A PROBLEM STILL CLOUDED:
YET AGAIN—STATISTICS AND "Q"

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It is a well-known adage that statistics can be misleading. Nevertheless, there persists a stubborn tendency to regard numerical representations of data as inherently objective. The hypothetical sayings source "Q", surrounded as it is by clouds of uncertainty, has naturally elicited attempts to subject it to the apparently hard and fast rules of mathematical analysis. "Once More—Statistics and Q", a study completed in 1971 by Charles Carlston and Dennis Norlin, is such an attempt.¹

In a recent response to Hans Dieter Betz, who has further clouded the problem of "Q" by proposing that the Matthean and Lukan Sermons were formulated independently of "Q" as separate collections of sayings,² Carlston makes reference to his earlier statistical study. Its results, he claims, confirm the following conclusions:

[1] Unless there are major errors (an occasional slip would not affect the results), we can now be assured that if Matthew and Luke in their present forms rest on Mark but are independent of one another (a nearly universally acknowledged conclusion), their common non-Marcan source was written.

[2] Not only must Q have been written, it must also have been used by Matthew and Luke in approximately the same form...the greater the differences in wording one

¹ Charles Carlston and Dennis Norlin, "Once More—Statistics and Q," HTR 64 (1971) 59-78.
² Betz does not do away with "Q" altogether: "The SM and the SP were formulated first independently of Q as separate collections of sayings. At a later stage of Q's development they were joined to Q (SM to QMatt; SP to QLuke. The analogy for this process would be the inclusion of smaller collections of sayings into larger ones, as we find in the growing collections of Greek gnomologia" ("The Sermon on the Mount and Q: Some Aspects of the Problem," in Gospel Origins and Christian Beginnings, ed. James E. Goehring [1990] 33). Also see Betz's Essays on the Sermon on the Mount (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985).
suggests between $Q^{\text{Matt}}$ and $Q^{\text{Lk}}$, the more inexplicable the double tradition agreements between Matthew and Luke become.\(^3\)

In the estimation of Carlston, the problem of the nature and unity of "Q" is not at all clouded. The clouds have been well dispersed, and "Once More—Statistics and Q" has played a decisive role in helping to clear them away. It is my intention to demonstrate that Carlston & Norlin's statistical study simply does not offer any objective substantiation of a unified written "Q".

1. *The Problem with the Basic Argument*

Carlston & Norlin begin by noting a fundamental methodological inconsistency in Theodore Rosché's 1960 statistical study\(^4\) in which he argues against the unity of "Q". Nevertheless, they agree with Rosché's finding that Matthew and Luke tend to preserve sayings material significantly more conservatively than narrative material.\(^5\) It must be underscored that Rosché's error only affects his argument regarding a disparity in the use of Markan sayings vs. "Q" sayings by Matthew and Luke,\(^6\) and has no bearing on his conclusion that Matthew and Luke transmit sayings (whether from Mark

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\(^5\) Carlston & Norlin, "Once More," 59-60, 64, 68.

\(^6\) Rosché's inconsistency is between Step Three ("Words of Jesus," 215-16) and Step Five (217-18) of his study. Graphically: Rosché's "% of maximum possibility" for Step Five = (no. of words in Matt-Luke agreement)/(total no. of words in Matt or Luke [the shorter version]); i.e., simply the common words divided by the total number of words in either the Matthean or Lukan pericope, whichever is the shorter version. By contrast, "% of maximum possibility" for Step Three = (no. of words in Matt-Mark-Luke agreement)/(no. of words in Matt-Mark or Luke-Mark agreement [the shorter version]). Hence, Rosché counts only the words in *triple agreement* in the numerator of the fraction by which he calculates his "% of maximum possibility," but more importantly, he counts only those Matthean or Lukan words which agree with Mark in the denominator. This latter practice would have the effect of eliminating much of the divergent material, producing inflated results. The restriction imposed in the numerator (only triple agreement words) would not offset this significantly, because the quantity of common Matt-Luke material excluded in the numerator would be far less substantial than the amount of divergent material excluded in the denominator. Rosché's results therefore indicate a much higher correspondence between Matthew and Luke for Markan sayings than for "Q" sayings (88% vs. 54%). But the inconsistency in his treatment of the data would in itself lead to this imbalance.