

JESUS  
THE HEALER  

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Possession, Trance,  
AND THE  
*Origins of Christianity*

STEVAN L. DAVIES

SCM PRESS LTD

# 6

## Demon Possession

**B**asing his analysis on the story of the Gerasene demoniac (Mk 5:1-19), Paul Hollenbach draws the conclusion that Jesus interpreted exorcisms differently from the Pharisees.

Jesus' interpretation constituted a radical transformation of the values held by the Pharisees. They were conservatives who focused narrowly on doing God's will in everyday life. This permitted them to escape confronting directly the terrifying social conditions and issues of their day. They were ready to pay not only taxes but total allegiance to Caesar in exchange for maintaining their privileged place in Galilean society. They were willing, naturally, to practice a kind of genteel medicine that included intermittent exorcising. But to focus on exorcising (as well as other kinds of healing) as a major form of action was not within their purview, probably because they recognized, even if they refused to face up to, the connection between the illness of their time and the unjust colonial social system of which they were an integral privileged part. Thus, Jesus' exorcising activity must have appeared to them as an independent countercultural move which would ultimately be a threat to their social position. If a fair number of healed demoniacs were like the Gerasene demoniac, this would have exacerbated the relation between Jesus and the Pharisees. So they moved against him.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Hollenbach, Paul, "Help for Interpreting Jesus' Exorcisms," *SBL Seminar Papers* (Scholars Press: Atlanta, 1993), 125.

He believes that the demoniac "brought the man's and the neighborhood's hatred of the Romans out into the open, where the result could be disaster for the community."<sup>2</sup> In this sort of analysis he is followed by John Dominic Crossan.<sup>3</sup> The same line of reasoning underlies Richard Horsley's analysis of demonic possession.<sup>4</sup>

This line of thought is preposterous. But it seems to be a state-of-the-art regarding the exorcism texts in the New Testament. The cause of demonic possession is said to be Roman domination of Galilee and the resulting extraordinarily excessive taxation and indebtedness of Galileans; the act of exorcism is assumed then to be a political act with anti-Roman overtones that would have been clear to any who witnessed it. It is hard to know where to start in rejecting this interpretation. First, E. P. Sanders has shown repeatedly and unquestionably correctly that characterizations of the Pharisees as "conservatives who focused narrowly on doing God's will in everyday life" are Christian polemical constructions that should never be viewed as correct historical analysis by contemporary scholarship.<sup>5</sup> Second, the alleged political privileges of the Pharisees, their resulting total allegiance to Caesar, the attribution to them of thoughts connecting colonial social systems with the illnesses of their time, and the assumption that during Jesus' lifetime Pharisees were a (or the) principal political power group—all are based on nothing more than pure imagination, and a polemical antipharisaic imagination at that. Third, while the story of the Gerasene demoniac is an anti-Roman allegory as it stands in Mark, as such it is a literary construction. *It is an imaginative allegory, not a historical reminiscence.* There never were 3,000 demons placed into 3,000 pigs who then ran quite a few miles to the sea of Galilee and jumped in and were drowned.

In the same volume as Hollenbach's essay quoted above, John Rousseau concludes that there probably once was an account of an exorcism in Gerasa of a demon-possessed man who broke chains,

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

<sup>3</sup> Crossan, *Historical Jesus*, 317, citing Hollenbach, Paul, "Jesus, Demoniacs and Public Authorities: A Socio-Historical Study," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 99, 1981: 573.

<sup>4</sup> Horsley, *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence*, 187-88.

<sup>5</sup> Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 23-58; cf. Neusner, Jacob *From Politics to Piety: The Emergence of Pharisaic Judaism* (New York: KTAV, 1979).

bruised himself with stones, cried out and lived among the tombs.<sup>6</sup> Rousseau notices, however, that there are several features in the latter part of the story that appear nowhere else in reports of Jesus' exorcisms, and that the idea that the demons fled to water contradicts Near-Eastern theory that evil spirits were afraid of water. He concludes that while there was an original exorcism story, "the initial account was embellished in 66 C.E. when told to Jewish insurgents just after the legions of Vespasian arrived at Ptolemais."<sup>7</sup> Yes, Mark 5:1-19 is an anti-Roman literary allegory, but as it stands it is not useful information in regard to the theory and practice of exorcism in ca. 29 C.E. nor is it significant information regarding the causality of demon-possession during that period.

In an article strongly disagreeing with trends in contemporary Jesus research, E. P. Sanders undermines the fundamental presuppositions that underlie the analyses of Hollenbach, Crossan, and Horsley, etc. The latter focus on the supposed psychological trauma that resulted in Galilee from Roman occupation and the concomitant extraordinary taxation of the Galilean peasantry. Sanders does not demonstrate so much as simply point out that *there were no Roman troops stationed in Galilee, nor were any stationed anywhere in the domain of Herod Antipas during the time of Jesus.*<sup>8</sup> Further, while it was the sorry situation of peasantry throughout the Roman Empire to be heavily taxed, and indeed this is the lot of such folk pretty much anywhere in the world, there is no evidence that the peasantry of Galilee were taxed more than peasantry elsewhere.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, because of the good relations between Herod and Rome it is likely that the tribute owed by Herod to Rome was relatively little and, therefore, that taxation of the peasantry by Herod was less than it might otherwise have been.<sup>10</sup>

For these reasons, and for others I shall turn to immediately, it is not possible to presume that nonexistent Roman occupying troops and their oppression were at the root of Galilean peasant

<sup>6</sup> Rousseau, John J., "Jesus, an Exorcist of a Kind," *SBL Seminar Papers* (Scholars Press: Atlanta, 1993), 129-53.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 144-45.

<sup>8</sup> Sanders, E. P., "Jesus in Historical Context," *Theology Today*, Vol. 50, 1993: 439.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 446-47; cf. his *Judaism: Practice and Belief 63 BCE-66 CE* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1992) for a full discussion of these and related matters.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

possession experiences. If Judeans found it annoying that roughly 3,000 Roman troops were located in Judea, mainly in the city of Caesarea, it is preposterous to think that this annoyance manifested itself in possession phenomena.<sup>11</sup> Further, to put it mildly, demon-possession is not at all widely attested as a likely, understandable, or useful mode of response to taxation and indebtedness. Excessive indebtedness might lead to interpersonal conflicts that in turn lead to possession, one can imagine such things happening, but "might" is about as far as one can go. Whatever was happening to cause demon-possession in Galilee it was *not* discontent with the Roman troops in Judea, nor was it a form of response to indebtedness and taxation.

### *Possession as an Intra-Family Coping Mechanism*

Many cross-cultural studies have made it abundantly clear that demon-possession is usually a means by which an individual in a socially subordinate role can respond to and cope with circumstances that cannot be effectively dealt with otherwise—most of the time, those circumstances arise from intrafamily conflicts. Accordingly, instances of demon-possession are found to occur most commonly among individuals who are the most subordinate members within family structures: wives and children. I. M. Lewis summarizes the situation this way:

we are concerned here with a widespread use of spirit-possession, by means of which women and other depressed categories exert mystical pressures on their superiors in circumstances of deprivation and frustration when few other sanctions are available to them. Of course, spirit-possession is only one possible mystical mode. . . . Witchcraft and sorcery are from this point of view other, more direct processes of retaliation and attack. . . . One specific characteristic of spirit-possession is that, unlike at least some forms of witchcraft and sorcery, it appears usually to offer an explanation only of illness. It does not generally explain external misfortunes [e.g., taxation and indebtedness], at least not directly, and this seems to follow

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 442. It should be recalled that Jesus' activities took place about thirty five years before the beginnings of the Jewish War.

logically from the specific nature of possession as an invasion of the person.<sup>12</sup>

In many and perhaps all cases, demon-possession is brought about by interpersonal conflict and such interpersonal conflict is to be located usually within families.

Shekar gives examples of such cases of possessions from his experience in India:

In most of the cases, the victim is a young woman who suffers severe psychosocial problems. . . . Because of conflicts in interpersonal relationships, sexual matters, and her status in the family, the victim suffers from severe anxiety, which is relieved through demon-possession (primary gain). After being possessed, she receives attention, sympathy, and concern from others, as well as relief from responsibilities (secondary gains).<sup>13</sup>

He cites the example of Sita, a twenty-year-old woman whose husband had no status in the family and who was treated like a servant by others, including her mother-in-law.

One day Sita became possessed by her grandmother's spirit. She spoke in a different tone that was very authoritative. The spirit blamed those who were ill-treating Sita and warned them that if they did not change they would be punished. Family members became alarmed and talked about the demon-possession. Attention was given to Sita and she was taken to temples and healers.<sup>14</sup>

In another example, Gowri, a twenty-eight-year-old housewife whose husband drank and visited prostitutes became possessed by her mother's spirit when there was a ceremonial function at home.

She declared openly that her son-in-law was purposefully neglecting her daughter, behavior for which he would pay dearly. Gowri's husband became panicky and assured the spirit in front

of relatives that from then onward he would look after Gowri properly. . . . Once in a while [subsequently] the mother's spirit descends on Gowri and talks about protecting her due rights and warns the son-in-law.<sup>15</sup>

Stanley and Ruth Freed summarize their observations of possession as follows:

One tentative inference from the Shanti Nagar data is that events precipitating spirit-possession are likely to be difficulties involving relatives of the nuclear or joint family and that the victim is often in a position where he can expect little support. These conditions pertain much more frequently to married women than to males or unmarried girls, and this is reflected in the preponderance of married women among those suffering possession. *Spirit-possession may be thought of as a means of controlling relatives.*<sup>16</sup>

The Freed's note particularly that "disputes or lawsuits over land, and financial reverses such as crop failure, theft, and the death of valuable animals," do not seem to cause possession.<sup>17</sup> They conclude more generally in regard to possession that

Precipitating conditions have two general characteristics: (1) the victim of spirit-possession is involved in difficulties with relatives of the nuclear or joint family, and (2) he is often in a situation where his expectations of mutual aid and support are low.<sup>18</sup>

Our vocabulary is becoming muddled here. Readers should recall that I use "spirit-possession" for an affirmative state of alter-persona consciousness that is found to be beneficial by a social group, and "demon-possession" for a negative state of alter-persona consciousness that is not found to be beneficial. In the

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Freed, Stanley and Ruth Freed, "Spirit Possession as Illness in a North Indian Village," in Middleton, John, *Magic, Witchcraft, and Curing* (Garden City: The Natural History Press, 1967), 317 (emphasis added).

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 320.

<sup>12</sup> Lewis, I. M., *Religion in Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 39.

<sup>13</sup> Shekar, Chandra, "Possession Syndrome in India," in Colleen Ward, *Altered States of Consciousness and Mental Health* (Newbury Park: Sage, 1989), 87.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 88.

cases cited above benefits accruing to the individuals concerned are understandable but, nevertheless, the possession state is culturally disvalued and in many such cases exorcistic treatments are sought. Accordingly, I would label such cases "demon-possession."<sup>19</sup> Authors whom I am citing in this section are using "spirit-possession" and "demon-possession" interchangeably. I do not.

Demon-possession can work to the advantage of the possessed individual. In the words of Nicholas Spanos,

The role of demoniac was most commonly adopted by individuals with little social power or status, [who had] few sanctioned avenues for protesting the dissatisfactions that stemmed from their lowly status. For such people the demonic role offered numerous advantages. Frequently, its adoption led to a dramatic rise in social status. On the one hand, demoniacs were viewed as helpless victims of satanic influence and consequently received sympathetic attention and a lightened work load. On the other hand, they were often treated as awesome seers whose affliction placed them in direct contact with the supernatural and whose performances commanded fearful respect and attention. Demoniacs often became the star attractions in what the community considered a deadly serious combat between the forces of Heaven and Hell. In short, adoption of the demonic role was often associated with increases in social position, power, and respect that would have been unavailable in other ways.<sup>20</sup>

Vincent Crapanzano and Vivian Garrison include in their book *Case Studies in Spirit-possession* essays from Egypt and Morocco inferring causalities for possession similar to those cited above; also in that volume Clive Kessler reports Malayan examples of

- the use of the possession idiom by women of three different statuses: (1) newlyweds who escape from an arranged marriage; (2) older married women who wish to preserve their marriages; (3) widows and divorcees of middle age.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup> I use "demon" as a term that can include spiritual beings considered to be ancestors, ghosts, devils, etc.

<sup>20</sup> Spanos, Nicholas, "Hypnosis, Demonic Possession, and Multiple Personality," in Ward, *Altered States of Consciousness*, 106.

<sup>21</sup> Crapanzano, Vincent, "Introduction," in Crapanzano and Vivian Garrison (eds.) *Case Studies in Spirit Possession* (New York: Wiley, 1977), 29. Also see therein, C. Kessler, "Con-

I. M. Lewis's theories of possession are in accord with the analyses discussed above. He writes that

In peripheral cults [of possession, i.e., those not sanctioned by the dominant culture] the catchment area of possession is so circumscribed that those who occupy marginal social positions are strongly at risk. . . . Of course, the extent to which different individuals of subordinate status are actively involved will depend upon their particular life circumstances, and especially upon the severity and magnitude of the stresses to which they are subject. The happily married wife who is content with her lot is much less likely to resort to possession than her harassed sister whose married life is fraught with difficulty. . . . The keenest recruits and the most committed enthusiasts are women who, for one reason or another, do not make a success of their marital roles, react against new domestic confinement or who, having fulfilled these roles, seek a new career in which they can give free rein to the desire to manage and dominate others.<sup>22</sup>

In light of such anthropological analyses, which could be multiplied considerably, it is almost certain that the majority of the "demon-possessed" individuals whom Jesus exorcised found themselves to be in intolerable circumstances of social subordination *within their family groups* and it is likely that many and perhaps most of these were women (as Luke indicates in 8:1-3). Joanna Dewey, noting "the increased attribution of demon-possession to females" in Luke's books, asks whether this "is an idiosyncrasy of Luke, or is it characteristic of literate men's views of women?"<sup>23</sup> This false dichotomy resting on anthropological ignorance is not entirely untypical of the writing of New Testament scholars on the subject of possession.

Men too might find themselves in intolerable socially subordinate family-group relationships in reference to their fathers, elder

fiect and Sovereignty in Kelanese Malay Spirit Seances," E. Saunders, "Variants in Zar Experience in an Egyptian Village," V. Crapanzano, "Mohammed and Davia: Possession in Morocco."

<sup>22</sup> Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion*, 171.

<sup>23</sup> Dewey, Joanna, "Jesus' Healings of Women: Conformity and Non-Conformity to Dominant Cultural Values as Clues for Historical Reconstruction," *SBL Seminar Papers 1993*, (Scholars' Press: Atlanta, 1993), 181-82.

brothers, or other family patriarchs, and men who were slaves or servants might find themselves in intolerable, but unavoidable, patron-client relationships. Our New Testament evidence is so extremely sketchy that we cannot do much more than generalize that Jesus' clientele who came (or were brought) for exorcism were probably, more than anything else, victims of abusive family relationships.

We might wonder, then, what it was about the Syrophenician woman that led her daughter to respond by being occasionally possessed by a demon (Mk 7:25-30), but we shall never know. What we can know is that becoming a demon is normally a mode of response, a coping mechanism, and not a supernatural event per se.

### *Demon-Possession as Multiple Personality Disorder*

The phenomenon of multiple personality disorder [MPD] can allow another model to be used for the analysis of demonic possession. David Spiegel and Etzel Cardena formally propose criteria for a diagnosis of MPD for DSM-IV as follows:

- A. The existence within the person of two or more distinct personalities or personality states (each with its own relatively enduring pattern of perceiving, relating to, and thinking about the environment and self).
- B. At least two of these personalities or personality states recurrently take control of the person's behavior.
- C. There is an inability to recall important personal information that is too extensive to be explained by ordinary forgetfulness or by an organic mental disorder (e.g., blackout during alcohol intoxication).<sup>24</sup>

In accordance with growing cross-cultural sophistication in the field of psychiatry they note that

it must be observed that many religious experiences labeled as possession ought not be considered pathological. They may have

<sup>24</sup> Spiegel, David, and Etzel Cardena, "Disintegrated Experience: The Dissociative Disorders Revisited," *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, Vol. 100, No. 3, 1991: 372. "Multiple Personality Disorder" is no longer the formal technical term to be used in psychiatric diagnosis; it

individual and social value, whereas other types of possession, particularly outside of a ritual context, are dysfunctional and may resemble to a greater or lesser degree what is known in Western psychiatric nosology as MPD, although with major differences in clinical profiles.<sup>25</sup>

Psychiatrists in India have observed that while MPD is very rarely diagnosed in India,

other dissociative disorders, such as possession syndrome, have been reported very commonly in India but not at all in the West. The condition occurs almost exclusively among women and generally in the lower levels of literacy and socioeconomic class. . . . Such behavior focuses the attention of the family on the individual, valuable time is gained, and the resulting structural realignment of forces within the family often improves the precipitating condition.<sup>26</sup>

They conclude,

*It can be hypothesized that possession syndrome in India and multiple personality disorder in the West represent parallel dissociative disorders with similar etiologies despite some major differences in clinical profiles. The pathoplastic influence of the prevailing culture may be important in causing these differences. With the increasing Westernization of Indian society, the rate of possession syndrome is likely to fall. Such a decrease may, of course, be duly compensated for by an increase in the diagnosis of multiple personality disorder.*<sup>27</sup>

By considering some cases of demonic possession perhaps to be MPD one does more than simply relabel the phenomenon. Psychiatric studies of MPD cases give a different etiology for the disorder than do anthropological studies of demonic possession. The latter

has been replaced by "Dissociative Identity Disorder". However, as essentially all literature on the subject uses the term Multiple Personality Disorder I will use it here.  
<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 374.

<sup>26</sup> Adityanjee, G. S. P. Raju, and S. K. Khandelwal, "Current Status of Multiple Personality Disorder in India," *American Journal of Psychiatry*, Vol. 146, No. 12, 1989: 1609.  
<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 1610 (emphasis added).

find that cause of the disorder is predominantly a *present* situation of intolerable social stress, usually familial, encountered by a socially subordinate individual. The former find that MPD is almost always caused by specific traumatic instances in the *past*, usually during childhood, and that those instances are more often than not instances of sexual abuse.

Some psychiatrists report that most MPD patients reveal themselves to have been victims of child abuse.<sup>28</sup> There may be other etiologies: "exposure to the death of a loved one, accidents, and the carnage of war, as well as severe pain, illness, near death experience, cultural dislocation, and family chaos."<sup>29</sup> But, primarily, according to the preponderance of evidence and discussion, MPD is most frequently caused by childhood abuse, usually sexual abuse.

Psychiatric theory of the origin of MPD runs as follows:<sup>30</sup> a child with the capacity to dissociate (e.g., one who has an imaginary companion) is brutalized or molested. He or she then develops a personality to encapsulate the experience so that it is dissociated, separated from the child's primary personality. The child might then develop an introjective personality based on the abuser, a protector personality, and perhaps other personalities. Over a period of time, anger over the abuse and any sexual stimulation experienced with it might also become organized into alter-personalities. With the beginning of adolescence, the MPD that developed to cope with intolerable childhood circumstances will often achieve some secondary autonomy and be increasingly maladaptive. As the individual approaches maturity, the independent activities of the personalities have fewer external restraints and so the condition becomes more overt and may begin to effect the individual's social relationships. Thus, although MPD begins in childhood, it is rarely diagnosed before late adolescence.

One might, therefore, expect to find that some people presumed to be demon-possessed in premodern cultures are subject to the influence of alter-personae developed as a result of childhood abuse or trauma. The only way to guess which "demon-possessed" per-

sons reported in the New Testament were victims of MPD would be to take seriously the observation that MPD individuals normally have a multiplicity of alter-personae and that persons using demon-possession as a coping mechanism normally have few, usually only one.

It appears, then, that the etiology of the cases of demon-possession reported in the New Testament may have been of two sorts. By analogy to cross-cultural anthropological studies we can presume that most of Jesus' clients were presently in situations of social, mainly familial stress, and that for them demon-possession was a somewhat effective, but socially unacceptable, coping mechanism. Other clients, based on analogy to MPD theory, may have been under the influence of alter-personae that originated in the past, during childhood, as defense mechanisms resulting from abuse. These two etiologies are not by any means mutually exclusive; occasions of abuse in childhood that resulted in MPD would indicate an oppressive family situation that might well continue into adolescence or adulthood and call forth a demon-possession coping mechanism. We might suspect that Mary Magdalene, exorcised of seven demons (Lk 8:2-3) was a victim of MPD, for a multiplicity of alter-personae is common for MPD victims but rare in instances of demon-possession as a social coping mechanism. But such extremely speculative diagnoses are of no consequence to my argument.

I have, at some length, suggested possible etiologies for New Testament reports of Galileans reported to have been demon-possessed for two reasons. First, to show how it can be that what look like purely supernatural events, e.g., that Jesus cast out demons, are, within the bounds of our very slim evidence, accounts of historical events that can rationally be understood through cross-cultural or psychiatric analogy. Second, to show that reports of demon-possession are best understood to originate from family circumstances either in the past (for MPD) or in the present (for the demon-coping mechanism) or both. I will show that this etiological inference has very significant consequences for our understanding of the career of the historical Jesus. First, however, I will shift levels of analysis and move to "native exegesis," i.e., what do we know about the way "exorcism" was conceived in Galilee in ca. 29 C.E.

<sup>28</sup> Klüft, Richard P., "An Update on Multiple Personality Disorder," *Hospital and Community Psychiatry*, Vol. 38, No. 4, 1987: 366.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> I am here summarizing Klüft, "Update," 366.

## Jesus' Exorcisms

Exorcism is neither a form of superstition nor a form of incompetent therapeutic practice. As Colleen Ward puts it,

exorcism may be assessed as other therapies, with reference to dynamic processes in the therapeutic session, client-therapist relationship, and effectiveness of the technique. Viewed from a more global perspective, the dynamics of possession and exorcism may reflect a cycle of sickness behavior, help seeking, and cure displayed universally but patterned by cultural constraints and cosmologies.<sup>1</sup>

Our knowledge of Jesus' exorcisms comes primarily from the synoptic gospels, particularly the Gospel of Mark. We do not have a considerable body of evidence concerning other contemporary Galilean exorcism techniques.<sup>2</sup> While we have a few indications of exorcistic practice from the Greco-Egyptian magical papyri that might give clues to Galilean practice, they are of later date, from a different language area, and may not be applicable to Jesus at all.

Morton Smith's argument in *Jesus the Magician* that such texts are good evidence for knowledge of the historical Jesus seems forced. What may have led Professor Smith astray was that he fell into the standard line of thought that Jesus of Nazareth was "possessed of" the spirit, that he "had the power of" the spirit, and so

<sup>1</sup> Ward, Colleen, "Possession and Exorcism," 128.

<sup>2</sup> As the present book was going to press the publication of Graham Twelftree's *Jesus the Exorcist* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994) was announced. It appears to cover in commendable detail what can be known of exorcism in the first-century Mediterranean world.

forth. It should follow, then, that the many Greco-Egyptian magical texts that provide techniques for gaining possession of spirits, or attaining power over spirits, might explain how Jesus came to possess a spirit or to have acquired the power of a spirit.<sup>3</sup> Smith tried to do what I am trying to do, to explain how it can be that Jesus' supposed relationship with spirit can be understood historically rather than simply by virtue of axiomatic theological statements. However, from my point of view, Smith misunderstood that relationship. It was not the relationship: "possession of," but the relationship: "possession by," the fundamental difference being whether the identity Jesus of Nazareth was thought to be in control of a spirit entity, or whether the identity of Jesus of Nazareth was sometimes thought to have been replaced by a spirit entity. And that makes all the difference in the world.

Two exorcism accounts from the ancient world are commonly cited as potential parallels to Jesus' practice. Josephus provides an eyewitness account of an exorcism by a man named Eleazar:

He put to the nose of the possessed man a ring which had under its seal one of the roots prescribed by Solomon, and then, as the man smelled it, drew out the demon through his nostrils, and, when the man at once fell down, adjured the demon never to come back into him, speaking Solomon's name and reciting the incantations that he had composed.<sup>4</sup>

We have a first century report from the Satirist Lucian of Samosata who tells this story:

Everyone knows about the Syrian from Palestine, the adept in [exorcism], how many he takes in hand who fall down in the light of the moon and roll their eyes and fill their mouths with foam; nevertheless, he restores them to health and sends them away normal in mind, delivering them from their straits for a large fee. When he stands beside them as they lie there and says: Whence came you into his body? The patient himself is silent,

<sup>3</sup> Interestingly, the magical papyri are much more concerned with how an individual might acquire a spirit than how spirits are to be exorcised.

<sup>4</sup> Antiquities 8.47, translation taken from Rebecca Gray, *Prophetic Figures in Late Second Temple Palestine*, 5.

but the spirit answers in Greek or in the language of whatever foreign country he comes from, telling how and whence he entered into the man; whereupon by adjuring the spirit and if he does not obey, threatening him, he drives him out.<sup>5</sup>

I see nothing in New Testament reports of Jesus' exorcism technique that leads me to think that he practiced in the manner of Eleazar or the Syrian. He may have, it cannot be ruled out, but our reports of Eleazar and the Syrian are themselves quite sketchy and no reports have come down to us of Jesus' use of the name Solomon, or of roots and incantations that Solomon is thought to have recommended. We have one report that Jesus questioned a demon to find out its name, but it occurs in the allegorical section of the story of the Gerasene demoniac, Mk. 5:8. Still and all, it is evidence of a sort and fits with exorcistic practices attested elsewhere, and so Jesus may well have asked demons' names. To gain the name of the possessing entity would, it was commonly believed in the ancient world, give one controlling power over that entity.

Our reports of Jesus' exorcisms are very simple. Jesus seems to have credited his power to exorcise to the spirit of God. According to Matthew 12:28, Jesus said, "If it is by spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you." The parallel version in Luke 11:20 substitutes "finger of God" for "spirit of God." Those are virtually synonymous phrases; the idea of the "hand of God" in prophetic texts is used synonymously with "spirit of God" to describe the initiation of prophetic experience. Scholarship is divided as to whether Luke or Matthew altered the Q original. Arguing, among other things, that Luke's conception of the spirit is as a power to effect speech, and not to perform miracles, Jean-Marie Van Cangh makes a strong case affirming that the original Q saying is preserved better in the Matthean version, and I shall make use of that version with the understanding that Luke's version is essentially synonymous.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Harmon, A. M., *Lucian*, Loeb Classical Library, (New York: MacMillan, 1921), "Lover of Lies," 16.

<sup>6</sup> Van Cangh, Jean-Marie, "Par l'Esprit De Dieu—Par Le Doigt De Dieu," 337-42, in Deibel, Joel, (ed.), *Logia: Le Paroles De Jesus—The Sayings of Jesus* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1982); cf. also Rodd, C. S., "Spirit or Finger," *Expository Times* 72, 1961: 157-58; and Hamerton-Kelly, Robert, "Note on Matthew 12:28 par. Luke 11:20," *New Testament Studies* 11, 1965: 167-69.

Jesus' exorcisms took place in the context of a culture that maintained a strongly dichotomous view of the supernatural. On the one hand supreme power resided in God, God's spirit, God's angels. On the other hand God had allowed demons, led it seems by Satan, to have considerable power and influence over the earth. In apocalyptic theory there would come a time when God would reestablish authority over all of the earth and Satan and his minions would be eliminated.

To cast out a demon, then, perhaps heralded the arrival of the authority of God over all of the earth, or at least the beginning of that arrival. This authority of God, the reign of God, is translated somewhat misleadingly (i.e., with inappropriate geographical overtones) as "the kingdom of God." I will use that established term, but readers should keep in mind that the kingdom of God is a perceived condition of God's rule and authority and not a place. Accordingly, the saying, "If it is by spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you," reflects both the conflict between the spirit of God and demons and the presumption that the spirit of God's victory over demons signifies the present activity of the Kingdom of God among individuals.<sup>7</sup>

### *Who is Jesus?*

Mark reports that Jesus cast out a demon who recognized him:

There was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit; and he cried out, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? I know who you are, the Holy One of God." But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him." And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. (1:23-26)

Mark tells us that "whenever the unclean spirits beheld him, they fell down before him and cried out 'You are the Son of God'" (3:11), and that a demon said "What have you do with me, Jesus, Son of

<sup>7</sup>In Romans chapters six through eight Paul gives detailed and fascinating testimony to the fact that for him the process of exorcism by the spirit has been interiorized. No longer a struggle between a person possessed by Spirit and persons possessed by Satan, exorcism has become a struggle between Spirit and sin within the psyche of a single individual.

the *Most High God*? I adjure you by God, do not torment me.' For he had said to him, 'Come out of the man, you unclean spirit'" (5:7-8).<sup>8</sup> Jesus' exorcisms are connected with Jesus' identity. The unclean spirits knew who Jesus was (1:33).

I think it is somewhat rarely observed to what a remarkable extent the question of Jesus' identity is raised in Mark, and in other ancient Christian texts. It should not be a question at all. The question is not one of category as one might expect (i.e., how should Jesus of Nazareth be classified), for which answers might be that he is a prophet or he is a son of God understood in the sense of a magician or wonder worker. No, the question raised concerns his personal identity; one would expect anyone's answer to have been that Jesus was Jesus.

However, according to Mark, Jesus asks his disciples the curious question, "Who do men say that I am?" and receives the even stranger answer, "John the Baptist; and others say Elijah; and others one of the prophets" (8:27-28), answers we are to think are wrong (8:33). The assumption of the question is that Jesus is not thought to be Jesus but that he is thought to be some other person entirely. Herod supposedly thought that Jesus was John the Baptist raised from the dead and "that is why these powers are at work in him" (6:14-16). One can but presume that because "powers are at work in him," he was thought no longer to be himself but someone else. The reasoning at work here is this: an individual who is possessed by the spirit of another individual, by the logic of possession, has assumed the identity of that other individual.

In 2 Kings 2:4-18 we find the story of Elijah who, having parted the waters of the Jordan, walked across with his companion Elisha. Elisha requested a double share of Elijah's spirit and subsequently received it so that the "sons of the prophets who were at Jericho saw him over against them, they said, 'The spirit of Elijah rests upon Elisha'" (2:18). The story of Jesus' baptism is reminiscent of this story. John the Baptist baptized Jesus in the Jordan and the spirit came upon Jesus. John the Baptist is unambiguously identified with Elijah in Matthew's gospel (17:13) and is usually thought

to be identified with Elijah in Mark's gospel too (9:11-13). The following pattern follows from this:

Elisha received Elijah's spirit near the Jordan

Jesus received John's spirit in the Jordan

Or, if John is Elijah

Jesus received Elijah's spirit in the Jordan

By the logic of possession, then, if Jesus received John's spirit he had therefore become possessed by John and so sometimes had John's identity. Or, if possessed by Elijah's spirit, he therefore sometimes had Elijah's identity.<sup>9</sup>

I have briefly considered this complicated case because, while it is certain that Mark disagrees that Jesus was John or Elijah, the logic by which those identifications were supposedly made derives from spirit-possession. The question that repeatedly arises in Mark's gospel is not *whether* Jesus was possessed but *by whom* is Jesus possessed and so, what is Jesus' identity.

Jesus' family are reported to have believed that Jesus was "outside himself" (3:21). In the context of that culture this is not just an example of the phrase we use for insanity "he is out of his mind," it is an example of a possession paradigm that assumes: given Jesus is out of his mind, another entity is in his mind. He is, in other words, not himself but another. He is possessed. Having reported Jesus' family's opinion that he is outside himself, Mark moves to offer explanations of what entity is inside him: "the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, 'He is possessed by Beelzebul, and by the prince of demons he casts out the demons'" (3:22). Immediately Jesus responds, "How can Satan cast out Satan?" (3:23) and so concedes that while he exorcises through a possessing entity, it is not Satan. He says, consistently with this, "Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they utter; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin," for they had said, "He has an unclean spirit" (3:28-30).

<sup>8</sup> This is the Gerasene demoniac story; note that the unclean spirit speaks of itself at this point in the story in the singular.

<sup>9</sup> By a logic of metaphoric identification it might have been thought that, as Elisha was to Elijah, so Jesus was to John the Baptist. And so, if John was Elijah, Jesus was Elisha. This line of thought seems to have appealed to some in primitive Christianity, as is evident

Mark, then, provides two quite different and unacceptable kinds of answers to the question of by what was Jesus possessed: it is not the case that Jesus having received the spirit from John (Elijah) should be identified with John (Elijah) and it is not the case that Jesus is possessed by Beelzebul, Satan, or any other unclean spirit. Rather, it is the case that Jesus was possessed by the Holy Spirit; to deny this and offer instead the demon-possession hypothesis is an unforgivable sin.

Principal questions raised in Mark's first eight chapters concern the question of Jesus' identity. If he is sometimes not Jesus of Nazareth, then who is he? If this were only a polemical perspective of Mark's then perhaps it could be put aside as a later Christian problem. But the two authors who revised Mark's gospel, Matthew and Luke, both accept Mark's perspective, although they disagree with Mark on other matters. More significantly, Mark's first eight chapters were probably written to discuss the views of Mark's opponents. Mark does not disagree with the perspective that Jesus' identity is a crucial question, but his own agenda is emphatically to insist that Jesus, the son of man, came to be delivered up, to suffer, to die, and to rise again. For Mark, "Son of Man" signifies Jesus of Nazareth's own persona.

Mark's view of Jesus as a spirit-possessed healer and exorcist is not the view he wrote his gospel to affirm. Rather it is a view that has been passed down to him which he accepts, but which he takes pains to indicate should not predominate over his own, chronologically later, view of Jesus the suffering, dying, and rising son of man.

The question of Jesus' identity also occurs in the Gospel of John where "the Jews" say to him, "Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, 'I have come down from heaven?'" (Jn. 6:42). And here, as we see ubiquitously in the Gospel of John, unless one understands that Jesus is not the persona Jesus of Nazareth but the spirit of God come down from heaven, one fails to understand the situation at all.

John, like Mark, believes that people would have assumed that if Jesus is possessed he is demon-possessed: Jesus said, "He who

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from the expansion of the miracle story of Elisha feeding one hundred men with a small amount of food (2 Kings 4:42-44) into the stories of Jesus' miracles of the loaves and fishes.

is of God hears the words of God; the reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God.' The Jews answered him, 'Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and are possessed by a demon?' Jesus answered, 'I am not possessed by a demon but I honor my Father, and you dishonor me'" (Jn. 8:47-49). And also, "Many of them said, 'He has a demon and he is mad; why listen to him?' Others said, 'These are not the sayings of one who has a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?'" (Jn. 10:20-21). To understand Jesus' words is to understand that it was not a human being who spoke but the spirit of God. Those who do not hear the spirit of God speak, and so hear the words of God, might well define an alter-persona differently, as a demon speaking. Such people would accept the possession paradigm but interpret it differently, as do Mark's scribes who came down from Jerusalem and declare that Jesus was possessed by Beelzebul.

Even the Gospel of Thomas raises the issue of Jesus' identity, presuming that "who Jesus is" would have been a reasonable question to ask: Thomas 43a, "His disciples said to him, 'Who are you that you say these things to us?' [Jesus replied] 'By what I say to you, you do not know who I am, but you have become as the Jews.'" And Thomas 91: "They said to him, 'Tell us who you are so that we can believe in you.' He said to them, 'You examine the face of the heavens and the earth, and (yet) you have not known him who is in front of your face, nor do you know how to examine this time.'" Whoever Jesus is, it seems from passages in Mark (and Matthew and Luke) and John and Thomas he is not (always) Jesus of Nazareth.

### *The Casting Out of Demons*

Mark's exorcism stories tell us plainly that there were people who knew who Jesus really was and they were people who were possessed by demons: "Whenever the unclean spirits beheld him, they fell down before him and cried out, 'You are the Son of God'" (3:11).

The demons knew; but what does this mean? Jesus' exorcism technique was to cast out demons by the spirit of God. He did not use the spirit of God, he had the identity of the spirit of God which, as discussed in Chapter Eleven, below, he seems to have equated

with the term "Son of God." Through that identity he forgave sins. A text from the Dead Sea Scrolls testifies to the fact that the connection between exorcism and forgiveness was not unique to Jesus. Called "The Prayer of Nabonidus (4QPrNab)," it is a late second or early first century B.C.E. story of the recovery of the last king of Babylon. He writes "I was afflicted [with an evil ulcer] for seven years . . . and an exorcist pardoned my sins. He was a Jew from among the [children of the exile of Judah, and he said] 'Recount this in writing to [glorify and exalt] the name of the Most High God.'" <sup>10</sup> Unfortunately, from this short account we cannot learn very much.

Jesus' exorcistic technique took advantage of the culturally accepted fact that God is more powerful than Satan. God, acting through God's spirit, could command a demon to leave and the demon would leave. The logic of this is clear and complete, although process may have been much more dramatic. As James Robinson summarizes Mark on the subject:

The clear-cut antithesis between the personages in the exorcism narratives is accentuated by the hostile attitude in which their discussions take place. We do not find calm conversations, but shouts and orders. The demons "shout" at Jesus: 1.23; 3.11; (5.5); 5.7; 9.26. In 5.7 the demon "adjoins" Jesus "orders" the demons (1.27; 9.25), or "reproaches" them with an order (1.25; 3.12; 9.25). The only passage approaching normal conversation is in 5.9-13, after the struggle is over and the authoritative word of exorcism had been uttered (v.8). <sup>11</sup>

Significantly, as many scholars have noticed, in exorcising demons Jesus does nothing but speak. The point is, of course, that roots, and rings, invocations, and other Solomonian magical techniques would not have been necessary if it were understood that a "demon" were confronted face to face with "the Holy One of God," for by cultural definition the spirit of God would be more powerful than any demon of Satan.

The drama of exorcism was played out on two levels. On the

<sup>10</sup> Vermes, Geza, *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987), translation number 30.

<sup>11</sup> Robinson, James M., *The Problem of History in Mark* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 84.

human level a person, let us say Mary of Magdala,<sup>12</sup> was confronted by a person, Jesus of Nazareth and they spoke. But the human level was practically irrelevant to the issue, as the culture understood it. On the supernatural level Mary of Magdala was possessed by demons and so, when she spoke, she was a demon who would be quoted as such. Mark writes, "the demons said," which is not the same thing as if he had written "people possessed by demons said"; Mark accepts the possession paradigm completely.

Mary, recognized as a demon, was confronted by another possessed person, she/demon recognized to be the Son of the Most High. The Son of the Most High drove out the demon. Subsequently, Mary of Magdala resumed the identity of Mary of Magdala and Jesus of Nazareth resumed the identity of Jesus of Nazareth.

One must bear in mind that such an exorcism, in its simplest process, is the act of transforming demon into Mary of Magdala. The act of exorcism was a drama played by two alter-personae, each recognizing the alter-persona state of the other. The demons knew who Jesus was, the Son of the Most High, and the Son of the Most High knew who the demons were (and so Jesus, like Lucian's Syrian and other known ancient exorcists, may well have demanded to know each demon's name and origin). When one recognizes that Jesus' exorcisms were carried out not by him but by the spirit/son/holy-one of God, just as one should recognize that he carried them out in regard to demons and not in regard to Mary or Joanna or Mathias, then one understands the situation. Morton Smith was wrong to assume that the spirit was an entity Jesus *had*, just as he would have been wrong to assume that a demon was an entity Mary of Magdala *had*. Rather, the spirit of God was an identity Jesus *became*, just as a demon was an identity Mary *became*.

The phenomena of conversion disorder and demon-possession are now and, in a sense, also were then understood to be different forms of psychological dissociation (then, of demonic intervention). Jesus the healer and Jesus the exorcist should be understood

<sup>12</sup> I will use her as a known example of an exorcised person, but will not press the point of her having, supposedly, "seven" demons.

to have played a social role based on one underlying paradigm. The spirit of God alleviated conversion disorders by forgiveness and the spirit of God alleviated radical negative dissociation by casting out demons.

### *Jesus' Social Healing Role Defined*

Michael Winkelman has recently analyzed the techniques of religious healing in forty seven premodern cultures, both ancient and contemporary [he includes no form of Christian or Jewish or Palestinian culture].<sup>13</sup> By his analysis there are five types of healer. The *shaman* who heals through ASC [Altered States of Consciousness] techniques particularly involving soul flight and journey into supernatural realms; the *shaman/healer* who uses physical and empirical medicine, along with charms, exorcisms and spells and sometimes ASC; the *healer* who uses only charms, spells, propitiation of spirits but has little or no use of ASC; the *medium* who acts primarily through the ASC of possession; the *priest* who acts through propitiation and collective rites with limited or no ASC; the *sorcerer/witch* who is exclusively immoral, may use ASC, and is normally credited with the power of flight and animal transformation.<sup>14</sup>

Two observations follow from his analysis. One, Jesus is reported to have had few or none of the traits of the shaman, the shaman/healer, the healer, the priest, or the sorcerer/witch. Second, Jesus has almost all of the traits of the "medium" (or, in my vocabulary, the spirit-possessed healer). I will quote Winkelman extensively on the subject to demonstrate this point.<sup>15</sup>

*Magico-religious Activities.* The primary activities of the Mediums [practitioners of spirit-possession] are healing and divination [prophecy]; they also provide protection [exorcism] against spirits [demons] and malevolent magical practitioners. Divination [prophecy] is accomplished through the use of ASC. Propitiation and worship of spirits [God] is another primary activity

<sup>13</sup> Winkelman, Michael, *Shamans, Priests and Witches: A Cross-Cultural Study of Magico-Religious Practitioners*, Anthropological Research Papers: Number 44 (Tempe: Arizona State University, 1992).

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 30-33. I am summarizing his detailed and organized discussion of these categories.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 61-62.

of the Mediums, frequently done in conjunction with agricultural rituals. Malevolent activities are essentially lacking in the Medium group.

It should be quite obvious that these characteristics are reported of Jesus. I have put in brackets terminology particular to the discussion of Jesus and to Palestinian circumstances. John reports three occasions on which Jesus attended the agricultural festival of Tabernacles; but this is weak evidence of a particular interest on his part in agricultural rituals.

*Sociopolitical Characteristics.* Mediums are predominantly women and are generally of low social and economic status. Although there are a few societies in which practitioners of this type are largely male, they are generally found in this role infrequently. The Mediums are generally evaluated by the members of their culture [Palestinian peasant culture, to be differentiated from elite culture] as being exclusively moral and benevolent in their activities, and generally not associated with the negative use of magical power for harm of others.

With one exception this set of comments applies to the reports we have of Jesus and his clientele. Judaism retained a few records of ancient female prophets but certainly the vast preponderance of reports in canonical texts, coupled with the skimpy reports we have of first century Palestinian prophetic activity, indicate that in Palestine prophet-Mediums were male.

*Professional Characteristics.* Mediums are generally part-time practitioners, engaging in normal subsistence activities in addition to their activities as practitioners. Mediums frequently do not receive remuneration for their professional activities. There is little specialization among the Mediums. . . . Spontaneously induced ASC [is] typical of the selection for all of the Mediums. . . . These spontaneously induced ASC experiences which apparently occur outside of the control or intention of the to-be practitioner no longer occur once the Medium undergoes a period of training. Subsequently, the possession episodes are no longer induced spontaneously, but occur only when there is a deliberate intention on the part of the Medium to enter an ASC.

The sections I have deleted from Winkelman's comments are reports of the typical, but abnormal, motor behaviors of spirit-possessed mediums. They are irrelevant to an account of Jesus' healing techniques because we have absolutely no evidence of those behaviors in the case of Jesus. In this matter an argument from silence (i.e., we have no reports because he exhibited no abnormal behavior) is unreliable due to the high probability that if there ever were such reports, they would not have been transmitted to us by the evangelists. The question is moot. Jesus seems to have been a full-time practitioner, but for a period of only a bit more than two years. We have no reports of his receiving remuneration; Crossan takes this standard practice to be a fact of considerable significance, but it is evidently commonplace.<sup>16</sup>

*Selection and Training.* Mediums are selected for their roles through spontaneous spirit-possession experiences which involve culturally defined episodes of possession by spirits in which the personality of the practitioner is believed to be replaced by that of a spirit entity. Mediums differ from other shamanistic practitioners in that *initial* ASC episodes leading to the need for training for the practitioner status are thought to be spontaneously induced and outside of the control of intention of the practitioner to-be; the status is not viewed as being sought in a voluntary fashion. Mediums' selection also involves episodes of illness and involuntary dreams or visions, as well as deliberate ASC induction procedures. They may be taught by individual practitioners and/or learn directly from the spirits [Spirit], but are generally trained by groups. (Winkelman's emphasis.)

The fact that Jesus' baptismal possession was spontaneous, i.e., not planned by either Jesus or John and so far as we know unparalleled in John's baptismal practice, is a particularly telling point. The story of the baptism is an account of the standard initial experience of a spirit-possessed healer and prophet.

We have no reports one way or the other of "episodes of illness and involuntary dreams," but the report of Jesus' involuntary vision of the heavens opening and a dove appearing is credible. Jesus

was taught by the prophet John the Baptist, but probably only in the weak sense of his being receptive to John's call for repentance. We have no evidence of any value that Jesus was trained by any group (e.g., Essenes). Accordingly, it is best to go with the evidence of the gospels that he learned directly from the Spirit.

*Motive and Context.* The Medium's activities are generally carried out at the request of a client group; their activities may occur in the setting of the client's family group, or may be public ceremonies in which the practitioner's activities are observed or participated in by the local community.

What can one say here but . . . yes, of course. It has often been noted that Jesus healed upon request and that there are no reports that he ever volunteered or offered healing. He did heal at the request of family groups and he did heal publicly and was observed by considerable numbers of people from the local communities.

*Supernatural power.* Relations with spirits [Spirit] is the primary source of their power for these practitioners. The Mediums are associated with superior spirits and gods [God], and generally did not have evidence of an impersonal source of power. The Medium's power is thought to be based in spirits [Spirit], who are thought to possess the Medium and act independently of the Medium's control, and occasionally without the Medium's awareness. There is the general belief that the Medium is not in control of what happens during the ASC, and may experience amnesia for all that transpired during that time. The Mediums have low control of their power and occasionally low or no awareness of its application, for instance when the spirits act outside of the Medium's consciousness.

The expectation of amnesia has been proven to be a culture-bound syndrome; if amnesia is not expected a spirit-possessed person will probably remember much of what happened during ASC. Given Winkelman's analysis, the case of the woman with a flow of blood (Mark 5:25-34) where Jesus felt power flow from him without his intention is more likely to be a case of "low control of . . . power" than of "an impersonal source of power."

<sup>16</sup> Crossan, *Historical Jesus*, 422.

*Techniques.* Generally the Mediums do not use magical technique, but instead rely upon their propitiation and ASC relationship with spirits [Spirit] as a means of manipulating the supernatural. However, sacrifice, particularly sacrifice consumed by the attending group, is also frequently employed.

Jesus' reported use of evidently ad hoc placebo devices such as spitting and the application of mud is not magic. The total monopoly of sacrifice by the Jerusalem Temple priesthood ruled out the possibility of sacrificial practice by any Palestinian Jewish healer.

### Conclusion

Jesus was a "Medium" according to Winkelman's classificatory system; he was a spirit-possessed healer to use my vocabulary. The overall parameters of his role in first-century Palestine are nothing unusual. Indeed, from Winkelman's analysis one would expect to find such healers in a culture like Palestine's, an agricultural society with social stratification and political integration. It would be surprising if there were no spirit-possessed healers there.

This is not to say, however, that Jesus' particular style and technique and alter-persona identification were anything other than unique. He was the only Palestinian healer possessed by the spirit of God of whom we know, he was the only Son of the Most High.<sup>17</sup> The account of Jesus' baptism is inversely correlative to accounts of Jesus' exorcisms. In the former case spirit-possession was initiated, in the latter cases demon-possession was eliminated. In some of the latter cases it seems reasonable to surmise that exorcised and healed individuals joined Jesus' retinue. In other words, those who came to him were those who went with him.

<sup>17</sup>In light of the foregoing analysis, and taking Mk. 13:11 to apply to the case of Jesus, the identity of the persona in Mk. 14:61-65 who says "I am," calling forth the demand "Prophecy!" becomes an interesting question.

## 8

### Jesus and His Associates

It is customary to call the set of individuals who traveled with Jesus his "disciples" a term drawn from the New Testament. But that term has two drawbacks. First, it implies that Jesus' associates were students of his and so he ought *primarily* to be regarded as having been a teacher, a view that I believe is mistaken.<sup>1</sup> Second, the term "disciples," has come to imply the set of male individuals celebrated in later Christian art and story to the general exclusion of the women who accompanied Jesus. But Mark informs us that after Jesus' execution, "there were also women looking on from afar, among whom were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joseph, and Salome, who, when he was in Galilee, followed him, and ministered to him; and also many other women who came up with him to Jerusalem" (15:40-41). Luke independently reports that "he went on through cities and villages, preaching and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God.

<sup>1</sup>Cf. Martin Hengel, *The Charismatic Leader and His Followers* (New York: Crossroad, 1981). Hengel does well to show that certain common perspectives on Jesus' career are invalid, in particular the view that Jesus was a rabbi with a circle of students, and the view that Jesus was an eschatological prophet along the lines of Theudas, or the Egyptian, or Jesus ben Hananiah.

But his own perspective is founded on principles of Christian theology. Jesus, he believes, called his disciples "to participate in his mission and authority, in the eschatological event which, taking its beginning in him, was moving powerfully towards the complete dawn of the rule of God *en dynamis* [in power]" (Mk 9.1, cf. 13.26/8); that he called them to participate by confronting the whole people, along with him, with the offer of approaching salvation and with the proclamation of the final judgment," 73.

Perhaps so, but if he thus called them *why* did they come? If you or I call disciples in this way no one will come.