke 3:7). A smaller but clear grammatical difference occurs in the injunction to produce fruit: Matthew reads καρπὸν ἄξιον, whereas Luke has καρποὺς ἀξίους (Matt. 3:8 // Luke 3:8). The evidence thus combines sustained verbal continuity with

alterations in the narrative frame and morphology. On the Two-Source model, both evangelists could have preserved a common written formulation while adapting its audience; on the Farrer model, Luke could have retained Matthew's wording while generalizing the addressees. The observed features are compatible with both reconstructions; the question of their comparative plausibility belongs to the Discussion.

On balance, the Baptist warning offers a modest advantage to the Two-Source hypothesis. Its unusually sustained agreement in both distinctive wording and sequence is readily explained if Matthew and Luke independently retained a written formulation. Farrer can also explain the data, but must posit Luke's close reproduction of Matthew alongside a deliberate change of audience and minor grammatical adjustments. Because these operations are not intrinsically implausible, the advantage for Q is limited rather than decisive.

The Lord's Prayer (Matt. 6:9–13 // Luke 11:2–4)

Matthew embeds the prayer in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 6:5–15), whereas Luke places it after a disciple asks Jesus to teach the disciples to pray (Luke 11:1–4). The shared petitions follow a broadly corresponding order: sanctification of the divine name, the coming kingdom, provision of bread, forgiveness, and deliverance from temptation. Yet the shorter Lukan form does not reproduce all of Matthew's petitions or their surrounding formulations (Table 3). The contrast is therefore one of stable petition-sequence alongside substantial variation in expression and location. Watson (2009, pp. 404–407) treats the redistribution of Matthean discourse material as a methodological test for explanations of Luke's compositional activity.

Textual transmission complicates any attempt to infer literary dependence directly from the two printed forms. In Matthew 6:13, Metzger (1971, p. 16) explains the secondary status assigned by the UBS committee to the doxological expansion transmitted in several forms. He also discusses the textual evidence for Matthew 6:9 (Metzger, 1971, p. 15). Accordingly, expansions familiar from later liturgical usage cannot be counted without qualification as original Matthean material absent from Luke. This control narrows the relevant comparison to the readings adopted in the critical Greek text, while leaving the literary question open: the Two-Source model attributes the differences to separate handling of a shared tradition; the Farrer model attributes them to Luke's selection and relocation of Matthean material.

In this case, neither hypothesis clearly outperforms the other. The Two-Source model explains the shared petition sequence without requiring Luke to dismantle Matthew's Sermon on the Mount, whereas Farrer can account for the shorter prayer through purposeful abbreviation and relocation into a scene prompted by a disciple's request. Since the table does not independently establish which form is earlier, the contrast cannot be used as positive proof of Q or of Luke's direct use of Matthew. The result is best classified as explanatory parity.

The talents and the minas (Matt. 25:14–30 // Luke 19:11–27)

Both accounts contain an absent master or nobleman, entrusted money, a subsequent reckoning, successful servants, and a servant who fails to employ the entrusted sum. The differences are nonetheless extensive. Matthew begins with three servants receiving unequal sums (five, two, and one talent), whereas Luke introduces ten servants each receiving one mina (Matt. 25:15; Luke 19:13). Luke adds the nobleman's journey to obtain royal authority and the hostility of his citizens (Luke 19:12, 14, 27) and rewards the first two reporting servants with authority over cities (Luke 19:17, 19). These are changes to the narrative design rather than isolated lexical substitutions (Table 4).

The latter part of Luke's account contains a noteworthy tension. Although ten servants were introduced, the reporting scene singles out the first, the second, and then ὁ ἕτερος ('the other'; Luke 19:16, 18, 20). Both accounts subsequently command that the unused sum be transferred to the servant associated with ten units (Matt. 25:28 // Luke 19:24). Goodacre (1998, pp. 55–57) argues that the movement from Luke's expanded opening toward a pattern resembling Matthew's three-servant account may indicate editorial fatigue. This is a published interpretation, not a finding independently established by the present comparison. As Goodacre himself notes (1998, p. 57), the phenomenon does not by itself establish whether Luke was modifying Matthew or a reconstructed Q narrative. The present observation is therefore limited to the contrast between Luke's initial narrative frame and the later reporting sequence.

Within the limits of the comparison, Farrer has a conditional advantage: Luke's apparent return to a three-servant reporting pattern is easier to explain if he has reworked Matthew's existing three-servant story. A Q-based account can explain the resemblance only by specifying a plausible earlier narrative form and subsequent editorial changes, neither of which is directly observable. Yet this advantage remains conditional because the two parables may also represent differently developed versions of a circulating narrative, and the table alone cannot demonstrate direct literary dependence.

A minor agreement in the mockery narrative (Matt. 26:68 // Mark 14:65 // Luke 22:64)

In the mockery scene, Matthew and Luke include a question asking Jesus to identify the person who struck him, whereas Mark's corresponding narration contains the command to prophesy without the same question in the standard critical text (Table 5). This is a candidate minor agreement because it concerns Matthean–Lukan correspondence within material shared with Mark, not the non-Markan double tradition. The comparison creates an explanatory task for the Two-Source hypothesis, which ordinarily treats Matthew and Luke as independent users of Mark, while remaining compatible with the Farrer proposal that Luke knew Matthew. It is not decisive in isolation: a final assessment requires control of the manuscript evidence and of possible harmonization in the transmission of these verses.

Subject to that textual-critical qualification, the Farrer hypothesis provides the more economical explanation of this particular agreement. If Luke knew Matthew, the shared question requires no additional source or independent coincidence. The standard Two-Source account must instead explain why two otherwise independent users of Mark arrived at the same non-Markan addition. This is a local advantage for Farrer, not a general refutation of Q, because the evidential weight of a single agreement depends on its textual stability and on the cumulative pattern of comparable cases

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A possible Mark–Q overlap (Matt. 3:11–12 // Mark 1:7–8 // Luke 3:16–17)

The three accounts preserve John's announcement of a stronger figure who comes after him and a contrast involving baptism. Matthew and Luke additionally contain the image of the winnowing fork, threshing floor, wheat, and chaff, absent from Mark's shorter form (Table 6). The material thus combines a triple-tradition nucleus with expanded Matthean–Lukan correspondence. Under the Two-Source hypothesis, the passage may be assigned to overlapping Markan and Q traditions; under the Farrer hypothesis, Matthew may have expanded Mark and Luke subsequently used both. Watson (2009, pp. 400–401) treats the Baptist material as a test of the source divisions presupposed by Q reconstruction. The observation does not establish two independent sources; it identifies the textual configuration that any proposed model must explain.

Here too, Farrer offers a comparatively economical account of the observed configuration: Matthew expands the Markan announcement, and Luke reproduces elements of that expansion. The Two-Source hypothesis remains possible, but its explanation requires overlapping traditions in Mark and Q whose precise relationship cannot be checked against an independently surviving Q text. Thus the overlap gives Farrer a modest explanatory advantage in this sample, without excluding the possibility that closely related Baptist traditions circulated in more than one form.

Synthesis of observed patterns

The comparisons identify three different kinds of evidence: prolonged verbal agreement accompanied by limited redactional changes (the Baptist warning), common petition order with substantial differences of length and setting (the Lord's Prayer), and broad narrative correspondence combined with structural divergence (talents/minas). The minor agreement and possible overlap add problems not resolved merely by labelling material as double or triple tradition. Taken together, the observations establish that each model requires specific editorial operations, rather than merely the existence of a shared source or a direct line of dependence. The relative economy and coherence of those operations are evaluated in the Discussion. No inference about the existence, exact wording, genre, or date of Q follows directly from these observations.

The comparative assessment yields a differentiated result rather than a uniform verdict. The Baptist warning marginally favours a shared written source; the Lord's Prayer does not discriminate securely between the models; and the talents/minas comparison, the minor agreement, and the possible Mark–Q overlap provide conditional or modest advantages for Farrer. On this five-case sample, Farrer therefore explains a greater number of the identified difficulties with fewer additional source assumptions. This is the study's limited original finding: it concerns the relative explanatory economy of the selected cases, not a demonstration that Q did not exist. The sample is purposive rather than statistically representative, and its findings should not be generalized to the entire double tradition without further testing.

DISCUSSION

The comparative analysis of the selected Synoptic passages demonstrates that the literary relationship between Matthew and Luke cannot be adequately explained through verbal agreement alone. Although the double tradition provides the principal basis for reconstructing the hypothetical Q source, its evidential significance depends upon the redactional procedures attributed to the evangelists. The results presented above therefore require evaluation within the broader methodological debate concerning the Two-Source and Farrer hypotheses. Recent scholarship confirms that this debate remains open, particularly regarding the origin of the double tradition, the direction of literary dependence, and the limits of source reconstruction (Grünstäudl, 2022, pp. 13–14) (Davis, 2024, pp. 36–37).

The preaching of John the Baptist (Matt. 3:7–10 // Luke 3:7–9) provides a particularly significant example because of its extensive verbal agreement. Such correspondence is compatible with the independent use of a common written source, as proposed by the Two-Source Hypothesis. However, it is equally necessary to consider whether Luke could have reproduced and adapted material already present in Matthew. The differences in the identification of John's audience and in selected grammatical formulations demonstrate that the evangelists did not transmit the passage in entirely identical forms. These differences must be explained under both hypotheses rather than attributed automatically to the editorial activity of one evangelist. Watson (2009, pp. 399–401) emphasizes the impor-

tance of comparing the redactional procedures required by competing models instead of assuming the improbability of Luke's dependence on Matthew.

A further complication emerges from the phenomenon of editorial fatigue. Goodacre (1998, pp. 45–58) argues that inconsistencies arising when an evangelist modifies an earlier account may provide evidence for the direction of literary dependence. His analysis of the talents and minas (Matt. 25:14–30 // Luke 19:11–27) suggests that Luke's introduction of ten servants, followed by a narrative concentrating on three, may reflect an incomplete adaptation of Matthew's account. Nevertheless, Davis (2024, p. 39) draws attention to Hägerland's counterexample from the preaching of John the Baptist (Matt. 3:7–12 // Luke 3:7–17). In Matthew, John addresses Pharisees and Sadducees, whereas the subsequent reference to baptism may appear more naturally suited to the crowds addressed in Luke. This observation complicates the use of editorial fatigue as a straightforward indicator of Lukan dependence upon Matthew. The phenomenon remains relevant, but its evidential value depends upon the comparative plausibility of the proposed redactional explanations.

The Lord's Prayer (Matt. 6:9–13 // Luke 11:2–4) illustrates a different methodological difficulty. The corresponding petitions occur in distinct literary settings and exhibit differences in length and wording. Under the Two-Source Hypothesis, these variations may reflect independent adaptations of a common prayer tradition. Under the Farrer Hypothesis, they may result from Luke's abbreviation and relocation of material encountered in Matthew. The latter explanation cannot be rejected merely because Luke's arrangement differs from Matthew's. Watson (2009, pp. 404–407) challenges arguments based upon assumptions concerning what Luke would have been likely to do, insisting that proposed redactional procedures must be examined within the evangelist's broader compositional activity.

Recent scholarship also offers a qualification to the assumption that an evangelist must reproduce a known source in its available form. Davis (2024, pp. 41–42), reviewing Goodacre's response to the argument from alternating primitivity, notes the possibility that an author might prefer a different form of a tradition even when familiar with another version. This possibility is particularly relevant to the shorter Lukan form of the Lord's Prayer. However, the appeal to alternative traditions must not become an unrestricted explanation for every textual difference. Its explanatory value depends upon identifiable literary or historical considerations rather than the mere possibility that another version existed.

The comparison of the Lord's Prayer also highlights the necessity of textual-critical control. The manuscript transmission of the prayer includes variations and expansions that may affect the apparent relationship between the Matthean and Lukan texts. Metzger (1971, pp. 15–16) discusses relevant readings in Matthew 6:9 and 6:13. Consequently, differences resulting from later textual transmission must be distinguished from those attributable to the evangelists' original literary activity. Without this distinction, harmonizing variants could be mistaken for evidence of direct dependence or common-source transmission.

The minor agreement in the mockery of Jesus (Matt. 26:67–68 // Mark 14:65 // Luke 22:64) raises a further difficulty for the standard Two-Source model. Matthew and Luke preserve a corresponding question concerning the identity of the person who struck Jesus, whereas Mark does not contain the same formulation. Davis (2024, pp. 40–41) identifies this example in his discussion of Goodacre's criticism of the Two-Source Hypothesis. The agreement is relevant because it occurs within the triple tradition, where Matthew and Luke are generally understood to have used Mark independently. Under the Farrer Hypothesis, Luke's knowledge of Matthew provides a comparatively direct explanation. Under the Two-Source Hypothesis, alternative explanations involving textual transmission or additional shared tradition must be considered. Nevertheless, a single minor agreement cannot establish the direction of dependence without consideration of the broader textual evidence.

A related problem concerns possible Mark–Q overlaps, particularly the preaching of John the Baptist (Matt. 3:11–12 // Mark 1:7–8 // Luke 3:16–17). The combination of material shared by all three evangelists with additional correspondences between Matthew and Luke complicates a strict division between Markan and non-Markan traditions. Davis (2024, p. 40) observes that Goodacre challenges the tendency to classify such material as Mark–Q overlap without independently testing the assumptions underlying that classification. From the perspective of the Farrer Hypothesis, these agreements may instead reflect Luke's knowledge of Matthew's modifications to Mark. Conversely, the Two-Source Hypothesis may explain them through related traditions preserved in Mark and Q. The competing interpretations demonstrate that the classification of overlapping material is itself dependent upon the source-critical model employed.

The question of literary arrangement is also connected with the phenomenon of doublets, or the repetition of corresponding sayings or narrative elements within a single Gospel. Historically, doublets have frequently been presented as evidence for the existence of Q, since their presence may be explained by the use of two written sources containing related material. Grünstäudl (2022, pp. 15–16) demonstrates, however, that the evidential value of doublets has been assessed differently even among supporters of the Two-Source Hypothesis. Some scholars continue to regard them as important support for Q, while others consider their independent probative force limited.

Grünstäudl's analysis is particularly relevant because it examines the redactional procedures required by both competing hypotheses. His conclusion is that doublets should not be treated as an independent and decisive argument for Q against the Farrer Hypothesis. Rather, they are closely connected with the broader question of literary order and the editorial arrangement of inherited material (Grünstäudl, 2022, pp. 24–25). This conclusion supports the methodological approach adopted in the present study: individual textual phenomena must be evaluated in relation to the compositional procedures proposed by each model. Although doublets were not examined here as a separate primary corpus, their significance reinforces the need to assess the selected passages within the wider patterns of Matthean and Lukan redaction.

Recent discussion has also emphasized that the rejection of Q does not automatically establish Luke's dependence upon Matthew. Davis (2024, p. 48) acknowledges the importance of Goodacre's contribution in challenging the dominance of the Two-Source Hypothesis, while questioning the tendency to move directly from skepticism concerning Q to the acceptance of the Farrer model. This distinction is methodologically essential. Demonstrating difficulties in the reconstruction of Q is not equivalent to demonstrating that Luke used Matthew. Similarly, identifying difficulties in the Farrer Hypothesis does not independently establish the historical existence of a common written source. Each explanation requires positive arguments concerning the literary relationships among the surviving Gospels.

The reconstruction of Q raises additional questions concerning the relationship between textual evidence and hypothetical literary entities. The source is not independently preserved, and its wording and arrangement are reconstructed primarily from material shared by Matthew and Luke. Consequently, the reconstruction is inseparable from assumptions about the evangelists' editorial activity. This difficulty does not render source reconstruction illegitimate, but it requires a distinction between the canonical texts, which constitute the surviving evidence, and the hypothetical source proposed to explain their relationship.

A significant recent contribution to this discussion is Gousopoulos's study of the Epistle of James and its possible relationship to Q. Gousopoulos (2024, pp. 425–427) examines whether Jacobean parallels to the sayings tradition may offer supplementary evidence for reconstructing the hypothetical source. Her approach draws upon the concept of *aemulatio*, according to which ancient authors could adapt earlier traditions through rhetorical

paraphrase rather than reproducing them verbatim. This is particularly important because the absence of exact verbal correspondence does not necessarily exclude literary or traditional relationships.

Nevertheless, the methodological implications of this proposal require careful qualification. The Epistle of James does not reproduce the relevant sayings in a form that permits direct reconstruction of Q's wording. Gousopoulos therefore proposes a selective use of Jacobean parallels, particularly where they may help evaluate disagreements between Matthew and Luke. Her discussion of the woes in Luke 6:24–26 suggests that James may offer additional support for their inclusion in the hypothetical source, although uncertainty remains concerning their original formulation (Gousopoulos, 2024, pp. 433–434).

This proposal broadens the discussion beyond the direct comparison of Matthew and Luke, but it does not provide an independently preserved manuscript of Q. Moreover, the possibility that James reflects a shared sayings tradition must be distinguished from the stronger claim that its author directly used a particular written document. The present study has not undertaken an independent analysis of the Jacobean parallels; consequently, Gousopoulos's findings are considered here as a methodological development in contemporary Q research rather than as additional results established by the present investigation.

The question of Q's literary character also requires caution. The prominence of ethical instruction, prophetic warnings, and eschatological material has encouraged its description as a *Sayings Gospel*. Such a designation may be useful for characterizing the reconstructed material, but it should not imply that the literary form of the hypothetical source has been independently recovered. The coexistence of sapiential and apocalyptic elements has likewise encouraged proposals concerning successive stages in Q's composition. Yet the identification of literary strata depends upon criteria of reconstruction and redaction that remain open to debate. The present comparison of selected Synoptic passages cannot establish a complete compositional history of Q.

Similar limitations apply to attempts to determine the date, provenance, and social setting of the hypothetical source. If Q existed as a written source used by Matthew and Luke, it would necessarily precede its incorporation into their Gospels. Beyond this relative chronological observation, however, the passages examined do not independently establish a precise date, geographical origin, or identifiable community responsible for its composition. More elaborate historical reconstructions require additional evidence and methodological arguments that extend beyond the scope of the present investigation.

The findings of the present study therefore support a differentiated assessment of the competing hypotheses. Extensive verbal agreement, as in the preaching of John the Baptist, is consistent with both a common written source and direct literary dependence. Differences in formulation and literary placement, as in the Lord's Prayer, require the reconstruction of editorial procedures under both models. The parables of the talents and the minas provide a potentially significant example of editorial fatigue, although the interpretation of this phenomenon is complicated by counterexamples and alternative explanations. Minor agreements and possible Mark–Q overlaps raise further questions about the assumption of Matthean–Lukan independence. Recent research on doublets and the possible use of Q traditions in James demonstrates that the wider source-critical debate cannot be resolved through any single category of textual evidence.

The principal contribution of the present investigation lies in applying the same comparative criteria to several different forms of Synoptic correspondence. The analysis does not establish the historical existence or nonexistence of Q, nor does it claim that the Farrer Hypothesis resolves every difficulty. Rather, it demonstrates that the explanatory adequacy of each model depends upon the coherence of the redactional procedures it requires and their consistency with the surviving textual evidence. This conclusion is consistent with Watson's (2009, p. 399) methodological proposal and with recent scholarship emphasizing

the need for a balanced assessment of competing explanations (Grünstäudl, 2022, pp. 24–25) (Davis, 2024, p. 48). The Q hypothesis consequently remains a viable but unverified reconstruction, while the Farrer Hypothesis constitutes a serious alternative whose explanatory claims must be evaluated with equal methodological rigor.

CONCLUSION

The present study has examined the explanatory value of the hypothetical Q source in relation to the literary formation of the Synoptic Gospels, with particular attention to the material shared by Matthew and Luke but absent from Mark. By combining comparative analysis of selected Greek passages with an evaluation of competing source-critical models, the investigation has sought to determine whether the double tradition provides sufficient evidence for an independent written source or whether its principal characteristics may also be explained through direct literary dependence.

The analysis demonstrates that the existence of substantial verbal agreement between Matthew and Luke does not, in itself, establish the historical existence of Q. The selected passages exhibit different patterns of correspondence, including close verbal agreement, variations in wording and literary context, narrative restructuring, and agreements between Matthew and Luke against Mark. These phenomena are consistent with the use of a common written source in certain respects, but they also admit alternative explanations involving the editorial activity of the evangelists. Their evidential value therefore depends upon the plausibility of the literary and redactional processes proposed by each hypothesis.

The comparison between the Two-Source and Farrer hypotheses has shown that neither model can be adequately evaluated through isolated textual similarities or difficulties. The Two-Source Hypothesis provides a coherent framework for explaining the double tradition through the independent use of Mark and Q by Matthew and Luke. Nevertheless, it must account for minor agreements, possible Mark–Q overlaps, and the uncertainties involved in reconstructing an unattested source. The Farrer Hypothesis avoids the need to postulate Q by proposing that Luke used both Mark and Matthew, but it must provide convincing explanations for Luke's selection, abbreviation, and rearrangement of Matthean material. The relative strength of either model consequently depends upon its ability to explain the available evidence through consistent and historically plausible editorial procedures.

A further finding concerns the methodological limitations of reconstructing Q as a distinct literary composition. Since no independent manuscript of the hypothetical source has survived, its wording, arrangement, genre, and historical setting remain dependent upon the interpretation of the canonical texts and the assumptions underlying particular source-critical models. The characterization of Q as a sayings collection, together with proposals concerning its literary development and historical context, may contribute to the study of early Christian traditions. Such reconstructions, however, must be distinguished from conclusions directly established by the surviving textual evidence.

The principal contribution of this investigation is therefore methodological. Through the examination of passages displaying different forms of Synoptic correspondence, the study has applied a comparative framework that evaluates the redactional implications of both the Two-Source and Farrer hypotheses. This approach avoids treating the reconstruction of Q as proof of its existence while also avoiding the assumption that direct dependence between Matthew and Luke constitutes an automatically preferable explanation. It demonstrates the importance of assessing each proposed literary relationship against the specific textual phenomena it is intended to explain.

The scope of the investigation nevertheless imposes certain limitations. The selected passages do not constitute an exhaustive analysis of the double tradition, and the study

has not undertaken a comprehensive quantitative assessment of verbal agreement across the Synoptic Gospels. Furthermore, the examination of textual transmission, oral tradition, and the possible literary development of Q remains limited to their relevance for the selected comparisons. Consequently, the findings cannot establish a definitive solution to the Synoptic Problem or reconstruct the historical circumstances of a hypothetical Q community.

Future research may extend this comparative procedure to a larger and more systematically defined corpus of Synoptic parallels, incorporating explicit measurements of verbal agreement, closer examination of textual variants, and a broader assessment of editorial tendencies across Matthew and Luke. Such an approach would permit a more comprehensive evaluation of whether the redactional procedures required by one hypothesis offer a consistently stronger explanation than those required by its alternatives.

In conclusion, the Q hypothesis remains a viable but historically unverified explanation of the double tradition. Its significance lies not in the recovery of a demonstrably existing document, but in its capacity to organize and explain important features of the literary relationship between Matthew and Luke. The Farrer Hypothesis remains a serious alternative that must be examined according to the same critical standards. The study therefore concludes that the Synoptic Problem is most fruitfully approached through the systematic comparison of competing literary models, with conclusions proportionate to the textual evidence and with a clear distinction between what the surviving Gospels demonstrate and what scholarly reconstruction proposes.

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Pericope	Matthew	Mark	Luke
John's Messianic Preaching	3:11–12	1:7–8	3:15–18
The Baptism of Jesus	3:13–17	1:9–11	3:21–22
The Temptation	4:1–11	1:12–13	4:1–13
Peter's Confession	16:13–20	8:27–30	9:18–21
Jesus Heals a Boy Possessed by a Spirit	17:14–21	9:14–29	9:37–43a
Jesus Blesses the Children	19:13–15	10:13–16	18:15–17
The Rich Young Man	19:16–22	10:17–22	18:18–23
The Triumphal Entry	21:1–9	11:1–10	19:28–40
The Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen	21:33–46	12:1–12	20:9–19
The Betrayal by Judas	26:14–16	14:10–11	22:3–6
The Trial before Pilate	27:11–14	15:2–5	23:2–5

Table 1. Examples of the Triple Tradition in the Synoptic Gospels

Feature	Matthew 3:7–10	Luke 3:7–9	Observation
Opening address	Γεννήματα ἐχιδνῶν	Γεννήματα ἐχιδνῶν	Exact phrase
Warning	τίς ὑπέδειξεν ὑμῖν φυγεῖν ἀπὸ τῆς μελλούσης ὀργῆς;	τίς ὑπέδειξεν ὑμῖν φυγεῖν ἀπὸ τῆς μελλούσης ὀργῆς;	Close / identical wording
Fruit	καρπὸν ἄξιον	καρποὺς ἀξίους	Singular vs. plural
Audience	Φαρισαίων καὶ Σαδδουκαίων	ὄχλοις	Different introduction

Table 2. John the Baptist's warning: selected Greek correspondences

Feature	Matthew 6:9–13	Luke 11:2–4	Observation
Address	Πάτερ ἡμῶν ὁ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς	Πάτερ	Different length; verify variants
Name	ἁγιασθήτω τὸ ὄνομά σου	ἁγιασθήτω τὸ ὄνομά σου	Shared petition
Kingdom	ἐλθέτω ἡ βασιλεία σου	ἐλθέτω ἡ βασιλεία σου	Shared petition
Context	Sermon on the Mount	Disciple requests instruction	Different literary setting

Table 3. Lord's Prayer: selected Greek comparison units

Feature	Matthew 25:14–30	Luke 19:11–27	Observation
Initial distribution	τρία servant roles; talents	δέκα δούλους; μνᾶς	Different allocation structures; Greek phrases abbreviated
Transfer command	δότε τῷ ἔχοντι τὰ δέκα τάλαντα	δότε τῷ τὰς δέκα μνᾶς ἔχοντι	Parallel transfer motif; exact wording verify
Political subplot	Not present	Nobleman receives kingship	Distinctive Lukan expansion
Fatigue proposal	Three servants	Ten initially; three report	Goodacre 1998, pp. 55–57

Table 4. Talents and minas: Greek anchor phrases and narrative features

Feature	Matthew 26:68	Mark 14:65	Luke 22:64
Question	τίς ἐστιν ὁ παίσας σε;	No matching question in same form	τίς ἐστιν ὁ παίσας σε;
Command	προφήτευσον	προφήτευσον	προφήτευσον
Interpretation	Question present	Question absent	Question present

Table 5. Candidate minor agreement in the mockery narrative