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## How to Discredit an Inconvenient Exorcist:

### Origin and Configuration of the Synoptic Controversies on Jesus' Power as an Exorcist

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*Esther Miquel*

#### Abstract

This article uses the ethnological research of M. Lewis on possession and exorcism as a methodological tool to solve some exegetical problems related to the interpretation, historical origin, and literary pre-synoptic development of the “Beelzebul controversies” (Mark 3:22–30; Matthew 12:22–32; Luke 11:14–23).

*Key words:* *Beelzebul Controversies, Spiritual Possession, Exorcism, Mark 3:22–30, Matthew 12:22–32, Luke 11:14–23*

The Synoptic Gospels contain four very controversial scenes in which Jesus' enemies find in his exorcisms an occasion to make accusations against him (Mark 3:22–30; Matthew 9:32–34; Matthew 12:22–32 and Luke 11:14–23). They argue that Jesus expels demons only because he is possessed or assisted by a powerful evil spirit or demon. Although the Greek preposition *en*, which is usually translated as “by (someone)” or “with the power of (someone),” does not make it clear whether the accusers think that the demon possesses Jesus and works through him (see Mark 1:23) or simply helps him by giving him power, the gravity of the charge cannot be questioned. As we shall see, in the context of ancient conceptions concerning the phenomenon of possession and exorcist practices, this would be equivalent to an accusation of witchcraft.

The Greek form of the name “Beelzebul” first appears in ancient literature precisely in these synoptic texts. Some exegetes believed this name to have been compounded or invented by Jesus' enemies to refer, perhaps in jest, to a demon

or pagan god. Others believe it to be the actual Hebrew or Aramaic name of one of these beings (Davies & Allison: 195–96; Fitzmyer: 920–21; Casey: 158–60). In any case, it is clear that the being referred to by this name is an evil spirit opposed to the God of Israel.

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The gravity of the accusation is confirmed by Jesus' reaction in the texts themselves. Three of them (Mark 3:22–30; Matthew 12:22–32 and Luke 11:14–23) take the literary form of a controversy and include several defensive responses from Jesus. The fourth (Matthew 9:32–34) does not include any defensive answers. However, if we consider it within the overall context of Matthew's narrative, we see that it is a point of no return in the rapidly deteriorating relationship between Jesus and the religious authorities represented here by the Pharisees (Luz: 95–97; Vledder: 222–25). All the exegetes agree that the story in Matthew 9:32–34 is a doublet of the exorcism that functions as the narrative frame of Matthew 12:22–32 (Casey: 156), and that it was created by Matthew to mark a highpoint in the spiraling conflict that would lead to Jesus' execution. The origin of the other three texts is, however, much more difficult to determine. The obvious parallelisms between them reveal literary dependencies. But the relations suggested by the parallel elements are so complex that it is impossible to reduce them to the dependency between documents put forth by the Two Document Hypothesis, even in its most complex versions. (See the table of texts on the following page.)

In any case, the interest raised by the problem of the origin and the oral or literary history of these controversies goes beyond the technical scope of literary analysis and reconstruction and touches deep hermeneutic issues. The meaning and historical value of the saying in Matthew 12:28 // Luke 11:20, which are the object of a heated debate between the scholars who interpret Jesus' kingdom of God as a present or incipient intrahistorical reality and those who qualify it as future or wholly transcendent, depend on the solution of this problem. The saying in question establishes a direct relationship between the intrahistorical reality of Jesus' exorcisms and the arrival of the kingdom of God: "But if it is by the spirit/finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has overtaken you." Therefore, the only way to avoid the conclusion that Jesus believed in the arrival of the kingdom of God in his own historical time is by arguing in favor of the redactional or hyperbolic nature of the statement (Räsänen).

The aim of this study is to show that setting the controversies in the proper socio-cultural context helps not only to understand its meaning but, most interestingly, to solve the problem of its origin and literary history as well. My argument aims to be an example of what social sciences can contribute to literary exegesis of the Gospel's texts.

The contextual setting I propose is based on Ioan M.

Lewis' comparative anthropological study on possession and exorcism (Lewis 1971) and on historic data from Jesus' cultural environment. This socio-cultural context is what will allow me to formulate the premise upon which my reconstruction rests. This premise affirms that the accusation of expelling demons in close association with a powerful demon is the type of accusation with which we would expect religious authorities in a traditional society to charge an inconvenient exorcist like Jesus. Rather than a circumstantial accusation against Jesus at one moment in his career, this would be a recurring accusation that he and his followers would have had to face up to on many occasions.

With the help of this premise, I will put forth a reconstruction of the first stages of the formative literary process that gave rise to the three controversies we find in the Gospels today. As the reader will see, this reconstruction is compatible with the Two Document Hypothesis and with the widely accepted historical-critical analyses that explain the texts in Matthew 12:22–32 and Luke 11:14–23 on the basis of Mark's Gospel and Q—among others, those used by *The Critical Edition of Q* (Robinson & Hoffmann & Kloppenborg) to reconstruct this last document.

## The Historical-critical Question

When comparing the three controversies, we see that all of them are formed by parallel or nearly parallel elements from the following sequence of literary components:

- (a) = story of exorcism
- (b) = accusation of casting out demons by one powerful demon
- (c) = first defensive answer (analogy with a divided kingdom and/or a divided house)
- (d) = second defensive answer in conditional form (accusers' sons, kingdom of God)
- (e) = parable (how to plunder the goods of the strong)
- (f) = saying (aligning oneself for or against Jesus, gathering or scattering)
- (g) = saying(s) (blasphemy against the Holy Spirit)
- (h) = Mark's redactional commentary

Of the eight components identified, at least (a), (c), (e), (f), and (g) are meaningful self-contained literary units, which could have been transmitted orally in an independent

| <b>Table of Texts</b>   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| <b><i>(a) story of exorcism</i></b>   |   |   |
| <b>Mark 3:22–30</b>   | <b>Matthew 12:22–32</b>   | <b>Luke 11:14–23</b>  |
|   | 22 Then a blind and dumb demoniac was brought to him, and he healed him, so that the dumb man spoke and saw.<br>23 And all the people were amazed, and said: Can this be the Son of David?  | 14 And he was casting out a demon that was dumb; when the demon had gone out, the dumb man spoke, and the people marvelled.   |
| <b><i>(b) accusation of casting out demons by a powerful demon</i></b>  |   |   |
| 22 And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said: He has Beelzebul, and by the chief of demons he casts out the demons.   | 24 But when the Pharisees heard it they said: It is only by Beelzebul, the chief of demons, that this one casts out demons.   | 15 But some of them said: He casts out demons by Beelzebul, the chief of demons;<br><br>16 while others, to test him, sought from him a sign from heaven.   |
| <b><i>(c) defensive answer: analogy with a divided kingdom and/or a divided house</i></b>   |   |   |
| 23 And calling them to him, he said to them in parables: How can Satan cast out Satan?<br>24 If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand.<br>25 And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand.<br>26 And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but is coming to an end. | 25 Knowing their thoughts, he said to them:<br><br>Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand;<br><br>26 And if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself; how then will his kingdom stand?  | 17 But he, knowing their intentions, said to them:<br>Every kingdom that has torn itself apart is laid waste, and one house falls upon the other.<br><br>18 If Satan also tears himself apart, how will his kingdom stand? For you say that I cast out demons by Beelzebul. |
| <b><i>(d) defensive answer in conditional form referring to the accusers' sons and the kingdom of God</i></b>   |   |   |
|   | 27 And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they shall be your judges.<br>28 But if it is by the spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has overtaken you.   | 19 And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they shall be your judges.<br>20 But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has overtaken you.   |
| <b><i>(e) parable about how to plunder the goods of the strong</i></b>  |   |   |
| 27 But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man; then indeed he may plunder his house.   | 29 Or how can one enter a strong man's house and steal his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? Then indeed he may plunder his house.   | 21 When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his possessions are in peace;<br>22 but when one stronger than he assails him and overcomes him, he takes away his armor in which he trusted and divides his spoils.  |
| <b><i>(f) saying about gathering and scattering</i></b>   |   |   |
|   | 30 He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters.  | 23 He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters.  |
| <b><i>(g) sayings(s) about the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit</i></b>  |   |   |
| 28 Amen, I say to you: all sins will be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they utter;<br>29 but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin.   | 31 Therefore I tell you, every transgression and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven.<br>32 And whoever says a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come. |   |
| <b><i>(h) Markan redactional commentary</i></b>   |   |   |
| 30 For they had said: He has an unclean spirit.   |   |   |

manner (Bultman: 13–14; Crossan: 184–91). This seems to indicate that the present texts were formed by the gradual concatenation of autonomous literary elements that were originally independent of each other. On the other hand, the clear parallelisms we see in the final compositions of the controversies suggest that their corresponding formative processes interacted among themselves and some of them had various stages of development in common.

Under the assumption of the Two Document Hypothesis, it is not difficult to explain the composition of the controversies in Matthew and Luke from the controversy in Mark and a hypothetical controversy contained in document Q. The scholars who were engaged in the reconstruction of this document have argued convincingly that Luke essentially reproduced the controversy in Q while Matthew mixed the traditions from Mark's controversy with those from Q's controversy. These two suppositions, together with the consideration of the possible redactional contributions from Matthew and Luke, make it possible to explain each and every one of the existing differences between the controversies transmitted by these two evangelists (Fleddermann 2005: 187–88; Dale & Allison: 332–33). The literary problem still posed by the texts, and which this article centers on, concerns the processes that predate the redaction of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. In the conceptual framework of the Two Document Hypothesis, the problem is that of explaining the parallelisms between the controversy in Mark and that in Q.

In my opinion, attempts to solve this problem by pointing out a literary dependency between these two documents have not been satisfactory. Detailed comparison between the whole content of Mark's Gospel and the whole content of Q indicate that, if indeed any dependency exists, it would be Mark's Gospel that depends on Q, and not the other way around (Fleddermann, 2005: 493–500). But if we accept that Mark knew Q, we would have to explain why his version of the controversy does not include the response (d) that appears in both Matthew and Luke, and would therefore also be included in Q. To date, no satisfactory explanation of this has been put forth (Gnilka: 170; Guelich: 168).

The response (d) includes the significant reference to the arrival of the kingdom of God which I mentioned above. On the other hand, it is the only straightforward answer from Jesus to the accusation of expelling demons by the power of Beelzebul: "And if I cast out demons by the power of Beelzebul..." The logical and terminological dependency

of (d) on this accusation is so great that it cannot be understood as a meaningful independent saying. However, the concatenation of the accusation (b) and the response (d) can easily be read as an independent literary unit in the form of controversy. Taking into account the relevance that the announcement of the arrival of the kingdom of God has in the Gospel of Mark, it is very unlikely that this evangelist would break the most logical literary connection of his supposed source to omit precisely the words of Jesus that could be of most interest to him. Therefore, the reason why Mark did not transmit this element (d) of the controversy in Q must be that he simply did not know it.

One way to get round these difficulties is to look for the explanation of the parallelisms between the controversies in Mark and in Q in the tradition prior to these two documents. If we look at the table of texts to detect possible common pre-synoptic traditions, we immediately note that the elements (b), (c), and (e), whose sequence make up the nucleus of the controversy in Mark, also appear in this same relative order in the controversies in Matthew and Luke. This leads us to suppose that the chain (b+c+e), formed by the accusation, the first answer, and the parable of the strong man, could have been taken from the oral tradition both by Mark and by the author of Q. In order to sustain this supposition, we need to imagine that the tradents of the pre-synoptic tradition were able to transmit not only isolated independent elements but also "chains" or concatenations of elements with possibly diverse origins.

The hypothesis that certain concatenations of sayings that we can now find included in the Gospels existed previously in independent form has been convincingly defended by J. D. Crossan (Crossan 184–91). When later developing this hypothesis, P. Sellew argued in favor of classifying the chain (b+c+e) in a specific type of groupings of sayings called "conglomerates" that show two important characteristics. Firstly, all the sayings grouped in a conglomerate refer to a common subject or theme. Second, the configuration that results from the grouping of these sayings is open to new additions (Sellew).

According to Sellew, the literary unity of conglomerates is greater than that of groups of sayings simply linked by a connecting or stitch word, but less than that of complex speeches built around a central theme or idea. Although all of the elements that make up a conglomerate offer some significant contribution to the subject that links them, the

structure that results from their grouping does not constitute a one-way closed argument. These features make the “conglomerate” literary genre especially apt for oral transmission of groups of originally independent sayings, because while offering to the human memory the support of a single thematic reference, it does not require memorization of complex syntactical structures or argumentations.

In addition, the capacity of a conglomerate to include new elements related to the subject it deals with, allows it to grow and adapt to the living conditions of the transmitters. Sellew relates this manner of collecting sayings ascribed to Jesus with the need that his followers must have felt after his death to remember his teachings about matters that were especially important to their lives and to legitimate with them their own conduct. Thus the controversy contained in the chain (b+c+e) would reflect the situation of Jesus’ followers who continued doing exorcisms in imitation of him, and had to defend themselves before those who linked this activity with evil magical practices (Sellew: 105). As this author so aptly pointed out, the open nature of the conglomerate’s configuration allows some adaptive creativity to filter into the tradition of sayings ascribed to Jesus.

The hypothesis of the oral existence of the chain (b+c+e) and of its later incorporation into the Gospel of Mark and the Q document can account for the parallelisms between the controversies contained in these two writings. However, it does not explain the origin of element (d) which appears only in the latter. One possible solution to this question is the assumption that this element was created by the redactor of Q (Fleddermann 2004: 17–33; Räissänen: 119–42). However, this would involve discarding the single origin of the chain (b+d) which, as I indicated earlier, is a perfectly meaningful and self-contained minicontroversy. Another possible solution and, in my opinion, the best, is to also grant an independent oral existence to the chain (b+d) and assume that the redactor of Q came to know it as part of his inherited tradition.

The only difficulty posed by this second solution is that it seems to ascribe the origin of the two remarkably different controversies, (b+c+e) and (b+d), to a single accusation (b). However, on close examination of the texts, we discover indications that the origin of the controversies might not be ascribed to just one accusation brandished against Jesus in one particular episode of his life, but to various recurrent accusations that would have taken place at different times. In

fact, the Markan controversy has two juxtaposed accusations: (1) “He has Beelzebul” and (2) “By the chief of demons he casts out demons.” On the other hand, although the controversies in Matthew and Luke transmit a single accusation, that of “expelling demons by Beelzebul, the chief of demons” (Matthew 12:24 and Luke 11:15), the evil spiritual entity to which Jesus is associated is identified in two different ways that match precisely with the terms used in the two accusations in Mark: through the name “Beelzebul,” and through the title “chief of demons.” These variations and coincidences suggest that the accusatory forms we now find in the Gospel texts—represented, all of them, with the letter (b)—are the results of blending different accusations uttered at different times by Jesus’ opponents, and that would have prompted different answers from Jesus as well. The fact that the formulae used are, nevertheless, so similar suggests that they share the same life context and that it is in this shared life context where we can find the sociological explanation of why Jesus had to respond to these verbal attacks more than once.

The hypothesis that sustains my proposal is that the accusation of expelling demons by the power of a strong evil spirit was a recurring accusation against Jesus. This hypothesis allows us to think that the oral tradition originated by this type of polemical setting could have preserved more than one formula for the accusation and more than one defensive answer ascribed to Jesus. In these conditions, Sellew’s theory on the formation and life context of conglomerates allows us to imagine the oral existence not only of literary independent units with the form of a controversy, like (b+d), but also of conglomerates of sayings such as (b+c+e), which acquired the form of controversy in the process of their development. With these assumptions, the literary reconstruction of the processes that gave rise to the controversies in the Gospel of Mark and in the Q document becomes considerably simpler. The section of this study on History of the Tradition, below, will include an in depth discussion of each of their stages. However, a sufficient justification of the hypothesis requires that we turn to the social sciences.

When referring to typical or recurring accusations against Jesus, we are in fact assuming that his social environment could identify his exorcisms as a known and, therefore, typical form of social threat. In other words, socially shared knowledge allowed Jesus’ enemies to identify him as a dangerous exorcist and react against him in the manner that traditional societies which believe in spiritual possession



used to react against such kind of exorcists. But the study of the shared social knowledge and the typical forms of behavior in a human group is the task of social and cultural anthropology (Craffert: 135–209). Therefore, it is to this field of knowledge that we must turn for models that could be used to interpret the life context in which the original controversies on Jesus' power as an exorcist first arose.

Ioan M. Lewis' anthropological model, which is applicable to human groups where belief in spiritual possession and the practice of exorcisms are still in force, can explain the political dynamism of the accusations of witchcraft against exorcists that empirical studies on many of these groups have highlighted. With the aid of this model, we find that the accusation of casting out spirits with the help of a powerful evil spirit was a typical rhetorical attack used by the authorities to ruin the prestige of annoying or inconvenient exorcists in Jesus' socio-cultural context. In addition to justifying the initial point of my literary reconstruction, Lewis' model will also serve as important help for the culturally contextualized interpretation of the different features that make up the controversies.

### Lewis' Model

Spiritual possession is a cultural phenomenon. This means that its existence and identification depend, not merely on the perceptible manifestation of the phenomenon, but also on the cultural interpretation it is given. Therefore, for an individual to be considered spiritually possessed there is a double condition. First, the individual must, in his social environment, show a partial or total incapacity to control actions, omissions and attitudes for which people are normally considered responsible. Second, people in his social environment must attribute his abnormal lack of control to the action of a spirit over him. Spirits possess persons in a way analogous to that in which masters possess or dominate the will of their slaves. This dominance may range from the most dramatic possessions, in which the possessed subject's will is totally supplanted by the spirit, to the slightest ailments caused by spirits that only limit or hinder the normal functioning of the subject in society.

As opposed to other forms of contact with the spiritual world acknowledged by different cultures, what makes possession distinctive is that the subject possessed loses all or part of his control over his own behavior to the advantage of the spirit possessing him. Thus, nobody can blame the

prophet possessed by Yahweh for his threats against the governing elite. No one can reproach the possessed slave for an aggressive attitude towards his master. No one can demand that a woman unable to stand straight up because of a spirit binding her in a crooked position should do her housework. The possessing spirit is the only one responsible for the problems this lack of control could cause in the normal functioning of society. Because this transfer of responsibility has important moral and political consequences, all the societies that recognize the phenomenon show great interest in identifying the type of spirit that restrains the behavior of the possessed and the ultimate cause of the possession for each particular case. Lewis' model deals precisely with the relationships that usually exist between the main social groups of interest and the possible interpretations of concrete cases of possession. These relationships are what will enable us to understand the ethical and political relevance of Jesus' exorcisms. Lewis bases his arguments on several transculturally valid conceptual classifications.

The first classification refers to spirits. In all societies that believe in possession, each human group has positive selective relationships with one or more powerful spirits that it worships in exchange for benefits and protection. The spirits so committed to a group are called "the central spirits of the group" (Lewis: 88, 132–48). The commitment of the central spirits to the group's well-being obliges them to defend them, not only from its external enemies, but from the internal ones as well. Internal enemies are basically those members or sectors of the group that shun, reject or infringe fundamental aspects of the common morality. It is therefore not strange that almost all human groups charge their central spirits with the task of repaying the moral conduct of their members with prizes or punishment (Lewis: 155–58). In the Judean culture of Jesus' time, the only central spirits were the God of Israel and his heavenly clientele.

Spirits that are not committed to the good of the group are called "peripheral spirits." In contrast to central spirits, they are whimsical and evil and attack people indiscriminately without taking their moral behavior into account (Lewis: 100–26). Like all the cultures of its time, first century Judaism acknowledged the existence of many different peripheral spirits, which it frequently identified as "demons." The Gentile divinities were an important group (Deut 32:17; Ps 106:37; 1 Cor 10:20), as well as the rebellious angels and the souls of a supposedly exterminated breed of giants that

some traditions identified as the offspring of the rebellious angels and the daughters of men (1 Enoch 1–36; Jubilees 10:1–14; 5:1–11; 7:20–33).

The second classification refers to the effects of possession. There are “positive possessions,” which are beneficial to the group, and “negative possessions,” which are harmful. The clearest positive possessions are those by central spirits in contexts of cult. Through this type of possession, the patron spirits make themselves present in the midst of the client group, assuring its members of their nearness and protection.

The most frequent negative possessions are those that cause physical or psychic suffering or alter conduct in such a way that the victims are incapable of carrying out their social roles and tasks properly.

The effects of negative possessions should be included in the anthropological concept of “ailment,” which is described as the malady or suffering caused by a subject’s unsatisfactory adaptation to his environment. Since humans are social beings, their socio-cultural environment is a significant component of their vital environment. The empirically proven fact that negative possessions mainly affect subordinate and marginal collectivities indicates that these possessions provide a culturally recognized channel through which the vulnerability that affects many people due to their poor adaptation to a hostile environment is made visible (Lewis: 113–19).

Vulnerability to negative possession is usually interpreted in different ways by different interest groups. There are two clearly different interpretive perspectives associated with the elite ruling class and the subordinate groups respectively. Subordinate groups insist that negative possessions are the result of whimsical aggressions by evil spirits that select their victims randomly. This interpretation makes negative possessions a potential weapon in the hands of the weak, because it allows them to express their protest by hindering the smooth functioning of society without being held responsible for the disorder they cause. It is no surprise that negative possessions attributed to peripheral spirits mainly affect the most oppressed sectors of society and tend to recur in societies with very rigid inequality structures (Lewis: 86–87, 92–99, 105).

Social sectors advocating the *status quo* aim to discredit these protests by interpreting negative possessions afflicting the weak in terms of moral retribution. According to them, the ultimate cause of the affliction can be found in the moral faults of the victims or of those closest to them, whom the

central spirits would have decided to punish through a possessing spirit. When the social elites cannot or do not think it convenient to blame the victim or anyone close to him, they try to find some suspect, annoying or marginal person whom it would be socially plausible to blame for having caused the affliction. According to anthropological studies, these circumstances concur frequently in the origin of accusations of witchcraft (Lewis: 121–22).

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As there are people who passively suffer from the action of spirits in their lives, there are others who have learned to relate to them in an active controlled manner (Shantz: 146–47). The latter type can be generically called “experts in spirits.” Usually, the socio-cultural identity of the expert in spirits is the outcome of a call from the spiritual world itself, by which one of its inhabitants shows interest in adopting a person as his client, ally or representative among men. It is not unusual for the spirit to possess the person he wishes to adopt and take advantage of his dominion over her to reveal his intentions to her, set up the conditions of their future relationship, and let her share in some of his extraordinary powers (Lewis: 66–99). Usually, the consolidated lasting relationship between a human being and a powerful spirit enables the human being to dominate most of the spiritual entities dominated by his allied spirit. This capacity is the basis of exorcism.

Experts in spirits generally have an unstable social position. The extraordinary powers they receive from their allied spirit(s) enable them to provide great service to other people. However, if they wish to, they can also cause them great harm. One who has the power to make a possessing spirit leave a person also has the power to make it enter another person. The advantages their privileged contacts with the spiritual world give to these experts can provide them with great authority and prestige. However, it can also make them objects of suspicion. These circumstances make them particularly vulnerable to any possible suspicion of manipulating the spiritual world for perverse ends. Therefore, when experts in spirits annoy the authorities by adopting a critical



position against the *status quo*, they run the risk of being accused of witchcraft (Lewis: 117–22).

Most traditional societies have a conception of "health" that is much more holistic and integral than that used by the biomedical sciences in our modern western civilization. That notion of health is not the opposite of the biomedical concept of illness but of the wider concept of "ailment" to which I referred above. Thus, we can state that pre-industrial societies generally understand health as the "adequate" integration of the subject in his human and ecological environment. Obviously, the criteria defining "adequacy" may vary from one society or culture to another, just as the internal structure and dynamism of the human context where the healthy person is supposedly integrated may vary as well. In every case, however, healthy people must satisfy group expectations related to culturally valid social categories.

If we accept the link put forth in medical anthropology between the cultural perception of health and social expectations concerning satisfactory integration in the group, we immediately notice the political and moral importance that healing practices may have in traditional societies. Lewis' study supports this conclusion for the case of the therapists that use exorcism. According to this researcher, the way exorcists treat their patients may vary according to two different and opposing orientations. The first one focuses on the reintegration of the possessed person in a social and cultural world whose goodness is never questioned. The second assumes that, not only the possessed person, but also his social environment have been damaged, and that both of them are in need of change. In the latter case, reintegration is understood as an adjustment between the patient and a renewed human environment.

These two therapeutic attitudes are normally associated with the two interpretations of negative possession, which, according to what we saw above, characterize the two large groups of interest. Those who regard possession as a punishment for moral transgressions believe that the guilty possessed person is the one who should adapt to his social environment. According to this perspective, healing requires the acknowledgment of guilt and some sort of conversion to the morality that legitimizes the *status quo*. On the other hand, those who think that the possession is caused by peripheral spirits that act without moral criteria are normally more critical of the *status quo* and believe that lasting recovery of the patient is only possible if the social environment changes.

I will call those exorcists that prefer the first interpretation, which is also the favorite of the social elites in power, "moral exorcists," because their healing practices legitimate the morality and social order in force. I will call those who sympathize with the position of the subordinate groups and prefer the second interpretation "a-moral exorcists," because implicitly or explicitly, they question the goodness of the existing morality and social order.

Moral exorcists usually belong to privileged social groups or to the clientele of those in power. In their therapeutic rituals, it is not unusual for them to demand that the patient confess his sins and, if they deem necessary, to intercede in his behalf before the central spirits for pardon. The patient who accepts his guilt thus expresses his willingness to reassume the role and functions that society had assigned him (Lewis: 163–67). In turn, the pardon granted by the central spirits expresses society's willingness to receive him. According to this perspective, healing is equivalent to releasing the victim from punishment by relieving him of his ailment, and recovered health is measured by the patient's capacity to fulfill social expectations.

Moral exorcists are often called to judge the possible moral causes of possession and to discover the guilty party. In their role as judges, they are invested with the power to delve into the faults of the victim and of those closest to her (family, relatives, friends, allies). If the investigation shows no results, they try to identify the person who supposedly would have induced the possession through the use of witchcraft (Lewis: 144–45, 150–52, 158–62). This identification is usually based on the denunciations forcibly obtained from the victim through whom the possessing spirit is thought to speak. The dynamics of confessions and accusations that are distinctive of the trial-like rituals performed by moral exorcists can be easily manipulated and turned into a "witch hunt" (Lewis: 157–58).

On the other hand, a-moral exorcists normally come from subordinate groups or marginal sectors of society. They do not associate ailments with sin. Nor do they delve into the patient's moral conscience. They often create associations of patients, who periodically engage in healing rites and back each other up. These associations usually evolve into stable tolerated forms, but during periods of social tension they may undergo transformation and become protest groups or popular movements for politico-religious and social renewal. The creation of these groups and movements should be understood as the logical result of trying to change a hu-

man environment which favors the proliferation of cases of negative possession and impedes the healthy reintegration of exorcised patients. The critical attitude of a-moral exorcists and their low social status make them especially vulnerable to accusations of witchcraft coming from the ruling elite (Lewis: 120–22, 127–29).

### Applying Lewis' Model to Jesus

In the first century of our era, all the societies in the cultural environment of the Mediterranean and Near East shared the belief in spiritual beings capable of possessing persons and acknowledged the power of certain individuals to exorcise them (Miquel: 120–38; Sorensen: 47–117; Twelftree: 13–52). We can therefore assume that Jesus' socio-cultural environment belonged to the category of human groups that comply with the conditions needed to apply Lewis' model.

The image that the gospel tradition offers of Jesus' exorcisms clearly corresponds to that of an a-moral exorcist who was especially annoying for the social elite and their clientele in first-century Palestine. If we examine the different stories of exorcism included in the Gospels, we see that Jesus never blamed the possessed or inquired about their possible sins. For him, the possessing spirits are not instruments of divine retributions, but peripheral spirits that act against God's will and God's people. Other data that support this image of Jesus as an a-moral exorcist are his low social status, the kind of accusations with which his enemies tried to discredit him (Mark 3:22b; Matt 10:25b; John 7:20; 8:48; 10:19–21; Mark 3:22c; Luke 11:15; Matt 12:24), and the connection put forth in a number of synoptic texts between the practice of exorcisms and healings in his movement and the announcement of God's kingdom (Mark 3:13–19; 6: 6b–13; Q 10:5–15).

In addition to helping us discover the characteristics that define an a-moral exorcist in these data, Lewis' model enables us to integrate them in a coherent and meaningful interpretation of Jesus' exorcist praxis. According to this model, the attitude adopted by a-moral exorcists of not blaming the victims of negative possessions shows an implicit criticism of the social order in force. Advocates of maintaining the *status quo* who recognize this criticism try to discredit the exorcist by accusing him of using his extraordinary powers for perverse aims. In some cases, as that of Jesus, the a-moral exorcists make his rejection of the *status quo* explicit by promoting religious movements of socio-political renewal.

The renewal fostered by Jesus is the one which the gospel tradition expresses with the political and theological concept of "kingdom of God." According to this interpretation, Jesus would have acted like an a-moral exorcist, not only in his way of understanding the evil that affected the victims of negative possessions, but also by trying to change the human context which made them vulnerable to these ailments and hindered their long-lasting recovery. The change that Jesus advocated would have been made explicit in his commitment to the arrival of the kingdom of God and in the creation of a popular movement aimed at making it come true.

Classifying Jesus as an a-moral exorcist according to Lewis' model offers a new adequate framework to interpret the controversies in the Gospels on the origin of his power to expel demons. These controversies can be understood as recollections of the accusative strategy used by the authorities to discredit the exorcist Jesus and of the replies with which he and his followers would have tried to defend themselves. However, some of the features of these accusations and responses should be subsequently clarified in the more specific framework of the beliefs and practices in force within the cultural environment where the gospel tradition was born.

One of the features that needs clarification is the contextual meaning of the claims made by Jesus' accusers: that Jesus was possessed, and that he expelled demons with the help of a powerful spirit or demon. As a number of contemporary documents show, these affirmations reflect the way in which Jesus' cultural environment imagined the participation of powerful allied spirits in exorcisms and witchcraft.

We know that the procedure of controlling a powerful spirit to oblige it to attack, drive away or dominate less powerful spirits was relatively common among ancient exorcists in the Mediterranean area (see, for example, Eusebius, *On Philostratus* 26: *Praeparatio Evangelica* 4.23.1—Humphries: 31). The *Testament of Solomon* describes exactly this type of situation: With the assistance of a magic ring received from God through the archangel Uriel, king Solomon obtains power over the chieftain of the demons and compels him to put all the other demons and impure spirits in chains and bring them before his royal throne (*Testament of Solomon* 1: 1–3, 6). Some magic papyri corroborate the ancient usage of this method, offering instructions on certain rites through which it was supposedly possible to obtain an allied spirit as a permanent superhuman helper (PMG I. 54ff; I.181ff; IV.170ff; IV.199ff—Smith: 74). Biblical and Rab-

binic traditions also speak of individuals who wanted to be possessed by a spirit in order to gain extraordinary capacities like predicting the future or the authority to command other beings from the spiritual world (Smith: 77–80).

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### Accusing an exorcist of being possessed by an evil spirit . . . was equivalent to suspecting him of witchcraft.

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When the spirit used as a helper was an evil spirit or could raise doubts about its moral character, this practice involved great risks and ambiguities. As the very name suggests, evil spirits were not considered reliable; so whoever dealt with them ran the risk of being dominated or possessed by them, thus becoming a threat for his fellow men. But any exorcist with the capacity of obtaining power from an evil spirit without letting it dominate him was no less suspicious, since the mere fact of looking for help from such beings could be interpreted as an indication of harboring evil intentions. Thus, among the practices that ancient texts most frequently associate with witchcraft (*goeteia*) is the capture and enslavement of powerful spirits, preferably the spirits of individuals who had suffered violent or untimely deaths (Stratton: 118ff). The suspicions awakened by dealing with spirits is magnificently expressed by Plato in *Laws* 932eff, where he recommends prison sentences for those who claim to be capable of guiding the souls of the dead and persuading the gods to do whatever they request. Although Plato does not seem to share this belief, he maintained that frightening people by making them believe they could be harmed through *goeteia* was a serious crime.

From the preceding data and reflections, we can thus conclude that accusing an exorcist of being possessed by an evil spirit or expelling demons with its help was equivalent to suspecting him of witchcraft. In the context of Jewish monotheism, which forbids any type of dealing with spiritual beings different from Yahweh and the members of his heavenly court, a clear accusation of idolatry would be added to this suspicion (Humphries: 22). In this context, the best defense an exorcist could use against the suspicions aroused by his dealings with spirits would be to convince people that he was acting selflessly (Reimer) and under the patronage of a central spirit.

### The Typical Nature of the Accusations and the Double Origin of the Controversies

If Lewis' model applied to the case of Jesus supports the hypothesis that the accusation of expelling demons by the power of a powerful demon was used against Jesus on more than one occasion, literary analysis of the texts points in the same direction. We notice, indeed, that the accusations and replies contained in these texts do not fully agree in the identification of the demon supposedly linked to Jesus. In Matthew 12:24 and Luke 11:15, the accusation mentions Beelzebul, which is identified with the chief of demons. However, Jesus' first reply (c) mentions only Satan, and the second (d) uses the name of Beelzebul again, but not the title "chief of demons." In Mark 3:22, we find two different accusations side by side: being possessed by Beelzebul, and expelling demons by the power of the chief of demons. On the other hand, Jesus' sole response in Mark is reply (c), which, as I have already pointed out, mentions only Satan. This disparity calls for an explanation, still more so if we take into account that Jewish literature prior to Christianity never identified Satan with Beelzebul (Mann: 253).

This confusion concerning the names and titles of demons seems to indicate that the present accusations are the result of a flexible process of transmission that has merged different accusation formulae used by Jesus' enemies at different times. Two formulae seem to be at the origin of this mixture: (b<sub>1</sub>) in which Jesus is accused of expelling demons by the power of the chief of demons, and (b<sub>2</sub>) in which he is accused of expelling demons by the power of Beelzebul.

The accusations transmitted by Matthew and Luke, which would come from Q, would have mixed the two original accusations (b<sub>1</sub>) and (b<sub>2</sub>) identifying the chief of demons with Beelzebul. The accusation that originated the controversy in Mark would be (b<sub>1</sub>) alone, but the Gospel redactor would have added the accusation of being possessed for literary reasons.

In fact, all the exegetes agree that the present narrative framework of the controversy in Mark is not original, but is a product of the redactional and compositional elaboration of the Gospel. This narrative framework was laid out by setting the controversy between two scenes in which Jesus' relatives play one of the main roles. The end product of this framing operation is a tryptic of polemical episodes (Dschulnigg: 121; Collins: 225). The side scenes, Mark

3:20–21 and Mark 3:31–35, describe two particularly tense encounters between Jesus and some members of his family. In the first, which is the only one we are interested in, the relatives of Jesus wanted to take him with them because they thought he was “out of his mind” (v 21b). If we take into account that in Jesus’ cultural context ecstatic behavior was frequently attributed to spiritual possession, the addition at the end of the scene of an accusation referring to this phenomenon cannot be considered misguided at all. Therefore, the accusation of being possessed, which actually belongs to the double accusation in the Markan controversy, could have come from a traditional story underlying the first scene, where it would figure as its conclusion. Another possibility is that Mark himself created this accusation in order to bridge the narrative gap between the first scene of the tryptic and the controversy. In either case, Mark would have been responsible for linking the accusation of being possessed to the accusation ( $b_1$ ) of expelling demons by the power of the chief of demons.

The name Beelzebul is a strange element in Mark’s text. It does not figure in any of the responses attributed to Jesus in the controversy nor in any other place in this Gospel. Its occurrence in Mark 3:22 is one of the arguments set forth by those who maintain that the controversy in Mark depends on the controversy in Q. However, this occurrence allows for other possible explanations which, in addition, are compatible with the hypothesis here defended according to which the traditional controversy known by Mark contained only the accusation ( $b_1$ ).

One of these possible explanations is that the name “Beelzebul” entered Mark’s text as part of the accusation “He has Beelzebul,” with which the traditional substratum in the first scene would have ended, or with which Mark would have created a redactional link between the two first scenes of his tryptic. In the second case, Mark may have known that Jesus had been accused of being possessed by Beelzebul thanks to some traditional independent saying, similar, perhaps, to that in Matthew 10:25 (Fleddermann 2004: 18–27).

Another possible explanation of the occurrence of the name Beelzebul in Mark 3:22, which I consider the most plausible, would be that this name is a late addition introduced by a copyist in order to harmonize the Gospel texts. In fact, if we take into account that from a very early date Matthew’s Gospel was much more appreciated and widely known than Mark’s, it is not at all unthinkable that copyists

were inclined to harmonize Mark’s text with that of Matthew. The accusation in Matthew’s controversy about Jesus’ exorcist power and, perhaps the previously mentioned saying in Matthew 10:25, would have favored the addition of the name “Beelzebul” in the double accusation of Mark’s controversy. The absence of textual testimonies of the Markan accusation without the name of “Beelzebul” may be explained by the fact that the first textual testimony of Mark’s Gospel ( $P^{45}$ ) dates from the third century, when the Gospel of Matthew was already largely widespread and, therefore, it was late enough for this hypothetical harmonization to have taken place and been consolidated.

One literary indication that supports this latter explanation is the inclusion formed by the accusations contained in verses 22a and 30, with which Mark deliberately marked the limits of the controversy. In these two verses, Jesus is accused of being possessed, and in both verses the accusations take the same form, with the verb *ekhein*: “he has x.” Verse 30 is clearly a redactional remark by Mark, in which the narrator seems to think he is reproducing the accusation that gave rise to the controversy (Gaundry: 170; Dschulnigg: 126; Gnlika: 171; Guelich: 170–71, 174). But verse 30 does not mention Beelzebul. Instead it refers to the possessing entity in a much more unspecific way: “for they had said: he has an unclean spirit.” So it is plausible that Mark’s original expression in the first prong of the inclusion was identical to the one the evangelist uses again in his final remark and so did not include the name “Beelzebul” either.

If we accept that the accusation “he has Beelzebul” does not belong to the traditional unit that underlies the actual Markan controversy, the extant Gospel texts allow us to think that in the origin of the three synoptic controversies there were not one but two different accusations ( $b_1$ ) and ( $b_2$ ). The first one ( $b_1$ ), which mentions the chief of demons, would have soon become connected with response (c), which mentions “Satan”, a name frequently used in intertestamental literature to refer to a powerful demon. The second, ( $b_2$ ), would have been transmitted from the first moment with the reply (d), which repeats the accusation itself in the form of a counterfactual conditional. Accusations ( $b_1$ ) and ( $b_2$ ) with their respective answers would have formed two brief controversies that would have been transmitted independently as part of the oral tradition about Jesus. For the remaining part of this study, I will refer to them as the “short Satan controversy” and the “short Beelzebul controversy” respectively.

## Miquel, "How to Discredit an Inconvenient Exorcist"

The following chart summarizes their contents.

| The short Satan Controversy   | The short Beelzebul controversy  |
|---|--|
| Accusation against Jesus ( $b_1$ ):<br>Expelling demons by the power of the chief of demons   | Accusation against Jesus ( $b_2$ ):<br>Expelling demons by the power of Beelzebul  |
| Jesus' response (c):<br>As it happens with divided kingdoms and/or families, if Satan rises up against himself, he will be destroyed. | Jesus' response (d):<br>If I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they shall be your judges.<br>But if it is by the finger/spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has overtaken you. |

### History of the Tradition

Sellew's research on conglomerates of sayings allows us to consider the possibility that the oral tradition not only created and transmitted the two short controversies but also developed them in the form of conglomerates by gradually adding new answers from Jesus. In turn, this possibility permits us to imagine that developments from both short controversies were contained in the oral tradition used by the author of Q, while the oral tradition used by Mark only included the conglomerate originated from the short Satan controversy. With these suppositions, it is not difficult to conjecture the three main stages in which the formation process of the three synoptic controversies would have been divided.

1<sup>st</sup> Stage: The formation of the oral tradition.

- The two short controversies, ( $b_1+c$ ) and ( $b_2+d$ ) are created.
- The parable of the strong man is added to the short Satan controversy producing the conglomerate ( $b_1+c+e$ ), which I will refer to as the "expanded Satan controversy."

2<sup>nd</sup> Stage: The oral tradition crystallizes in written documents.

- The conglomerate ( $b_1+c+e$ ) is incorporated in the Gospel of Mark.
- The short Beelzebul controversy and the expanded Satan controversy are merged in the pen of the redactor of Q who formulates the accusation of his new controversy by identifying Beelzebul with the chief of demons.

3<sup>rd</sup> Stage: The Gospels of Matthew and Luke are composed taking as their basis the Gospel of Mark and the Q document.

- In Matthew 12:22–32, Matthew merges the controversies in Mark and in Q, and he also creates the doublet Matthew 9:32–34.
- Luke only incorporates in his controversy the elements of the Q document.

In the following sections I will propose coherent explanations of the details of the process in its first and second stages. As I indicated above, the third stage has been satisfactorily explained in other studies.

#### *The short Satan controversy ( $b_1+c$ )*

The argument (c) used as a reply to the accusation of expelling demons by the chief of demons is a piece of demonological knowledge that makes use of proverbial sentences concerning the consequences of internal discord in kingdoms and/or families to speak about the destruction of Satan. From a literary viewpoint, it is a meaningfully self-consistent simile that could have existed independently before becoming part of the controversy. If this were the case, it could be a creation of Jesus or a traditional saying adopted by Jesus or his followers in order to clarify some aspects of his own exorcist practice.

The formula in the oral tradition that was used to link the response (c) with the accusation must have been much simpler than those used in the present texts; probably a mere "and he said." In fact, the majority of exegetes think that at least Mark 3:23a, and Matthew 12:25a are redactional (Gnilka: 171; Davies & Allison: 336).

Although there are differences between the three synoptic versions of this response (c) as far as the logical structure and vocabulary are concerned, Matthew's and Luke's versions are much more similar to each other than either one is to Mark's. Undoubtedly, this fact reflects the dependency of the first two on the version of (c) used in the Q document. On the other hand, all the differences between Matthew's and Luke's versions can be explained by the differences in the way one and the other dealt with their sources, that is, as modifications that would have taken place in the 3<sup>rd</sup> stage of the formation of the controversies.

The most relevant difference between the version in Mark and the version in Q, reflected in Matthew and Luke, con-



cerns the linguistic modality of the reply. In the first case, Jesus concludes his response by definitely affirming that Satan will destroy himself. In the second, however, he concludes by asking if, under his accusers' premise, could it be otherwise (*The Critical Edition of Q*: 226–28). If we assume that Mark's version of (c) is the closest to the oral version, this main difference can be explained as the result of the modifications made by the redactor of Q when merging the material of the conglomerate originated from the short Satan controversy with that of the short Beelzebul controversy. As I will argue, the change from the positive to the interrogative construction in the response (c) would have been due to the need to make it compatible with the response (d) and the desire to dispel suspicions about perverse exorcist practices that the positive construction could raise.

Mark's version of (c) admits two different interpretations that the tradents were probably aware of, but neither would have fully satisfied the redactor of Q. According to the first interpretation, Jesus would be arguing against the possibility of Satan expelling Satan. According to the second, Jesus' argument tried to show how Satan could end up destroying himself. In order to facilitate the discussion, I will refer to these two interpretations as the "argument from impossibility" and "argument from possibility" respectively.

The argument from impossibility is a *reductio ad absurdum* argument (Humphries). The example of the divided kingdom and the divided house shows that if Satan expelled demons from his own clientele, he would be bringing about his own fall. However, if it is admitted that Satan has not yet lost his power over the world of men, it is impossible to maintain that Jesus has used Satan to fight against the possessing demons. This interpretation of the response (c) is not compatible with the response (d), as the latter implies that the arrival of the kingdom of God is indeed bringing about the fall of the demons.

The argument from possibility, however, implicitly accepts the thesis of the accusers. Jesus would admit he was using the power of the chief of demons because this would enable him to put forth the premise that in his exorcism Satan was forced to confront his own family or clientele. In this case, Jesus' defense consists of showing that, in fact, his procedure is a strategy to achieve Satan's self destruction (Rousseau: 130–31; Sellw: 106). Besides being incoherent with the response (d), which maintains that Jesus' powers as an exorcist do not come from the chief of demons but from God, this in-

terpretation does not eliminate the suspicion that Jesus could be using his powers as an exorcist for perverse ends.

The previous reflections demonstrate that if the redactor of Q knew the response (c) in its positive Markan formulation, he had good reasons to change it, and that the slight change consisting of the modification of the linguistic modality in the conclusion would have been enough to solve all of his problems. This slight change makes Jesus' response (c) a sufficiently ambiguous rhetorical question from which it is not possible to infer that Jesus is admitting his accuser's thesis. At the same time, it eliminates its original incompatibility with the second response (d), which is the one to which the redactor of Q subscribes. Thus, we can conclude that the hypothesis according to which the oral version of (c) was quite similar to the one we find today in the Gospel of Mark is very plausible.

#### *The expanded Satan controversy ( $b_1 + c + e$ )*

According to the conclusion in the previous section, the response (c) contained in the brief Satan controversy roughly agreed with the version transmitted by Mark. One of the possible, and probably the most authentic, interpretations of this response is that Jesus admits to be using Satan's power strategically to bring about Satan's self destruction.

As I pointed out in the section on Applying Lewis' Model to Jesus, above, dominating a powerful spirit to force it to expel inferior possessing spirits was a common practice in the ancient world. Obviously, the more powerful the dominated spirit was, the greater the exorcist's power. The advantages that dominating a powerful evil spirit gave an exorcist were, however, impaired by the suspicions aroused by this practice among the people. Thus, it is not strange that Jesus' followers who were interested in transmitting the controversy ( $b_1 + c$ ) would soon find it advisable to add some saying ascribed to Jesus to it that would dispel any possible doubt about his relationship with Satan. The parable of the strong man would have had precisely that function.

The parable of the strong man (e) appears in our texts in two quite different forms: ( $e_1$ ) in Mark 3:27 and Matthew 12:29, and ( $e_2$ ) in Luke 11:21–22. Furthermore, there is a parallel of Mark's version in logion 35 of the *Gospel of Thomas*. In all the versions, its content speaks about the difficulty of dispossessing a strong man and the means to achieve it. Although all these forms and versions of the para-



ble are independent literary units, it is difficult to guess what the original intention of their messages was. Some authors maintain that at least some of these versions are creative rereadings of the Greek version of Isaiah 49:24–25, with which they share the key terms *skula* (spoils) and *skhuros* (strong). (Sorensen: 140–42). This prophetic oracle uses the images of the strong man and the giant's booty to announce that, in spite of Babylon's power, God will free the Jews captured by this nation:

Will any one take spoils from a giant?; and if one should take captives unjustly, shall he be delivered? For thus said the Lord, If one should take a giant captive, he shall take spoils, and he who takes from a mighty one shall be delivered: for I will plead thy cause, and I will deliver thy children.

Other authors suggest that these sayings are part of a broad set of metaphors belonging to the very tradition about Jesus that uses the images of the thief (Luke 12:39, Matt 24:43, 1 Thess 5:2; 2 Pet 3:10; Rev 3:3; 16:15), the rival or the usurper to express the violent nature of the arrival of the kingdom of God (Oakman).

Whatever meaning ( $e_1$ ) and ( $e_2$ ) could have had during their previous independent existence, it is clear that those who included them in the controversies we are studying intended them to be read metaphorically in an exorcist context. The strong man that is to be dispossessed stands for the possessing demon, his goods or booty are the possessed victims, and the assailant is the exorcist who frees them from the demon's power.

The parables of the strong man add one more exonerating explanation of Jesus' use of the chief of demons in his exorcisms. Mark 3:27 states that in order to dispossess the demon, it is necessary to bind him first. According to Luke 11:21–22, what needs to be done first is to defeat and disarm him. In both cases, the strategy consists of dominating the strong man without destroying him, exactly the same strategy that Solomon uses in the *Testament* known by his name. Those mistrusting the use Jesus could have made of a powerful demon in his exorcism are thus assured that the demon in question had been previously subdued.

The apologetic argument implicit in the parable of the strong man is clearly different from that of the reply (c). The first one deals with dominating the demon, the second one with its self destruction. This indicates that the two elements

(c) and (e) of the controversy were originally independent of each other and that they would have been incorporated in the conglomerate at different stages of its development. However, both reflect concern for clearing up the suspicion that Jesus was dealing with powerful demons to achieve perverse, antisocial or selfish ends.

Parable ( $e_1$ ) and the reply (c) contain the same stitch word *oikia* (home, family), which, however, does not appear in parable ( $e_2$ ). This suggests that the parable of the strong man was incorporated to the short Satan controversy in an identical or very similar version to what we find in Mark today (Crossan: 190). The replacement of ( $e_1$ ) by ( $e_2$ ) in the Gospel of Luke can be explained as an intervention of the redactor of Q or of Luke himself.

#### *The short Beelzebul controversy ( $b_2 + d$ )*

Matthew 12:24.27–28 and Luke 11:15.19–20 are so similar that there is no doubt that they came from the same source. This common source would be Q, in which the short Beelzebul controversy ( $b_2 + d$ ) would have been previously incorporated.

The identification of the accusers as Pharisees is probably due to Matthew, because a redactional analysis of his Gospel as a whole indicates that the members of this Judean group perform the paradigmatic function of "Jesus' enemies" in it. The other differences between the two versions of the accusation are only syntactical, thus allowing us to attribute them to variations typical of oral transmission or to redactional interventions on the part of the evangelists.

The only difference between Matthew's and Luke's versions of reply (d) pertains to the manner in which they describe Jesus' power to expel demons: With the spirit of God, according to Matthew, with the finger of God, according to Luke. Most exegetes think that in this case it was still Matthew who modified the source. There are two arguments to back up this thesis: first, that Luke did not seem to have any reason to replace "spirit of God" with "finger of God"; second, that Matthew seemed to have had reasons to do just the opposite. We know, in fact, that Luke granted a key role to the figure of the spirit of God in all of his writings (Fitzmyer: 227–31). Therefore, it is unlikely that he would eliminate a reference to it from his source. However, Matthew, like Mark but unlike Luke, concludes his controversy with the saying about the blasphemy (g). In the context of

Mark's and Matthew's controversies, this saying presupposes that those accusing Jesus had blasphemed against the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, the only accusation that comes from the Pharisees in Matthew's controversy is that Jesus expels demons by Beelzebul, the chief of demons. It is, then, extremely important for this evangelist to make it clear that the Pharisees have committed blasphemy by identifying the Holy Spirit with a demon (Beelzebul). But this error in identification becomes explicit only when Jesus defends himself by saying that he expels demons with the spirit of God. Therefore, if Matthew found the term "finger" instead of "spirit" in his source, he would have had a good reason to change it. On the other hand, although Matthew does not grant the Holy Spirit as large a role as Luke, the fact that he put the Beelzebul controversy immediately after a quotation of the Scriptures (Matt 12:18–21) in which God speaks of "his beloved servant," "in whom he will put his Spirit" (Isaiah 42:1–2), is one further reason to attribute this change to him (Luz: 341, n. 24). It is indeed obvious that, according to Matthew, this prophetic word has been fulfilled in Jesus.

The expression "finger of God" finds its oldest and sole testimony in the Old Testament in Exodus 8:15, where it comes from the mouth of the Egyptian sages who competed with Moses and Aaron to see who could work the greatest wonders. After unsuccessfully trying to reproduce a mosquito plague, the Egyptian sages exclaim: "It is the finger of Elohim." Although the existence of this illustrious testimony could make us think that the synoptic reference in Q 11:19 is due to a redactor wishing to legitimize Jesus' exorcisms with the Scriptures, there are other data that point in a different direction. The expression appears again in an invocation directed to the god Cronos engraved on an Egyptian *ostrakon* from the Roman period. In it, an oath is sworn by the "finger of God" so that Cronos will stop a certain person from communicating with another. The form and contents of the invocation indicate that this is a ritual formula belonging to the morally ambiguous and potentially dangerous world of magic and that it was used to contact with the spiritual world (Couroyer: 482). This finding is coherent with the information offered by literary sources from the Hellenistic and Roman periods about the fame of Jewish magic and the exaltation of Moses as a wonder worker (Koskenniemi: 98). In view of these data, it should not surprise us that experts on spirits in Jesus' culture referred to the power awarded by the God of the Jews with the expression "finger of God."

Nevertheless, the magical connotations of the invocation found in the *oskhatron* and the fact that the expression does not appear in any other literary work from this period suggest that its use was mainly circumscribed to those marginal ritual contexts which the social environment would have probably identified as witchcraft.

Although the almost complete parallelism between Matthew 12:27–28 and Luke 11:19–20 leaves little doubt about the formulation of the response (d) in the Q document, the reference it contains to the arrival of the kingdom of God (Matt 12:28; Luke 11:20) has made it the object of much debate. The debate is concerned with the meaning of the response as much as with its literary origin, and is always held in the wider context of the discussion about the historical authenticity of that reference. In the following paragraphs, I will attempt to show that an anthropologically contextualized reading of the texts may help to solve the problems under discussion.

The first part of Jesus' defense (d) (Matt 12:27; Luke 11:19) is an *ad hominem* argument in the form of a rhetorical question: "And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they shall be your judges." The greatest difficulty in interpreting these words is to know who the supposed exorcists that Jesus refers to as "your sons" are, and why they are going to take on the role of judges in relation to the accusers. Does Jesus also consider them enemies, or is he suggesting that they could be on his side? It is mainly the exegetes who deny that Judeans opposed to Jesus could carry out successful exorcism under the patronage of God that are concerned with this point (Räissänen: 125–26).

One interpretation which already has a long history and solves this issue is the one based on the hypothesis that the sons of the accusers in this particular controversy were also disciples of Jesus (Shirok). Their future capacity to judge would simply be a consequence of Jesus' and his followers' expected eschatological victory. This would have already been announced in Luke 22:28–30 and Matthew 19:28, two nearly parallel texts which very probably came from Q. The main objection to this proposal is that the hypothesis it is based on grants a particular supposition which is not mentioned in the controversy but is indispensable to understand it.

In order for an oral tradition to be transmitted in an independent manner, it must have meaning by itself, that is, it must be understandable without other presuppositions but the socially shared knowledge. Therefore, although it is not

impossible that those who criticized Jesus' exorcisms on one particular occasion had sons amongst his disciples, if this information had been necessary to understand Jesus' defensive response, those transmitting the controversy would have made it explicit. If they did not do so, it was because the controversy could be understood without that supposition.

Most of the other proposed interpretations understand the term "son" in the metaphorical sense of "follower" or "supporter." With this presupposition, which is broadly supported by the literary context, efforts are concentrated on understanding the logic of the argument Jesus used to answer his opponents. All these interpretations agree in that Jesus' rhetorical question intended to redirect the accusation against him towards the exorcists from his accusers' clientele. The aim of this strategy would be to make these exorcists stand up against their own leaders.

Although I fully agree with this understanding of the meaning of "sons" in (d), I think that Lewis' anthropological model can help us to make this meaning a bit more precise. In the section on Lewis' Model, above, we saw that the ritual procedures used by moral exorcists often include trial-like rites intended to force a confession of guilt and/or the denunciation of a witch from the possessed person. The ease with which a prestigious exorcist can manipulate these procedures makes him a potentially dangerous person whom it would be better not to confront. When considered from this cultural background, Jesus' enigmatic words become a defensive strategy full of meaning. When accused, Jesus suggests to his accusers that they are making exactly the same charge against the exorcists of their own clientele, and he warns them of the terrible consequences that becoming their enemies would imply.

This last interpretation also requires that the audience to this controversy should share with the transmitters some information that is not explicit in the text. However, in this case, the information needed does not refer to a particular hypothetical event in Jesus' life—that some of his disciples' fathers criticized his exorcisms—but to cultural knowledge we can assume was shared by all the people socialized in the ancient Mediterranean area. The use of an anthropological model has enabled us to reconstruct typical patterns of thought and behavior that were in force in that cultural environment, and use them to imagine the context of meaning presupposed by the texts.

The second part of Jesus' response (Matt 12:28, Luke

11:20) sets up a clear connection between the exorcisms carried out by the spirit/finger of God and the arrival of the kingdom of God: "But if it is by the spirit/finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has overtaken you." The greatest difficulty we find when trying to interpret it is not linguistic but theological and refers to the apparent contradiction of Jesus including his enemies among those receiving the kingdom of God (Meier: 407–13; Räissänen: 127–33).

In order to solve this problem, some exegetes have argued that the addressees of the second part of the response are not the same as those of the first, and that this implies that the two parts have different literary origins, having been secondarily connected by a redactor. According to this opinion, Matthew 12:28 // Luke 11:20 would originally have been an independent saying, unrelated to the controversy, whose true addressees would have been Jesus' followers or the whole people of Israel. But careful examination of the expression used in this sentence will show that the aforementioned contradiction is only apparent, and there is therefore no reason to disconnect the sentence from its present context in the controversy.

The Greek verb *phthanō*, translated here as "overtake," does not appear anywhere else in the Gospels. In our texts this verb is followed by the preposition *epi* and a pronoun in the accusative, resulting in a phrasal verb that can be translated as: "to run over" or "to overtake aggressively" the reference of the direct object (see, for example, Judges 20:34.42 in the LXX). This meaning is the most coherent one with the polemical nature of the controversy. Uttered by Jesus, this sentence would not be a neutral announcement of the arrival of the kingdom of God in connection with his exorcism, nor the sort of announcement that he could have addressed to an undefined audience, to his followers or to Israel as a whole. This erroneous identification of the potential addressees is what creates the false problem of explaining how Jesus could declare that his enemies would participate in the kingdom of God. But, on the contrary, we can assume that this sentence has an aggressive connotation (Sanders: 177). Jesus would have used it to threaten his accusers by announcing the imminent arrival of something they feared: the effective victory of a kingdom of God understood in the terms in which Jesus understood it, a kingdom of God that meant displacing the social order that Jesus' healing attitude implicitly criticized. According to these connotations, Matthew 12:28b // Luke 11:20b could be translated as: "Be careful, because the kingdom of God has overtaken you!"

Thus interpreted, the second part of response (d) presupposes a polemical context. Consequently it could not have been transmitted as an independent saying. The accusation ( $b_2$ ) of expelling demons with the help of Beelzebul offers an adequate and sufficient controversial context for any reader or hearer to be able to grasp its entire meaning (Räissänen: 127–32). Moreover, there are reasons to think that it is not an after Easter creation secondarily attached to the accusation. As we explained at the start of this section, Jesus' expression "finger of God" evokes the context of magical practices and witchcraft. Since the primitive post Easter communities soon make efforts to disconnect Jesus' extraordinary actions from these socially and morally ambiguous rituals, it does not seem plausible that they would falsely attribute such a suspiciously formulated saying to him. In fact, it is an expression which is not used again in primitive Christian literature. This allows us to conclude that there is a high probability that accusation ( $b_2$ ) and response (d) were always transmitted together and that the short Beelzebul controversy they make up reflects typical arguments used in historical controversies related to Jesus' exorcist practice.

#### *The Satan controversy in the Gospel of Mark*

According to the points put forth in the section on The Typical Nature of the Accusations, the original controversy about Jesus' exorcist power in Mark begins with the accusation ( $b_1$ ) of casting out demons by the chief of demons, which corresponds to the accusation in the expanded Satan controversy. The expanded Satan controversy ( $b_1+c+e$ ) was incorporated in the Gospel of Mark with the help of some redactional stitches and additions. The redactors' most obvious interventions are these:

- The link established between the controversy and the previous scene through the accusation of being possessed; this accusation probably did not mention Beelzebul.
- The final remark in v 30: "for they had said: he has an unclean spirit."
- The introduction to response (c) in v 23a: "And calling them to him, he said to them in parables."

Some authors also defend the position that it was Mark who identified the accusers with scribes from Jerusalem.

The redactional origin of the first two elements, which

make up the inclusion by which Mark has set the limits of the controversy, has already been dealt with in the aforementioned section. The redactional origin of v. 23a is deduced from Mark's frequent use of the expression "calling them to him ... , he said to them ..." to introduce Jesus' words (Mark 3:23; 7:14; 8:1; 8:34; 10:42; 12:43) as well as from the narrator's repeated remark that Jesus taught in parables (Mark 4:2.10–11.13.30.33–34; 7:17; 12:1.12; 13:28).

The Markan saying (g) on blaspheming against the Holy Spirit (Mark 3:28–29) has an autonomous meaning; so it could possibly have existed independently before being added to the controversy. This addition could have taken place in the oral stage or as a result of Mark's redactional work (Marcus: 278). Besides logion 44 of the *Gospel of Thomas*, this saying has other synoptic versions whose presence in the texts is obviously related to the hazards of the formative processes of the controversies we are studying and which, for this reason, I consider important to explain: One of these versions appears in Matthew 12:31–32, as part of Matthew's Beelzebul controversy, and the other in Luke 12:10, outside Luke's controversy in a subsequent section of the third Gospel. Once again, we see that Matthew's version can be understood as a blend of Mark's and Luke's versions. This seems to indicate that the Q document contained Luke's version of the saying in the relative place where Luke puts it (Q 12:10), while Matthew, having found another version of it in the Markan controversy, decided to incorporate it in his own controversy. But he did this only after having blended the Markan version of the saying with the version from Q, which he also knew (*The Critical Edition of Q*: 310).

#### *The Beelzebul controversy in the Q document*

My thesis is based on the supposition that the redactor of Q knew some of the units with which he composed his version of the Beelzebul controversy in the form of orally transmitted conglomerates. In particular, I assume that he knew the expanded Satan controversy ( $b_1+c+e$ ) and the short Beelzebul controversy ( $b_2+d$ ). Noticing the similarity of accusations ( $b_1$ ) and ( $b_2$ ), the redactor of Q would have combined both conglomerates to form a sole controversy. Merging the two accusations meant identifying the chief of demons with Beelzebul, thus giving rise to the formulation of the complex accusation: "He casts out demons by Beelzebul, the chief of demons." On the other hand, this same redactor would have constructed

Jesus' defense by concatenating all of the responses that appeared in one conglomerate or the other. It is logical to expect that the arrangement and readjusting of these responses would call for some redactional interventions.

The order of (b+c+d+e) common to Matthew and Luke indicates that the redactor of Q arranged Jesus' responses by inserting the reply (d) of the short Beelzebul controversy between the responses (c) and (e) of the expanded Satan controversy. This is probably what led him to modify the linguistic modality of response (c), replacing the assertive form in Mark's version for the interrogative form we now find in Matthew and Luke. Surely, if the Jesus of the Q document intended to use response (d) to reject the accusation of expelling demons by a powerful evil spirit, he could not keep a formulation of (c) that could be understood as a justification of the one exorcist strategy that his accusers were criticizing. This explains why the redactor of Q would have wanted to transform the assertive conclusion of the original response (c) into an interrogation that questions the logic of the accusers.

Other elements shared by Matthew and Luke but absent in Mark include the exorcism story (a) that functions as a narrative framework, and the saying (f) about gathering and scattering. The narrative framework (a) could have been added to the Q document during its process of composition, or could be an original element belonging to any of the two oral conglomerates that crystallized in this document. If it had been part of the Satan controversy, Mark would have eliminated it for editorial reasons, because, as we have seen, this evangelist was interested in linking the controversy about Jesus' exorcist power with the scene where his relatives intended to take him away.

The element (f) is probably an originally independent saying. The first part of it has a parallel in Mark 9:40, in a literary context entirely different from the controversy. The complete parallelism that exists between Matthew's and Luke's versions of the saying and the exact coincidence of their places within the corresponding controversies indicate that both Matthew and Luke took it from the controversy in Q. There are two possible explanations for the presence of (f) in Q: the redactor's initiative or the previous presence of the saying in an orally developed version of the short Beelzebul controversy. In the second case, we should imagine that the structure of the oral Beelzebul controversy incorporated by the redactor of Q was (a?+b<sub>2</sub>+d+f).

Besides the variation between the terms "finger" and "spirit" that I have discussed earlier, the differences in the shared chain (b+c+d+e+f) in Matthew and Luke do not pose any problems that cannot be solved with the hypothesis I am putting forth. The most relevant differences appear in response (c) and in the parable (e).

Matthew's response (c), like Mark's, contains two comparisons while Luke's only has one. Matthew and Mark compare the division of Satan with the division of a kingdom and the division of a house, while Luke only uses the first comparison. In Luke's version, the image of houses falling one upon the other is not a comparative term, but part of the description of the kingdom divided against itself. At present, it is impossible to be sure whether the reduction of the two comparisons to one was the work of the redactor of Q or of Luke. Therefore we cannot know whether Matthew followed only the version of Q or merged it with the version of Mark. *The Critical Edition of Q* prefers the second solution (226–28).

The questions raised by the differences between Matthew's and Luke's parables of the strong man are similar to the previous ones. In this case, Matthew follows Mark's parable quite closely, while Luke shows a similar but clearly different parable. Within the framework of our hypothetical explanation, the innovations can once again be attributed to the redactor of Q or to the third evangelist. *The Critical Edition of Q* attributes innovations to both, but allows an important margin of possible errors and variations in the reconstruction proposed (234).

## Conclusion

Setting Jesus' exorcisms in a socio-cultural context with the help of Lewis' model has enabled us to affirm that Jesus was socially identified as an inconvenient exorcist and, therefore, he must have been the target of recurrent accusations of witchcraft throughout his ministry. The fact that Jesus' exorcist activity was a typical trait of his ministry and the typical form of the accusations with which the defenders of the *status quo* tried to discredit him have allowed us to suppose that the three Synoptic controversies on Jesus' exorcist power have a multiple origin. In other words, there were at least two different formulas of the accusation and several defensive responses ascribed to Jesus by the pre-synoptic oral tradition. With the help of this premise and Sellev's theory



on conglomerates, I have shown that among the literary independent units that make up the synoptic controversies we can identify two different, probably oral, pre-synoptic controversies. The crystallization of these oral traditions in written texts would explain the formative process of the synoptic controversies up to the Gospel of Mark and the Q document, which is the period where the principal exegetical problems arise. The advantages of the proposed reconstruction of this process are that there is no need to presuppose any literary dependency between the Gospel of Mark and the Q document, and that it is compatible with the text reconstructed by Q Project and published in *The Critical Edition of Q*.

This same anthropological model has enabled us to understand Jesus' response (d) as a meaningful pertinent defense against the accusation of expelling demons with the help of Beelzebul. The problems that many exegetes find in Jesus' reference to other supposedly successful exorcists, as well as in the announcement to his enemies of the coming of the kingdom of God are cleared up when interpreted in the proper socio-cultural framework. Having solved these problems about meaning, the need to attribute part or all of the response to the creativity of a post Easter redactor also disappears.

One important consequence of this study is that the close link between Jesus' exorcisms and the arrival of the kingdom of God, established by reply (d) in the short Beelzebul controversy, could well go back to the historical Jesus: "But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has overtaken you" (Matt 12:28; Luke 11:20). Jesus would have understood the success of his exorcisms as proof that God was already winning the battle against the powers of evil.

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