


Francesco Filannino, *La fine di Satana. Gli esorcismi nel Vangelo di Marco* (Supplementi alla Rivista Biblica 67; Bologna: Edizione Dehoniane 2020). Pp. 285. € 34. ISBN 978-88-10-30257-6

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The subject of exorcisms and Satanic activity is an important constituent of the Second Gospel, which in 30 per cent consists of descriptions of miracles performed by Jesus, and almost a quarter of those descriptions are accounts of exorcisms. The topic naturally aroused the interest among Biblical scholars and readers of the Bible. The question of Satan's existence and his activities finally resulted in numerous, and often contradictory, interpretations. It is, therefore, necessary to explore the topic further using the precise methodology to discover the authentic message of Mark about the exorcisms of Jesus. A book by Francesco Filannino is included in this area of research.

Francesco Filannino, born in 1988, is a presbyter of the Archdiocese of Trani-Barletta-Bisceglie-Nazareth. Upon the completion of philosophical and theological formation at the Pontifical Lateran University, he began his studies at the Pontifical Biblical Institute where he obtained a bachelor's degree (2016) and a doctoral degree (2019) based on his dissertation on the mission of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark (title of his doctoral thesis: *Tra il precursore e i discepoli: la missione di Gesù nel vangelo di Marco*), then published in *Analecta Biblica*. He is currently a lecturer of ancient languages at the Pontifical Lateran University.

The book is 285 pages long and consists of a preface, a general introduction and nine chapters divided into two parts. In the end, the author provides a bibliography, a biblical text index and an author index.

In the introduction, the author presents short status questions by referring to different authors dealing with this subject, especially in the last two decades. He then writes about research assumptions and the method. Being inspired by the works of Hauw, he prefers a syncretic and narrative approach to show various theological aspects of those stories in relation to Christology, eschatology, and discipleship. In his work, the author does not include a general introduction to the subject of exorcisms in The Old Testament, in Jewish writings from the Second Temple Period, and Greco-Roman literature. Thereby, he intends to favour Mark's text and provide all the references while examining the specific issues. In this way, the broad context allows a better understanding of Mark's theology to prevent

the reader from starting the reading of the study with the general knowledge that may overlap with the understanding of evangelical descriptions.

The author selects the analysed pericopes while in his analysis he omits *summaria* (Mark 1:32–34,39; 3:7–12), which do not contain new information in comparison with the analysed pericopes. However, he will refer to them, as well as to the story about the temptation of Jesus, which despite not being an exorcism, still contains interesting theological issues. Apart from classical elements of the historical-critical method (delimitation, context, etc.), the author wishes to concern himself with intratextual and intertextual reading. The aim is the semantic and rhetoric analysis of the pericope within the context of Mark's entire work as well as the extraction of significant references to the Old Testament. From the very beginning, the author underlines that every pericope, although it describes the moment of deliverance from the evil spirit, conveys at the same time an important theological message. In the 'programmatic' pericope, which describes the deliverance of the evil spirit in the synagogue of Capernaum (Mark 1:21–28), the key theme is the identity of Jesus. The exorcism of Gerasa (Mark 5:1–20) stresses the need to fight against evil powers and the definite character of their defeat, which falls within Mark's vision of apocalyptic eschatology. The deliverance of the Syrophenician woman's daughter from the influence of the evil spirit (Mark 7:24–30) underlines the openness of Jesus to other nations while the expulsion of the mute spirit from the boy (Mark 9:14–29) raises the issue of faith as a key component in being a disciple of Jesus. Those observations, according to the author, suggest that exorcisms are deeply inscribed in the narrative of the Gospel of Mark because they convey a theological message consistent with the message of the section in which they were placed.

Having presented the objectives of the work and methodology, the author analyses selected texts. In the first part of the book (pp. 27–185) he provides an analysis of 4 pericopes, which contain a description of the exorcism. He begins with Mark 1:21–28, first addressing the issue of delimitation and general context, and then proceeding with a detailed analysis of the text. Examining inclusion, repetitions and other stylistic devices, he reveals the significant theological motifs of the text related to the teachings, the power (*eksousia*) and the novelty of Jesus's teaching. In a conclusion of a theological character, the author emphasises once again what results from the analysis of the text, namely the theme of the power and authority of Jesus, as elements inherent in the exorcism.

The second chapter (pp. 59–100) constitutes an analysis of the description of the liberation of the demon-possessed from Gerasa (Mark 5:1–20). The author elicits from it significant theological elements: the belonging of the possessed to the world of the dead, the power of the demon, etc. In the interpretation, he takes into account the context of macrosection Mark 1:16–8,26, where the identity of Jesus is an important topic. In his theological conclusions, he emphasises the absolute power of Jesus over evil spirits and the moment of revelation of his identity by demons. The event itself anticipates eschatological victory over evil, whose preacher becomes a man liberated from the demon's power.

In the third chapter (pp. 101–122), an extract describing the deliverance from the demon of a Syrophenician woman's daughter is analysed (Mark 7:24–30). The author

examines the direct context of the pericope and analyses in detail the dialogue between Jesus and the Syrophoenician woman. In his theological conclusion, he stresses that exorcism as an event serves to show the desire of Jesus that the salvation message spread over all nations. This soteriological aspect seems to be the core message of the story.

Finally, the fourth chapter (pp. 123–156) describes the release of the epileptic from the mute spirit (9:14–29). As usual, the author devotes considerable attention to the context, in which the exorcism occurs, and analyses its respective elements. In conclusion, he shows the message of the pericope, which focuses on Christology and the idea of discipleship. In the author's opinion, the latter is the fundamental message that the organically inspired author combines with the context that touches upon that subject.

In the conclusion to the first part of the study, the author stresses the theological richness of the pericopes, which cannot be construed as a mere exorcism. He also emphasises the meaning of the context, which is the key to identifying the meaning of every pericope as in the evangelist's intention it forms with it an organic whole.

The second part of the book is devoted to the interpretative keys of exorcisms (pp. 160–224). The author selects extracts which relate to the theme of the demon's activity and at the same time shed light on the understanding of evangelical exorcisms.

The first chapter (pp. 163–185) examines the description of the temptation of Jesus in the desert (Mark 1:12–13). Presenting different interpretations of the extract, the author highlights the theological aspect: the presentation of Jesus as the Messiah (continuation of the presentation from Mark 1:1) and the eschatological message, which is connected with the desert theme, the Holy Spirit and peaceful communion with animals. It is also a harbinger of the final victory over evil at the end of time.

The second chapter (pp. 186–207) examines Mark 3:22–30, in which the words about the kingdom of Satan appear in the context of accusing Jesus of collusion with the forces of darkness. The elements of Christology and eschatology reappear: Jesus, anointed with the Holy Spirit, lives in constant communion with God and comes to defeat the kingdom of Satan through healings and exorcisms.

The third chapter (pp. 209–222) depicts the exorcism of a man who was not a disciple of Jesus (Mark 9:38–40). The author, starting from a careful analysis of the context and structure of the text, stresses that the mere emphasis on the power of Jesus and the importance of his name, which are indispensable elements in performing an exorcism, is not the most important from the theological perspective. The key thing here is the didactic element, i.e. the instruction that the effective action against demons is a sign of belonging to Christ. Although this unknown man was not a disciple of Jesus, he acted on His behalf and carried out the mission that was entrusted to the Twelve and, more broadly, to all believers of Jesus.

In the theological synthesis, the Italian exegete once again emphasises that exorcisms should be interpreted from their rich, theological perspective. In his opinion, they are the element (one of many), from which several aspects of the theological mission of Jesus can be extracted. First, the emphasis is put on their Christological dimension because they

reveal the identity of the Master of Nazareth. The analysis of Christological titles present in the descriptions of exorcisms shows their absolute convergence with Mark's theology extracted from the entire Gospel. The eschatological aspect is also crucial, showing the final victory of Jesus in the confrontation with the world of demons. In the soteriological perspective, the universality of salvation, which embraces all nations, is emphasised. Finally, exorcisms provide an opportunity to present the concept of being a disciple of Jesus and faith as a fundamental relation to the Master. This way, the events that are usually associated with the manifestation of power and are astonishing by their nature and raise numerous questions, are presented in a proper theological perspective. They are not only moments of struggle against the evil spirit, but they also are of revelatory nature, which perfectly fits into the theological image of the activity of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark. The study of these extracts alone leads to conclusions that flow from a comprehensive analysis of the Second Gospel.

The book by Francesco Filannino is a proposal of great theological value. Employing exegetical studies, the author systematically shows the theological message of exorcisms, which at first glance is merely a fight against evil forces. It is only the in-depth analysis which shows that each exorcism is perfectly suited to the wider context, and additionally confirms the teaching of the section in which it is placed. The theological conclusions proposed by the author are convincing as they arise from a precise analysis of the text, and they are supported by firm evidence included in the text. The book provides also a general idea of Mark's theology. It would be interesting to employ this methodology of work to other groups of events described in the Gospel of Mark to check whether they are also organically linked to the theological message of the whole Gospel as the description of exorcisms.