

The Politics of Exorcism: Jesus' Reaction to Negative Labels in the Beelzebul Controversy

Santiago Guijarro

Abstract

Jesus was accused of being possessed by Beelzebul because of the exorcisms he practiced. This kind of view is characteristic of the first-century Mediterranean interpretation of deviant behavior. The purpose of this article is to determine the historical causes of this accusation and the purpose of the reaction of Jesus against it. To accomplish this we apply to the Beelzebul controversy some models developed in the study of deviant behavior. The first step is a source- and tradition-critical study of the sayings contained in it to determine which of them can be assigned to the historical Jesus. Then the accusation of being possessed by Beelzebul is considered in the framework of societal reactions to deviant behavior. Finally, the responses of Jesus are placed in the scenario of the Mediterranean challenge and riposte game and in the context of other possible reactions to negative labeling.

Accusations against Jesus are frequently mentioned not only in the writings of Christian apologists, but also in the earliest strata of the Gospel tradition (Q 7:34; Mark 2:7–16; 14:64; Matt 27:63; Luke 23:2.5; John 10:33–36). These accusations are a privileged starting point for the study of the historical Jesus because of their embarrassing nature and because of their close relationship to the trial and execution of Jesus, which are among the best documented facts of his biography.

In social-scientific analysis accusations can be described as negative labels, while titles of prominence can be identified as positive labels. Both negative and positive labels are social weapons whose purpose is to identify and control behavior that is outside the normal. Models derived from the sociological study of deviant behavior and of societal reaction have been applied recently by English speaking scholars in the study of some Second Testament documents (Luke: Malina & Neyrey 1991a and Richter; Matthew: Malina & Neyrey 1988; Paul's letters: Richter), as well as in the study of the relationships between Judaism and Christianity in the first century (Sanders; Barclay). German speaking scholars have used a particular perspective of this approach for the study of the historical Jesus (Ebertz 1987; Mödritzer; Theissen 1996) and the early Christian movement (Theissen 1989 and 1995; Ebertz 1992).

The use of modern social-scientific models to explain

the behavior of Jesus labeled deviant by his contemporaries may appear as an alien intrusion, because the culture in which they lived had its own way to understand deviance. The ancients had a broader view of the world than we do today. The inhabited world was conceived as the battleground for the cosmic forces that filled the sky and affected the world of humans. Consequently they had little difficulty in ascribing deviant behavior to the influence of evil forces (Pfuhl: 20). Modern social studies of deviant behavior, on the contrary, have a much narrower view of nature. Nevertheless, the application of models from these modern studies to reports of the demonic perspective like those in the Gospels has analytical advantages. It allows us to under-

Santiago Guijarro, S.S.L. (Pontifical Biblical Institute, Rome), S.S.D. (Pontifical University of Salamanca, Spain), is a professor in the Faculty of Theology of the Pontifical University of Salamanca (e-mail: Guijarro@upsa.es). He has been coordinator of one of the most recent translations of the Bible into Spanish (BIBLIA DE LA CASA DE LA BIBLIA and BIBLIA DE AMÉRICA), and has recently published a monograph on the disruption of the family for the sake of discipleship (FIDELIDADES EN CONFLICTO: LA RUPTURA CON LA FAMILIA POR CAUSA DEL DISCIPULADO Y DE LA MISIÓN EN LA TRADICIÓN SINÓPTICA—Salamanca, 1998). He is currently working on a book on this same subject, to be published in English.

stand the Gospels in a different way by situating those documents within the social and historical context in which the events took place, and helps us to ask new and exciting questions (Pfohl: 37–40).

Following the path opened by the above mentioned studies, in this paper I will use the social study of deviant behavior to understand one negative label attached to Jesus by his adversaries, and also his own reactions to it. As a test-case I have chosen the passage describing the “Beelzebul Controversy” (Matt 12:22–30 par), because in this cluster of sayings we find one of the best attested accusations against Jesus. This accusation and the subsequent answers of Jesus to it, are the key to interpreting his exorcisms (Yates: 43). They should be understood in the framework of the activity of Jesus as an exorcist, an activity widely attested in the Gospel tradition (Twelftree). On the other hand, the study of this accusation can provide us with some clues for understanding other accusations, because it illustrates effectively the understanding of deviant behavior shared by Jesus and his accusers. The first step of our investigation will be to clarify the source- and tradition-critical problems of this passage with a view to discovering what in it can be assigned to the historical Jesus.

Pre-Easter Traditions in the Beelzebul Controversy

In the synoptic Gospels we find four versions of the Beelzebul controversy: two in Matthew (Matt 9:32–34; 12:22–30), one in Mark (Mark 3:22–27) and one in Luke (Luke 11:14–15, 17–23). All four versions are located in different narrative settings. This means that there has been some intense redactional activity, but we are not going to engage in a redactional analysis here. More interesting for our purposes is the source-critical problem raised by the great number of minor agreements between Matthew and Luke against Mark in this text-segment. A quick look to a synopsis reveals an unusual complexity in the relationships among the four extant versions. The study of the verbal agreements among them, and especially the above mentioned minor agreements, have produced different proposals about the sources used by the evangelists. The common view among the scholars is that behind these four versions there were two independent sources (Mark and Q), which Matthew and Luke used with different purposes. But not all scholars agree with this view.

A. Fuchs, in a documented monograph on this passage, suggests that the four versions depend on the canonical text of Mark, and that the minor agreements of Matthew and

Luke should be explained by a later redaction of Mark, which he calls Deutero-Mark. All of these minor agreements, argues Fuchs, reveal a unitary view, so that they can be attributed to the same redactional work. This redactional work was motivated by a new situation in the life of the community in which it was crucial to understand the exorcisms practiced by Jesus (1980:109–14). If Fuchs is right, then the earliest report of the controversy is to be found in Mark and perhaps in the two sayings of Q included by Deutero-Mark in his revised version of canonical Mark (Q 11:19–20, 23).

Fuchs’s thesis has not been accepted in subsequent scholarly discussion. His plea in favor of Deutero-Mark has been rejected after a close analysis of this same passage (Boring: 618; Trunk: 56–57). On the other hand, the view that before Matthew and Luke there were two independent versions of this controversy has recently gained greater support (Sellew: 99–100; Oakman: 112–13; Humphries; Kollmann: 174). These and other scholars have assembled a quite convincing amount of evidence to show that Mark and Q represent two independent versions of this controversy (Boring: 615–16). But at the same time, they have also stressed their agreement as to the content and as to the order, as the following table shows:

	Independent Units	Mark	Q (Luke)
1	Narrative Introduction (Exorcism)		11:14
2	Accusation(s)	3:22	11:15
3	Answer A (Kingdom divided)	3:23–26	11:17–18
4	Answer B (By the Spirit of God)		11:19–20
5	Answer C (The Strong one despoiled)	3:27	11:21–22
6	Answer D (For or against me)		11:23
7	Conclusion A (Sin against the Spirit)	3:28–30	
8	Conclusion B (Returning spirit)		11:24–26

Especially striking is the coincidence in the order of accusation (2), answer A (3), and C (5), along with the fact that the accusation and the long argument developed in answer A have a similar form in both versions. These coincidences suggest that Mark and Q might depend on an earlier (oral) version. Trunk assigns (2), (3), and (5) to this common oral tradition, and (1), (4), (6), and (8) to the compositional work of Q. According to him, conclusion A (7) is clearly a conclusion introduced by Mark in view of

new problems raised in his community (89–90). This proposal basically matches other attempts to explain the history of the composition of the Q version (Schürmann: 574), and its final redaction according to ancient rhetorical techniques (Crossan 1983: 184–91; Humphries: 127–39).

This compositional process shows that Mark, Q, and the traditions behind them rely on a wider oral tradition (Sellew: 96–98, 102–03), witnessed by the presence of one of these sayings in the Gospel of Thomas (GThom 35 = Mark 3:27 and Q 11:21–22). It will be our next task to ascertain which of the individual units of the oral tradition can be assigned to the *Sitz im Leben* of the historical Jesus.

Narrative introduction (Matt 12:22–23;
9:32–33; Luke 11:14)

This is one of the characteristic features of the Q version, which is best attested by Luke and Matt 9:32–33a. In spite of its brevity, it contains a complete healing account with the description of the ailment (a deaf man), the act of healing (the demon is cast out), the confirmation of healing (he spoke) and the reaction of the bystanders (they were astonished). It can be argued that Mark chose to omit an introduction of this sort when incorporating this unit into his narrative (Sellew 1988: 100–01; Twelftree 1993: 103–04). But there are sounder reasons to think that this introduction was added in the final redaction of Q (Schürmann 1992: 574), following the well attested method of elaborating *chreiai* in ancient rhetorical schools. The elaborated *chreiai* used to begin with a word of praise, which here has been replaced by a concise account of a successful exorcism (Humphries 1993: 127).

This exorcism might be located in the activity of Jesus, but due to his abbreviated form it can be considered a secondary composition. In spite of this, it represents a probable setting in which the accusation can be located.

Accusation/s (Matt 12:24; 9:34;
Mark 3:22; Luke 11:15)

Matthew and Luke seem to follow the Q version, best attested as in the previous case by Matt 9:34 and Luke. The identification of the accusers is different in the three Gospels (Matt: Pharisees; Mark: scribes; Luke: some of them), and this makes it difficult to know who were the original accusers of Jesus (Twelftree: 104). All we can say is that Luke's anonymous accusers and Mark's scribes are to be preferred to Matthew's Pharisees.

The central point in this unit is the number of accusations and their content. Mark has two: "that he is possessed

by Beelzebul, and that he cast out demons with the power of the Prince of demons." Q, faithfully followed here by Luke and Matthew's two accounts, had only one: "that he casts out the demons by the power of Beelzebul, the Prince of demons." As Kollmann has suggested (175; see also Trunk: 57), it was probably Mark who duplicated the accusation when he inserted this controversy in his narrative, trying to relate the attitudes of his relatives (Mark 3:22: *hoti exestē*) to that of his adversaries (Mark 3:22b: *Beelzebul echei*; 3:30: *pneuma akhatharton echei*). So we conclude that Q has preserved the oldest form of the accusation.

That this accusation contains a charge against the historical Jesus can scarcely be doubted (Twelftree: 106; Kollmann: 179). In addition to Mark and Q, it is attested in two other independent sources: three times in John (7:20 and 8:48–52: *daimonion echei*; Jn 10:20–21: *daimonion echei kai mainetai*), and once in M (Matt 10:25: *Beelzebul*). On the other hand, it is quite improbable that such an accusation could have been created by the early church. Finally, this accusation refers to one widely attested activity of Jesus (his exorcisms), an activity that was not denied even by his adversaries.

Answer A (Matt 12:25–26;
Mark 3:23–26; Luke 11:17–18a)

The narrative introduction and the initial question of Mark's version (Mark 3:23) are due, most probably, to his redactional activity. Apart from that, Jesus' response has a tripartite form in Mark and Matthew, and a bipartite form in Luke. This is striking, because Matthew's wording is closer to that of Luke. We may consider two possibilities: (a) Luke represents the original form of Q, and Matthew has modified it in view of the Markan version; (b) Matthew represents the original form of Q, and Luke has abbreviated it, stressing the reference to the divided kingdom. In any case we can be sure that in the oral tradition the saying of the divided kingdom and the conclusion were together. We can even say that the tripartite structure is characteristic of oral discourse, and so that the version of Matthew could have preserved the earliest form of this tradition (Sellew: 103–04). It can also be said that this saying was originally independent of the preceding accusation both because it does not answer directly to it and because of the different name given to the Prince of demons, "Satan" rather than "Beelzebul."

In spite of that, there are no reasons to challenge the attribution of this saying to the historical Jesus. It does use a proverb of everyday wisdom, but this proverb is part of an argumentative answer to the accusation of being allied to

Satan. As we shall see later, this kind of argument fits the social and political situation in Galilee in the time of Jesus extremely well (Oakman: 114–22).

Answer B (Matt 12:27–28; Luke 11:19–20)

Matthew's and Luke's version of this saying agree except for one word (Matt: by the Spirit of God; Luke: by the finger of God). Both have borrowed it from Q, but we cannot be sure who has preserved its original version (Meier: 407–11; Crossan 1983: 180).

Since Bultmann (14), the relationship between Q 11:19 and 11:20 has been considered problematic because it implies that other exorcists were casting out demons by the power of the Spirit of God, and this activity was supposed to be peculiar to Jesus. This difficulty rests upon the presupposition that the word *sons* has a metaphorical meaning and refers to other Israelite exorcists (Twelftree: 32 and 39–40). But the difficulty disappears if we identify the accusers of Jesus with the fathers of some of his disciples who were casting out demons, as commissioned by him (Shirock: 48–51; Guijarro 1998: 331).

This saying has been almost unanimously attributed to the historical Jesus (Meier: 404). In fact its content and form make a strong case in favor of its historicity. The kingdom of God was a central concern in the preaching of Jesus. The saying relates its initial coming to Jesus' exorcisms, something that the early Church never did. Moreover, the use of the antithetical parallelism is characteristic of Jesus, and so is the use of *ekballein* in the context of exorcisms. The fact that this word is used in the Septuagint in the context of defense against an enemy may help us to understand the exorcisms of Jesus as hostility against God's enemies in order that his purpose, the coming of the kingdom of God, would be fulfilled (Twelftree: 110; Kollmann: 182).

*Answer C (Matt 12:29; Mark 3:27;
Luke 11:21–22; GThom 35)*

The independent attestation of this saying in the Gospel of Thomas is a sign of its secondary attachment to the original *chreia*. This attachment took place most probably in the oral tradition, because we find it in Mark and in Q. Crossan considers it a good example of an aphoristic conclusion (1983: 188–90). The Markan version might have preserved the form of its oral version, attested also by Matthew (Q?) and by the Gospel of Thomas (Sellew: 104). The different version that we read in Luke can be explained as due to Q's elaboration or, more probably, to the redaction of Luke.

The fact of its similarity to the saying about the defeat

of Satan (Q 10:18) speaks in favor of its historicity and of its relationship to the controversy over the exorcistic activity of Jesus. This point has been stressed recently by Kollmann (89–195; see also the arguments of Twelftree: 111–12). In both sayings Jesus understands his mission as a struggle against Satan in order to advance the coming of the kingdom of God.

Answer D (Matt 12:30; Luke 11:23)

This double proverb was included in the elaborated *chreia* of Q. The first part of it can be found in a slightly different form in Mark (Mark 9:40; Luke 9:50; POxy 1224), also on the occasion of an exorcism. De la Fuente has suggested that the version of Q might be closer to the context of the historical Jesus, whereas the version of Mark may mirror the situation of the early Church (455–58). But as Humphries has shown, its rhetorical situation in Q implies that this popular proverb did not refer to a connection to Jesus, but was used as an argument to confirm the central statement of the *chreia*, namely, that Jesus is not in favor of Beelzebul, but against him (136–37). Although it can be attributed to Jesus, its original relationship to his exorcisms is not certain. Hence we are not going to consider it among the reactions of the historical Jesus to accusations of his casting out demons in the name of Beelzebul.

*Conclusion A (Matt 12:31–32; Mark 3:28–30); and
Conclusion B (Matt 12:43–45; Luke 11:24–26)*

These two conclusions may be attributed to the redactional work of Mark (A) and Q (B). Mark has to explain this conclusion by stressing that it answers to the accusation of having an unclean spirit (Mark 3:30). This means that even if this saying was uttered by the historical Jesus, its relationship to his exorcisms is not clear. On the other hand, the conclusion in Q fits the argument by analogy, and this was a usual way to conclude an elaborated *chreia* (Humphries: 138–39). The purpose of the argument was to stress the central statement of the *chreia* showing that demons do not oppose each other, but help each other against a common enemy, and so it is impossible to interpret Jesus' exorcisms as an internal disruption. The saying is a summary of ancient demonology (Böcher: 17). It can be considered common wisdom in the world of Jesus. But it is difficult to conclude that it was used by Jesus against the accusation of casting out demons in the name of Beelzebul.

We can sum up the analysis of the isolated units by say-

ing that Jesus was accused of casting out demons by the power of Beelzebul, the prince of demons, and that he answered this negative label with at least three different arguments (answers A, B, and C). These reveal the meaning he assigned to his exorcisms. The next step in this research will be to develop a scenario that would enable us to adequately understand the societal reaction that provoked the accusation against Jesus.

Societal Reaction to the Exorcisms of Jesus

The activity of Jesus as an exorcist provoked different societal reactions. Q's version of the Beelzebul controversy reports two of them that we find frequently in the Gospels: "the people were amazed, but some of them said: he casts out demons by the power of Beelzebul, the Prince of demons" (Q 11:14b-15). The first reaction implies a positive interpretation of the exorcism reported, whereas the second interprets this behavior of Jesus as deviant. The negative interpretation of the exorcisms of Jesus is characteristic of the demonic perspective which does not differentiate very much among various types of deviants (Pfohl: 25). The use of the sociological study of deviants can help us to identify more precisely the meaning of this societal reaction and the real causes of this accusation. Among the different approaches to the study of deviants, we are going to use the labelling theory developed by symbolic interactionists (Lemert: 14-22; Thio: 34-38). According to this perspective, public accusations are negative labels used to control behavior which some individual(s) have interpreted as negative or dangerous to society at large, or to a group within it.

The act of labelling can be described as the "successful identification of a person and his/her personhood with some trait of his behavior" (Malina & Neyrey 1988: 35). This identification can be positive (titles) or negative (stigmas). Stigmas are attached to negative deviant behavior, that is, to "vagrant forms of human activity, moving outside the more orderly currents of social life" (Erikson: 307). The process by which stigmas are ascribed to such a behavior is called stigmatization, and comprises the "attaching of visible signs of moral inferiority to persons, such as invidious labels, marks, brands, or publicly disseminated information" (Lemert: 65). Labelling a person as deviant is then a complex social process "by which the members of a group, community or society (1) interpret behavior as deviant, (2) define persons who so behave as a certain kind of deviant, and (3) accord them the treatment considered appropriate to such deviants" (Kitsuse: 248). These basic definitions of labeling, deviance, and the process by which a person is la-

beled as deviant raise some questions about the social nature of deviance that can be useful to interpret the negative reaction to the exorcisms of Jesus.

In the first place it must be said that deviance is a socially assessed phenomenon. What is considered deviant depends on a socially shared interpretation, so that "the deviant is one to whom that label has successfully been applied; deviant behavior is behavior that people so label" (Becker: 9). This means that different cultures may have different standards for interpreting and defining deviant behavior. The reason for this cultural nature of deviance is that deviant behavior can only be defined and enforced by reference to the values and rules of a given society (Becker: 129-34; Lemert: 31-32). Values and rules are related to the maintenance of social boundaries, and for that reason "transactions taking place between deviant persons on the one side and agencies of control on the other are boundary maintaining mechanisms" (Erikson: 309-10). The values and boundaries of a society are then the framework in which deviant behavior can be understood as such. Consequently the deviant nature of the exorcisms of Jesus and societal reaction to them can only be understood in the context of the culture in which he and his accusers lived.

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There are some common traits of Mediterranean culture that affect the definition of deviance in it. In the first place there are the core values of honor and shame, which reveal a deep concern for the opinion of other people. The importance of public opinion was such that an intense process of social control was continuously going on (Malina & Neyrey 1991b: 25-46). Related to these core values is the dyadic perception of the personality, by which a person understands himself or herself as part of a group, particularly the kinship group. Deviance is perceived as something affecting the honor of the group, not just the individual (Malina and Neyrey 1991c: 76-80). The strong-group, collectivistic quality of that society is likewise important. This quality makes social boundaries more defined and at the same time more dangerous.

The Mediterranean society of the first century was also

an agrarian society. As such, it had a rigid social stratification, in which every movement outside the group or status, especially vertical movement in the social pyramid, was perceived as problematic (Guijarro 1997: 55–57). The same can be said about the roles and norms governing social interaction in general. That society placed no value on innovation. For that reason innovative behavior was considered non-conformist, and only fully conforming role performance was tolerated (Coser: 168–69). At a lower level, the concrete social and political conditions of Israelite society in the first century are relevant to understanding why the activity of Jesus as an exorcist was interpreted by some in such a negative way.

I shall come back to these contextual references later. Now I would like to mention some structural patterns in the deviance process and in the societal reaction to it that are common to different cultures. One of these is the purpose of the deviance process. The deviance process entails a degradation ceremony that effects a transformation of identity, so that “the other person becomes in the eyes of his condemners literally a different and new person. It is not that the new attributes are added to the old ‘nucleus.’ He is not changed, he is reconstituted . . . the former identity stands as accidental; the new identity is the ‘basic reality.’ . . . The public denunciation effect such a transformation of essence” and “through the interpretive work . . . the denounced person becomes in the eyes of the witnesses a different person” (Garfinkel: 421–22). To be successful, the degradation ceremony must include some features, such as the identification of the denouncer as a public person, whose task is the defense of supra-personal (socially shared) values (Garfinkel: 422–23).

Malina and Neyrey have shown that these conditions can be found in the deviant career of Jesus (1988: 45–46). Hence the public denunciation of Jesus can be considered as a social sanction, whose purpose “is not a simple act of censure,” but “a sharp rite of transition at once moving him out of his normal position in society and transferring him into a distinct deviant role” (Erikson: 311). According to Erikson this rite of transition has three related phases. The first is “a formal confrontation between the deviant suspect and the representatives of his community”; in the second “they announce some judgment about the nature of his deviancy”; and in the third “they perform an act of social placement, assigning him to a special deviant role.” Relevant is the fact that “such ceremonies tend to be events of wide public interest and ordinarily take place in a dramatic, ritualized setting” (311). We can trace this same process in the confrontation of Jesus with his adversaries: the contro-

versies about his *exousia* fit the first phase; the accusation of casting out demons by the power of Beelzebul the second; and his identification as Beelzebul (Matt 10:25) the third. According to the Gospels, all these phases took place in a public setting.

Locating the accusation of casting out demons by the power of Beelzebul in this scenario can help to identify the purpose of his accusers and the nature of their accusation. To be labeled a deviant means not only to be accused as a rule-breaker, but to be ascribed a deviant ontological status, which tends to make a person an outsider and to exile him or her from the group. As Katz has shown, deviant identifications are not about role identities, but about ontological identities, that is, about the essence of a person (192–97). By accusing Jesus, his accusers try to assign him a new identity, a new self of a negative kind. They do this in order to neutralize his activity, which they perceive as negative. It is either dangerous for society as a whole or for the group that initiated the deviance process. And the accusation is an important part of this process. The scenario suggested here has a heuristic value in that it raises new questions, such as these:

- Why were the exorcisms of Jesus so important and dangerous for his accusers?
- Who were those accusers?
- What social values or boundaries were violated in the activity of casting out demons?

Only by answering these questions can we find out what is behind the accusation of casting out demons by the power of Beelzebul. The importance attached to Jesus' exorcisms by his accusers is something very striking for the modern reader, most probably because we do not experience demon possession and exorcism as did persons in antiquity. A close scrutiny of the gospel tradition reveals that the exorcisms were an essential part of Jesus' activity. Some years ago, Hollenbach called attention to this fact. He noted that (a) “quantitatively the exorcisms played a large role in Jesus' career”; (b) “qualitatively . . . exorcisms figured prominently in Jesus' own understanding of his career,” and (c) “it was in connection with this particular activity that he drew upon himself the wrath of all the important public authorities of his time” (568–69). In his challenging and ground-breaking study Hollenbach proposed an interpretation of demonic possession and exorcism using anthropological studies, and was thus able to throw new light on the reaction provoked by the exorcisms of Jesus.

The anthropological studies quoted by him show a close relationship between demonic possession and social tensions, such as “class antagonisms rooted in economic ex-

plotation, conflicts between traditions where revered traditions are eroded, colonial domination and revolution" (Hollenbach: 573; see also Pfohl: 38–40 and Sanders: 133–35). Hollenbach rightly sees these instances as relevant analogies because the circumstances described are very similar to those of Israel in the time of Jesus (see contra: Davies: 78–81). That situation finally exploded in the Judean-Roman war of 66–70 CE. This structural analogy allows us to interpret the situation of Roman Palestine in the light of the cases in question in which demonic possession is frequent. In these cases "mental illness can be seen as a socially acceptable form of oblique protest against, or escape from oppressions" and "some types of mental disorders became . . . 'cures' for, as well as symptoms of, social conflict" (575). The kinds of possession described in these studies

suggest the possibility that Palestinian possession performed a similar function and occurred within a similar social and political pattern. It may have functioned as a "fix" for people who saw no other way to cope with the horrendous social and political conditions in which they found their lot cast [576].

Demonic possession was a socially accepted way to cope with tensions, because it allowed the possessed to do and say what he or she could not do or say as a sane person. In the world of Jesus there were two social domains: the public (political) and the private (familial), and in both there were people under constraints of abusive authority. In the kinship context persons subject to the authority of the *paterfamilias*, and especially women, were more likely to resort to demonic possession to soften the tensions of patriarchal authority (Mark 7:24–30; 9:14–27). In the public arena, on the other hand, we are more likely to find male adults, as in fact we do in the case of the exorcism performed by Jesus in the synagogue of Capernaum (Mark 1:23–28) and that of the Gerasene demoniac (Mark 5:1–20). Davis has stressed the importance of the exorcisms of Jesus in the kinship sphere (1995: 85–86), but the public accusations against him must have been provoked by the exorcisms effected by Jesus in public.

This leads us to the question of the identity of Jesus' accusers. Although the accusers identified in individual Gospel documents may mirror the situation of the communities for whom those documents were composed, as in the case of the "Pharisees" of Matthew (Matt 9:34; 12:34), there are reasons for identifying them with the dominant elite of Roman Galilee or their retainers (the Scribes of Mark 3:22). Accusations of madness, witchcraft and possession were frequently used by the dominant classes as a means of social control, especially in times of social unrest (Hollenbach:

577). The tradition preserved in Luke 13:31–33, which may be traced back to a saying of Jesus (Kollmann: 187–89), shows the hostility of Herod Antipas toward Jesus. It also implies that the activity for which Herod sought out Jesus was precisely his exorcisms: "Go and say to that fox: behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will finish my task, but it is necessary for me to keep walking today, tomorrow and the next day, because a prophet cannot be killed outside Jerusalem." An intriguing relationship among casting out demons, the hostility of Herod, and a prophet's death needing to take place in Jerusalem appears in this saying of Jesus. This relationship stresses the links between the accusations against Jesus and his trial and crucifixion.

The exorcisms of Jesus were a threat, first of all, to the governing elite of Galilee, and consequently, to the Judean elite. By interpreting the casting out of demons as a sign of the coming of the Kingdom of God, and by making his exorcisms part of a strategy for restoring Israelite integrity, Jesus threatened the stability of the social order. The puzzling reaction of his own family, affected by gossip claiming Jesus was demon-possessed (Mark 3:21; see Neufeld), as well as the reaction of the townspeople after the exorcism of the Gerasene demoniac, who ask Jesus to leave their region (Mark 5:17), reveals that his exorcisms were perceived by ordinary people as dangerous. Those reactions must be understood in connection with the accusation of the scribes (Mark 3:22) and with Herod's persecution (Luke 13:31–33). All these instances mirror the threatening consequences of Jesus' restorative activity, which had disruptive effects for the stabilized social order.

Jesus' three responses to the accusation of casting out the demons by the power of Beelzebul contain heavy political overtones. These responses confirm the interpretation pointing to how the exorcisms of Jesus were perceived by the political elite of Israel. In them, Jesus talks about a divided kingdom (Q 11:17–19) and says that the casting out of demons is part of hostilities against God's enemies and a sign of the coming of God's kingdom (Q 11:20). Hence his exorcisms must be interpreted as a victory over the strong man and his house (Mark 3:27).

Oakman has asked, "Why have all of these words been attracted to this particular context?" (114). He suggests that they should be viewed in a peasant context and in a political situation in which these statements lived on orally:

The conflict surrounding Beelzebul, which immediately escalates into words about divided kingdoms and the plunder of the goods of the strong one, underscores the political and

economic dimension of demon possession. The “demons” that the “reign of God” is colliding with are not just “spooks” and psychoses. There is in view here economic disprivilege, malnutrition, endemic violence, and the destruction of rural families [115].

There may be other, complementary, explanations of the hostility provoked by the exorcisms of Jesus, but all of them can be understood as arguments that underscore their threatening nature for the governing elite. One such argument points to the fact that Jesus lacked religious credentials for this healing and exorcistic activity (Mark 6:1–6). Another argument would be that he did not follow the procedures used by other exorcists (Rousseau: 148). On the other hand, the accusation of being possessed was commonly leveled at exorcists in the ancient world as well as in many pre-industrial societies (Eitrem: 49ss.; Kolenkow). Some of these arguments can be discerned in the response of Jesus, but they were not the central point. The central point was the public/political effect of his exorcisms. Viewed in their original peasant context and in the political situation of first-century Galilee, the exorcisms of Jesus reveal subversive connotations that might have been lost in part as his literate followers recorded his words and deeds in a new situation in which exorcisms had different connotations (Oakman: 109–10). Some of these connotations can be perceived in the responses of Jesus to his accusers. We now turn to them.

Jesus' Response to His Accusers

The analysis of the deviance process from the perspective of societal reaction—the focus of labeling theorists in the sixties—permits only a partial view of it. In the early seventies some scholars proposed a fuller approach, taking into consideration the viewpoint of those labeled deviants (Mankoff; Rogers & Buffalo; Lipp; Warren).

The viewpoint of the accused is important because it helps us understand the meaning he or she attaches to deviant behavior. This is precisely what we find in the response of Jesus to his accusers. To adequately understand it we need to know that in their cultural context both accusation and response had a particular meaning. Jesus lived in an honor culture, in which an accusation was perceived not only as an act of aggression (Rogers & Buffalo: 102–03), but as an honor challenge. An honor challenge cannot remain unanswered because when the person challenged does not respond to it, personal reputation is lost in the eyes of the public. The response of Jesus to his accusers must be understood in the scenario of the challenge and riposte pattern

characteristic of the Mediterranean culture (Malina & Neyrey 1991b: 29–32). In this context his response appears as a defense of his honor and, at the same time, as an explanation of the meaning of his exorcisms. This is what we find in the three answers that we have assigned to the pre-Easter tradition.

Whatever the precise wording of the pre-Easter tradition of the first saying, the reasoning behind the response is clear: the accusation is inconsistent because Beelzebul cannot act against himself (Matt 12:25–26 par). Jesus resorts to popular wisdom, recalling that a divided kingdom and a divided house (an extended family, most probably the ruler's family) cannot continue to exist. In the ancient world political and familial solidarity was so highly valued that it was easy to understand Jesus' argument and its conclusion: Jesus does not belong to Satan's *basileia* (see also Q 4:5–8). Consequently his accusers have lost face in the public arena and have been dishonored by his wise answer. To the original audience of the Gospels this was so evident that the author does not need to spell it out.

In the second saying (Matt 12:27–28 par) Jesus' response goes further because it makes his reaction against his accusers explicit. And more importantly, it provides an alternative explanation for his purported deviance. The verbal coincidences with the accusation (*en Beelzebul . . . ekballein . . . ta daimonia*) makes this second response a more direct answer to the accusation. The saying begins with an *ad hominem* argument. This argument is clear if the sons of Jesus' accusers are his own disciples. If Jesus casts out demons by the power of Beelzebul, the same can be said of them, and so the shame/deviance that his accusers want to attach to him reverts to them. But Jesus then offers a different explanation of his exorcisms: he belongs to the *basileia* of God; he is acting, not on behalf of the Prince of demons, but on behalf of the Spirit of God; his exorcisms manifest, not an alliance with Satan, but war against him and victory over him.

The third response (Matt 12:29 par) is linked to the first by the catch-word *oikia*. It offers a complementary explanation: Jesus does not belong to the house of Beelzebul, but attacks that house. The reign of Satan is not divided, but under siege. The image behind this saying is that of a ruler's house attacked by a throne rival, an image that would be familiar to the audience of Jesus (Oakman: 114–17). The proverb, which may be a piece of popular wisdom, recalls another saying of Jesus that declares victory over Satan (Q 10:18). Some have seen in this saying an early account of the vision of Jesus' call by God (Theissen: 196–97). This perspective helps to explain the importance

of the exorcisms in his public activity, and the context of this answer.

Following the challenge-riposte pattern characteristic of the Mediterranean public interaction, Jesus accepts the challenge and responds to it by defeating his accusers and thus winning honor in the eyes of the public. But he does even more since by his responses and by the way in which he reacts to the labels tossed at him, he reveals the meaning that he attached to the acts labeled deviant by his accusers. To find out the meaning of Jesus' reactions we have to place them in the context of other possible reactions, and for that we are going to use the typology proposed by Rogers and Buffalo.

This typology (Rogers & Buffalo: 105–14) describes nine modes of adaptation to a deviant label, which are classified according their tactical and societal relationships. The tactical relationship refers to “the deviant maneuvering vis-à-vis his/her labelers in terms of attitude and action,” whereas societal reaction represents the “thrust emerging from the deviant's tactic encountering societal context” (106). The authors consider three possible reactions on the part of the labeled person: assent, rejection, and exchange, and three possible societal reactions to each of these: magnification, manipulation and obliteration. Combining those different possibilities they propose nine modes of adaptation to a deviant label:

	Magnification	Manipulation	Obliteration
Assent	Acquiescence	Channeling	Reinterpretation
Rejection	Repudiation	Evasion	Redefinition
Exchange	Flight	Modification	Alteration

In terms of tactical relationship the three responses of Jesus can be classified under the category of rejection, because in all of them Jesus rejects the accusation of being allied to Beelzebul. But in each of them we find different connotations, which allow us to identify them with the three types of rejection considered in the typology.

Repudiation is the outcome of an accused deviant's rejection of some accusation that is coupled with societal magnification. This can be described as an overt rejection of the deviant label “through such claims as: It isn't so” (107). The public nature of this kind of resistance to stigmatization requires considerable determination on the part of the accused. It also requires resources and power to be successful, because such a reaction effects a societal magnification of the label, making it more prominent. Answer A (Kingdom

divided) can be assigned to this category. The whole argument, based on comparisons of the divided kingdom and family, has the effect of publicly rejecting the accusation: It isn't so, because it is impossible for Satan to be against himself! This answer, like the rest, is uttered in a public setting and has the effect of magnifying the accusation by openly rejecting it.

The second mode of rejection is evasion. Evasion is the outcome of an accused deviant's rejection of some accusation that is coupled with societal manipulation. It “refers primarily to verbal manipulation as a means of defense against the imputation of deviance. The person in response rejects the label, which is manipulated to deflect to negative impact through a counterploy based perhaps on a differing view of reality, involving society” (110). Malina and Neyrey have developed this mode of reaction, including in it such techniques of neutralization as (a) denial of responsibility, (b) denial of injury, (c) denial of victim, (d) condemning the condemners, and (e) appeal to higher loyalties (1988: 63–65). Most of these traits can be found in answer B (by the Spirit of God). Through verbal manipulation (by Beelzebul/by the Spirit of God), Jesus rejects the label of being allied with Beelzebul, but he does it in such a way that societal manipulation takes place. He begins by accusing his accusers, announcing that their own sons will be their judges. Then he appeals to a higher loyalty, ascribing his exorcisms to the power of the Spirit of God. In so doing, he implicitly denies his responsibility and also casts his exorcisms in a positive light in which there are no victims and no injuries. This societal manipulation of the label achieves successful neutralization and, at the same time, offers a new justification of the exorcisms of Jesus.

The third possible kind of rejection is redefinition. Redefinition is the outcome of some accused deviant's rejection of some accusation that is coupled with societal obliteration. The definitional change

is effected when that which was previously called deviant comes to be called normative. The characteristic or behavior remains the same, but society has altered its view and redefined the deviant behavior in positive terms of approval [113].

Redefinition is implied in answer C (the Strong one spoiled). In this response Jesus not only offers a different explanation of his exorcisms (as in answer B), but proposes this behavior as normative. This activity was, in fact, proposed by Jesus to his followers as normative behavior. They were sent by him to cast out demons (Mark 6:7), and this seems to have been his primary activity according to the

two more ancient reports of the mission charge (Q 10:17; Mark 6:13). In this core group the meaning of the exorcisms of Jesus was successfully redefined, and we can presuppose that this point of view was shared by those who interpreted his exorcisms in positive terms of approval (Q 11:14b).

The identification of the three answers of Jesus with the three kinds of rejection proposed in the typology of Rogers and Buffalo is not an end in itself. As the authors warn, "cells in a typology . . . represent only a transitional phase of theoretical endeavor," and the typology itself "implies entrances, motion within, and exits" (114). This can be also argued of our previous assignment of the different sayings of Jesus. Answer A (Kingdom divided), for example, contains an implicit condemnation of condemners (shaming them in public) which is a characteristic of evasion. Answer B (by the Spirit of God) includes some redefinition traits, because Jesus tries to obliterate the accusation by offering an alternate explanation. Finally, in answer C (the Strong one despoiled) one can discern some features of evasion.

The main purpose of Jesus' responses was not to clarify what kind of exorcist he was, but to make clear the cosmic and political implications of his exorcisms.

The basic defensive strategy of Jesus was to reject the label applied to him. In his different reactions he did not deny his exorcisms. What he did deny was the way in which the exorcisms were interpreted by his accusers and the labels attached because of this interpretation. This is a characteristic feature of behavior that seeks political change. In fact, two of the strategies that we have identified in the sayings of Jesus (repudiation and redefinition) figure, according to Rogers and Buffalo, among the three more likely adaptations for political action labelled deviant (115). This, as we have already noted, fits strikingly well with the content of the responses and also with the political overtones of the exorcistic activity of Jesus. The exorcisms of Jesus had political consequences. He and his accusers knew it. While his accusers interpreted them as a threat to the political order, Jesus considered them as a sign of the presence of the reign of God. The main purpose of Jesus' responses was not to clarify what kind of exorcist he was, but to make clear the cosmic and political implications of his exorcisms. Among

them, the social restoration of the victims of social and economic tensions had a prominent place.

The reintegration of those marginalized as a consequence of political and economic unrest implied a redefinition of the social boundaries, and also a change in the rules governing social relations. As Davies has suggested (107–12), the exorcistic activity of Jesus is closely related to the gathering of a surrogate family (Mark 3:31–35; 10:28–30). In my opinion Davies is not right when he postulates that most of the followers of Jesus were previously demon-possessed due to intrafamily tensions. But I find it highly possible that the gathering of a new family governed by kinship-like reciprocity instead of patriarchal authority may have been part of the same reintegrative strategy to which Jesus' exorcistic activity belonged. To this same strategy can be assigned other characteristic features of Jesus' activity, such as his closeness to sinners and tax-collectors, which is widely witnessed in the gospel tradition.

Contributions to the Study of the Historical Jesus

The foregoing discussion of societal reaction to the exorcisms of Jesus and of his own strategies to counter this reaction as reflected in the Beelzebul controversy suggests some reflections that can be helpful for the study of the historical Jesus.

The use of social studies of deviant behavior as a cognitive and heuristic tool for interpreting the deviance process of Jesus can help to clarify the sense in which Jesus can be considered a "marginal" Jew (sic: Meier). The Gospels contain a demonic interpretation of the deviance of Jesus, but this kind of interpretation does not explore its historical causes and consequences. When we analyze the data of the Gospels with the tools developed for the social study of deviant behavior, new questions arise. The historical causes and consequences of Jesus' deviant activity appear more clearly.

The social study of deviant behavior has helped us to discover that the accusation of being possessed by Beelzebul belongs to a broader strategy whose purpose was to discredit Jesus, to declare him an outsider in his society, and to assign him a new identity. These features have raised a new set of questions that have led us to a more concrete contextualization of the exorcisms of Jesus. The analogy of the situation in first-century Palestine with that of other societies in which demonic possession is frequent has been the clue to discovering that Jesus' exorcisms were perceived as threatening to the governing elite and their retainers. By

casting out the demons and restoring people to society, Jesus threatened a social order in which demonic possession was an escape-valve. The puzzling reaction to his exorcisms by his own family, as well as by the people, the scribes and Herod Antipas suggest that the social reintegration of demoniacs had social and political connotations for Jesus and for his contemporaries that are opaque to us. This is particularly important, because Jesus was the first in the ancient Mediterranean world to give such a prominent place to exorcisms in his activity.

The responses of Jesus to the accusation of casting out demons by the power of Beelzebul reveal that he never accepted this interpretation. He fought against it in every possible way and unveiled the real meaning and purpose of his exorcisms. Coherent with his culture's perspective on nature, which included non-visible, person-like beings to explain certain effects, Jesus explained that he was possessed by the Spirit of God and that in his dealings with those possessed by demons he was engaged in a cosmic war against Satan. Victory over Satan was the sign of the dawning of God's rule. The sign of the coming of God's reign was the restoration to society of those who were at the margins. Jesus called them to be part of a new family together with him and his followers, and this was highly disruptive.

Since this study has dealt only with one passage, the conclusions reached about the deviant character of the activity of Jesus and about his reactions to negative labels are partial. Further research on other accusations and on Jesus' reaction to them is needed to have a fuller picture of both the nature of societal reaction to Jesus deviant behavior and the meaning of his counter strategies.

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