


What Is the Sin of Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, and Why Is It Unforgivable (Mark 3:28–30 and Parallels)?

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ABSTRACT: This article is a comprehensive examination of the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Despite numerous attempts to definitively answer the question of the nature of this sin in Christian history and today, it still appears to be a *crux interpretum*. The first step is to comprehensively present the *status quaestionis* and attempt to systematise existing research. The lack of consensus among scholars justifies the need to address this topic from a broader research perspective. The first step in exegetical analysis is a meticulous examination of the synoptic passages in Mark 3:28–30, Matt 12:31–32 and Luke 12:10 in their narrative contexts. This article argues that the essence of the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is the rejection of the revelation offered by God in Jesus Christ and of God Himself as the revealed God, i.e. apostasy. However, each Evangelist approaches this issue differently, placing emphasis on different aspects. This article also asserts that Luke, probably inspired by Q 12:10, attempts to remove this teaching from its local narrative context and make it universal. This article also examines other texts (Heb 6:4–6, 1 John 5:16, and *Gos. Thom.* 44) that broaden the theological and cultural context for interpreting the gospel teaching on blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, but they do not add much new content.

KEYWORDS: sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, Mark 3:28–30, Matt 12:31–32, Luke 12:10, Heb 6:4–6, 1 John 5:16, Q source 12:10, *Gospel of Thomas* 44

The sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, also referred to as the sin against the Holy Spirit or the unforgivable sin, is a biblical and theological issue that has been the subject of many studies. Even though this New Testament topic has been hotly debated throughout Christian history and is considered by many exegetes and faithful Christians to have been thoroughly explored, conflicting interpretations and new attempts at explanation continue to emerge. This article first presents the issue of understanding blasphemy in Old Testament Judaism. Next, we will present the *status quaestionis* of the topic of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit in the history of exegesis and attempt to systematise its interpretative trends. This will justify the need for this research, demonstrating that this topic remains a *crux interpretum*. The next stage will involve a detailed exegesis of three gospel pericopes (Mark 3:28–30; Matt 12:31–32; Luke 12:10) in which the theme of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit appears in literary and theological contexts. A novelty of this study compared to existing ones will also be the examination of this theme in the context of Heb 6:4–6

and 1 John 5:16, as well as parallel passages from the Q source and the *Gospel of Thomas*. The final step will be an attempt at a balanced and differentiated assessment, followed by the formulation of conclusions.

1. Blasphemy in Judaism

A detailed investigation into the meaning of the gospel pericopes dealing with the unforgivable sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit should begin with the following question: Did this or a similar concept exist in biblical Judaism before the time of the New Testament?¹ Several passages in the Hebrew Bible address this issue. The first of these is Lev 24:10–23.² These verses, part of the so-called Holiness Code (chapters 17–26), refer to blasphemy against the Name of God, which is punishable by death by stoning. The blasphemy involved the son of an Israelite woman cursing the name of God (24:11):

וַיִּקְבּוּ בְּנוֹת־הָאִשָּׁה הַיִּשְׂרָאֵלִית אֶת־הַשֵּׁם וַיִּקְלֹל וַיְבִיאוּ אוֹתוֹ
καὶ ἐπονομάσας ὁ υἱὸς τῆς γυναικὸς τῆς Ἰσραηλεΐτιδος τὸ ὄνομα κατηράσατο.
'The son of an Israelite woman blasphemed [וַיִּקְבּוּ] the Name and cursed [וַיִּקְלֹל] it.'

The act of blaspheming against the name of God is here expressed by the Hebrew verb *nāqab*, and cursing Him is rendered by *qālal*. After committing blasphemy, the culprit was imprisoned and then, on God's orders, led outside the camp. There, all who heard the blasphemy laid their hands on his head, after which the whole congregation stoned him (Lev 24:14). After this incident, God commanded Moses to tell the Israelites that:

Anyone who curses [קָלַל] God shall incur guilt. One who blasphemes [קָבַל] the name of the Lord shall be put to death. The whole congregation shall stone the blasphemer. Aliens as well as the native-born, when they blaspheme [קָבַל] the Name, shall be put to death (Lev 24:15–16).

The closest context to this statement is the various punishments for offences against humans and animals, among which the death penalty for the murder of a human being is the most severe (24:21). The same rules apply to both Israelites and aliens. After presenting these punishments, the author recounts how the Israelites, led by Moses, carried out the death sentence by stoning a man who had blasphemed against God (Lev 24:23).

1 For more on blasphemy in the OT, see S.M. Olyan, "The Sin of Blasphemy in Ancient Israel: Boundaries of the Sacred," *Rites and Rank: Hierarchy in Biblical Representations of Cult* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 2000) 85–102.

2 A more detailed explanation of this text can be found, for example, in A. Tronina, *Księga Kapłańska. Wstęp, przekład, miejsca paralelne i komentarz* (Biblia Lubelska; Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL 2021) 115–116.

A similar situation, in which a man is sentenced to death by stoning for alleged blasphemy against God, is described in 1 Kgs 21:1–16.³ It tells the story of Naboth of Jezreel, who was falsely accused of blasphemy by Jezebel, the wife of King Ahab. The king's wife devised a plot and wrote a letter in his name to the elders and nobles of the city, accusing Naboth of blasphemy against God and the king. Naboth was put on trial, during which two false witnesses corroborated the accusation: וְמִלְךָ אֱלֹהִים בָּרַכְתָּ [LXX: ὑπολόγησεν θεόν καὶ βασιλέα] in 21:10. These words literally mean: 'You have blessed [ברך] God and the king.' Naboth was deprived of the opportunity to refute the accusation or defend himself. He was immediately led outside the city and stoned.

Exod 22:27⁴ contains a prohibition in the context of the regulations accompanying the narrative of the covenant at Mount Sinai (chapters 19–31):

אֱלֹהִים לֹא תְקַלֵּל וְנָשִׂיא בַעַמֶּךָ לֹא תָאָר

Θεοὺς οὐ κακολογήσεις, καὶ ἄρχοντας τοῦ λαοῦ σου οὐ κακῶς ἐρείς (in LXX Exod 22:28).

'You shall not blaspheme God or curse a ruler of your people' (22:27).

The verb קָלַל *qālal* is used here to describe blasphemy against God. This blasphemy is juxtaposed with imprecating/cursing the ruler, who is the Lord's anointed one. In turn, the cursing of the ruler is rendered by the verb עָרַר '*ārar*.

A similar situation is described in Isa 8:21:⁵

וְעָבְרוּ בָּהּ נָקְשָׁה וְרָעַב וְהָיָה כִּי־רָעַב וְהִתְקַצְּף וְקָלַל בְּמַלְכוֹ וּבְאֱלֹהָיו וּפָנָה לְמַעַלָּה

καὶ ἥξει ἐφ' ὑμᾶς σκληρὰ λιμός καὶ ἔσται ὡς ἂν πεινάσῃτε λυπηθῆσθε καὶ κακῶς ἐρείτε τὸν ἄρχοντα καὶ τὰ παταγῶν καὶ ἀναβλήσονται εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν ἄνω

'They will pass through the land, greatly distressed and hungry; when they are hungry, they will be enraged and will curse their king and their gods and turn their faces upward.'

Unlike Exod 22:27, the same verb קָלַל *qālal* is employed here to describe cursing both God and the king.

These four texts are the only ones in the Old Testament that deal with blasphemy against God and the death penalty by stoning as its consequence. There is no mention of what curses/blasphemies were uttered. Hence, some conclude that blasphemy consisted in the

³ See M. Cogan, *1 Kings: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 10; New York: Doubleday 2001) 482–494; M.A. Sweeney, *I & II Kings: A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox 2007) 248–255.

⁴ See the exegesis and interpretation of this verse in T.B. Dozeman, *Exodus* (ECC; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 2009) 522–524; J. Sklar, "Exodus," <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/commentary/exodus/> [access: 30.04.2025].

⁵ This text is well explained, for example, by J. Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 19; New York: Doubleday 2000) 242–244; B.S. Childs, *Isaiah: A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox 2000) 75–77.

mere utterance of the name of God.⁶ This view is expressed in the Mishnah.⁷ The Gemara goes even further, extending this sin to any ungodly speech about any attribute of God (e.g. Holy, Merciful, etc.).⁸ However, Jewish literature makes no mention of the sin of blasphemy against the (Holy) Spirit.⁹

2. *Status quaestionis* – Suggestions for Interpreting New Testament Texts on Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit in the History of Exegesis

This section presents a chronological overview of how the gospel statements regarding the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit have been interpreted throughout the history of exegesis. It is impossible and unnecessary to mention and discuss in detail the opinions of all authors who have expressed their views on this subject.¹⁰ Therefore, we will endeavour to select and present primarily interpretations that offer a new perspective, and then draw on them to produce a synthesis.

Jesus' statement about the unforgivable sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit has moved and intrigued faithful Christians from the very beginning. The oldest post-biblical reference to her can be found in the *Didache*:¹¹ 'And ye shall not tempt or dispute with any prophet who speaketh in the spirit; for every sin shall be forgiven, but this sin shall not be forgiven' (11:7). The context of this statement (chapter 11) is instruction on how to treat Christian teachers who enter communities. This statement suggests that it would be an unpardonable sin against the Spirit to mistreat (tempt or dispute with) a prophet who speaks in the Spirit. This means that mistreating the messenger is equivalent to opposing the Spirit that sends the prophet, and this would result in committing the unforgivable sin. For prophecy was regarded as a function (and gift) of the Holy Spirit.

Another voice on the matter is St Irenaeus of Lyons (130–200), who, like the author of the *Didache*, links the sin against the Holy Spirit to the denial of the prophetic spirit and, at the same time, considers any heretical teaching concerning the Holy Spirit an unforgivable sin.¹²

6 See K. Kohler – D.W. Amram, "Blasphemy," *Jewish Encyclopedia*, <https://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/3354-blasphemy> [access: 21.02.2025].

7 See m.*Sanh* 7:5.

8 See b.*Sanh* 56a.

9 For more, see U. Luz, *Matthew 8–20* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress 2001) 205–209.

10 An excellent summary, from which we have drawn here, was presented by W.W. Combs, "The Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit," *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 9/1 (2004) 57–96.

11 The English translation by Charles H. Hoole, available online at <https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/didache-hoole.html>, is given in square brackets.

12 Irénée de Lyon, *Contre les hérésies*, Livre III (ed. F. Sagnard) (SC 34; Paris: Éditions du Cerf 1974) 3.11.9, 156–157.

Origen (185–254), who addresses this topic in his commentary on the Gospel of John,¹³ does not define the nature of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, but claims that it can only be committed by those who have been baptised. This indicates that it is a sin exclusive to Christians. This opinion has become one of the leading interpretations in the history of the Church.

An interesting interpretation is offered by Athanasius the Great, bishop of Alexandria (296–373), who maintains that the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit committed by Jesus' Jewish opponents consists in their rejection of Christ's divinity.¹⁴ If they blasphemed against Him as the Son of Man, the sin could be forgiven. On the other hand, to deny God revealed in His humanity is to deny the Holy Spirit, the very God revealed in Christ the Son of Man.

Cyril of Jerusalem (315–387), in his catecheses, maintained that people should be careful of their speech lest, through carelessness or ignorance, they should say something inappropriate, with which they might show dishonour to the Holy Spirit and thus condemn themselves.¹⁵ The same opinion is expressed in the writings of Ambrose of Milan (339–397), Basil the Great (330–379), Gregory of Nyssa (330–395) and other Church Fathers of the time, who state that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, which is an unforgivable sin, is any erroneous or inappropriate utterance about Him.¹⁶

John Chrysostom (347–407), commenting on the pericope in Matthew (Matt 12:31–32), concluded that sin against the Holy Spirit was a singular transgression committed by the Jews who claimed that Jesus cast out evil spirits by the power of Satan.¹⁷ It can be presumed that Chrysostom did not think that the sin against the Holy Spirit could be committed after the end of Christ's earthly mission.¹⁸ Jerome (345–420) also claimed that this was a singular sin, consisting in attributing to Jesus the power of Beelzebub. Jerome does not make a clear statement as to whether blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, understood in this way, can also be committed during the time of the Church.

Augustine of Hippo (354–430) was the Church Father who showed the strongest interest in the problem of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit as an unforgivable sin. It was such an intriguing subject for him that he returned to it several times in his writings. Augustine

¹³ See Origène, *Commentaire sur l'Évangile selon Jean* 2.6 (45–50) (ed. Cécile Blanc) (SC 120; Paris: Cerf 1966) I, 236–240.

¹⁴ See Athanasius Alexandrinus, "Epistula ad Serapionem" 4,17, *Athanasius Werke* I/1,4 (ed. K. Savvidis) (GCS N.F. 19; Berlin – Boston, MA: De Gruyter 2010) 583–584. We use the following Polish translation: Św. Atanazy Wielki, *Listy do Serapiona* (trans. S. Kalinkowski) (*Źródła Myśli Teologicznej* 2; Kraków: WAM 1996). This work is discussed in detail in W. Turek, "Grzech przeciw Duchowi Świętemu: Mt 12,31–32 w Listach do Serapiona św. Atanazego Wielkiego," *Studia Płockie* 26 (1998) 67–74. The author of the article rightly points out that these letters are the first work of the Church Fathers entirely devoted to the Holy Spirit. See *ibidem*, 67.

¹⁵ Our presentation of the topic is in line with Combs, "The Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit," 59.

¹⁶ Combs, "The Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit," 59.

¹⁷ See John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel of Saint Matthew* 41.5. We use the following translation: Św. Jan Chryzostom, *Homilie na Ewangelię według św. Mateusza. Część II: Homilie 41–90* (trans. A. Baron) (*Źródła Myśli Teologicznej* 23; Kraków: WAM 2001).

¹⁸ See Combs, "The Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit," 60.

devotes the most time to this issue in his homily on Matt 12:32.¹⁹ Unlike Jerome, he does not assert that it is a matter of a singular sin committed by Jesus' opponents. Drawing on his life experience, he observes that many people blaspheme against God or His works. However, they then confess their sins, repent and return to the bosom of the Church. Therefore, he believes that Jesus is not referring to this sin in Matt 12:32. Augustine believes that the unforgivable sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit can be committed by those who received the Holy Spirit by accepting faith in Christ, but then renounced God and failed to convert, thereby excluding themselves from salvation. However, he asserts that a person can convert even in the very last hour of their life. Therefore, only those who persist until the end of their earthly life in rejecting the salvation offered by Christ blaspheme against the Holy Spirit. However, Augustine was not entirely satisfied with his answer and claimed that this was one of the most difficult exegetical problems in the entire Holy Scriptures:

Fateor vobis, fratres, quia numquam audacius aliquid aut difficilius in omni scriptura divina tractavi. Ideo in contionibus populi vitavi hanc quaestionem molestissimam.

[Perhaps there is no more difficult and important issue in the entire Holy Scriptures. Therefore, I confess to you that in my speeches to the people, I avoided this troublesome issue].²⁰

The Middle Ages witnessed attempts to explain the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit in scholastic theology, two of which we will discuss here. The first of these we owe to Peter Lombard (1100–1160), considered the father of systematic theology, as his *Libri Quattuor Sententiarum*²¹ became one of the leading theology textbooks until the seventeenth century. Referring to Augustine of Hippo, Lombard claimed that sin against the Holy Spirit involves obstinate and deliberate persistence in evil. Accordingly, he identified six unforgivable sins: despair, presumption, impenitence, obstinacy, resisting the known truth, and envy of another person's spiritual good.²² However, this theologian believed that none of these sins are unforgivable in an absolute sense (conversion is always possible).

Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) was the second of the great medieval theologians to tackle the problem of the unforgivable sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. In his seminal work *Summa Theologica* (written approx. 100 years after Lombard's textbook), he systematises the teachings of the Church Fathers on this subject and takes Lombard's opinion into account.²³ He suggests that the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit

19 See Augustinus Hipponensis, *Sermo* 71, 10,17 – 12,20 (ed. C. Lambot) (CCSL 41Aa; Turnhout: Brepols 2008) 24–30.

20 See Augustyn, *ibidem*, Kazanie 71.1 (translation by the authors).

21 A digital version is available at: <https://archive.org/details/petrilombardisen01pete/page/2/mode/2up> [access: 24.02.2025].

22 Petrus Lombardus, *Sententiae in IV libris distinctae*, 3 ed. (Grottaferrata: Collegium S. Bonaventurae 1971–1981) I–II, passim.

23 See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* II-II, q. 14, a. 1 (Editio Leonina. Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII P. M. edita) (Romae 1895) VIII, 111–112. We use the following Polish edition: Św. Tomasz z Akwinu, *Suma teologiczna*. XV. *Wiara i nadzieja*, 2–2, *qu.* 1–22 (trans. and notes P. Belch) (London: Katolicki Ośrodek Wydawniczy "Veritas" 1966).

should be considered threefold: (1) as a specific singular sin committed by Jesus' Jewish opponents, who alleged that His salvific acts, performed in the power of the Spirit, were, in fact, the work of Satan; (2) as a sin of persistent rejection of the salvation offered by God in Christ until the end of one's life (Augustine's concept); (3) as a sin resulting from malice/persistence in evil.²⁴

The 16th-century Protestant reformers also addressed the topic of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Both Martin Luther and John Calvin rejected Augustine's interpretation of this sin as transgression committed in the last moments of a person's life, if that person died in a state of rejection of God's salvation (without conversion). They believed that a person could commit this sin at any stage of life and that it would remain unforgivable. In their view, such an unforgivable sin is the rejection of the accepted truth of the Christian faith explicitly revealed by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, it is not a sin directed against the Holy Spirit but against His action in the lives of believers. Luther claimed that this sin could be committed by both non-believers and those who had already been reborn through faith. Calvin, on the other hand, maintained that a true believer is incapable of committing this sin.

In contemporary Christianity, too, there is no consensus on how the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit should be defined. The authors either repeat proposals developed in the tradition of the Church or (rarely) attempt to present original hypotheses. These opinions can be organised into several categories, which we present here systematically.

Few authors deny the possibility of such a thing as the unforgivable sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. One argument in favour of this view is that it would be contrary to the nature of God, who does not condemn anyone to eternal damnation. It would also be contrary to Christ's salvific mission on earth. Such a view is presented, for example, in the 1939 edition of the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*. T. Rees, in his entry on 'blasphemy', asserts that when Jesus uttered these words, he was incorrect – he was mistaken.²⁵ In the subsequent edition of this encyclopedia, published in 1979, the editors of the entry on 'blasphemy' maintained their position that it was impossible to commit this sin, but removed the statement that Jesus had made a mistake in uttering these words. Others dismiss the possibility of this sin, pointing out that in the Old Testament, as in Jewish intertestamental literature (e.g. Philo of Alexandria), the phrase 'unforgivable sin' is used idiomatically to refer to grave (but still pardonable) transgressions against God. Thus, following this line of thinking, when Jesus spoke of the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, his listeners understood it as follows: blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is a grave offence against God, much more serious than blasphemy against another human, but still

²⁴ According to Thomas Aquinas, in this third case, God can exceptionally and miraculously overcome this malice/wickedness in a person.

²⁵ See T. Rees, "Blasphemy," *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (ed. J. Orr) (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1939) I, 486. Contemporary online version: <https://www.internationalstandardbible.com/B/blasphemy.html> [access: 28.04.2025].

forgivable.²⁶ Some other researchers examining this topic believe that the historical Jesus could not have uttered words about the unforgivable sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, and that this statement was attributed to him by the Church communities that edited the Gospels.²⁷

Several contemporary commentators adhere to the interpretation proposed by Augustine and prevalent in the Middle Ages. In their view, unforgivable blasphemy against the Holy Spirit involves rejecting the salvation offered by God and refusing to be reconciled with Him at death.²⁸ This is the dominant interpretation in the Catholic Church and is reflected in the Catechism of the Catholic Church:

Whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin (Mark 3:29; cf. Matt 12:32; Luke 12:10).

There are no limits to the mercy of God, but anyone who deliberately refuses to accept his mercy by repenting, rejects the forgiveness of his sins and the salvation offered by the Holy Spirit. Such hardness of heart can lead to final impenitence and eternal loss.²⁹

The third category comprises authors who claim that the unforgivable sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit was a concrete sin committed once, in a specific place and time, by Jesus' opponents, who accused Him of casting out evil spirits by the power of Satan. As this sin was closely linked to the rejection of Jesus' mission guided by the Holy Spirit, it can no longer be committed after His resurrection and ascension into heaven.³⁰ Consequently, it does not apply to Christians living in the Church of all ages.

The largest group of contemporary commentators on this subject are those who believe that the unforgivable sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit can be committed by people of all times in the history of salvation following the incarnation of the Son of God (both during the public ministry of Jesus and in the times of the Church). However, several differences of opinion are worth noting. Some modern exegetes adopt Athanasius' interpretation

26 Such an opinion is presented in a commentary on Matthew, for instance, in A.H. McNeile, *The Gospel according to St. Matthew: The Greek Text with Introduction, Notes and Indices* (London: Macmillan 1915; reprint Grand Rapids, MI: Baker 1980) 179.

27 Here, we name only a few representative authors from among the dozen or so who have written on this subject: R. Scroggs, "The Exaltation of the Spirit by Some Early Christians," *JBL* 84/4 (1965) 361; A.J.B. Higgins, *The Son of Man in the Teaching of Jesus* (SNTSMS 39; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1980) 89; R.W. Funk – R.W. Hoover – Jesus Seminar, *The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus* (New York: Scribner 1993) 51, 185, 227.

28 See, for example, G. Smeaton, *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit* (Edinburgh: Clark 1882; reprint Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust 2016) 220. Smeaton is one of the few Protestant theologians who accept this interpretation. See also the Catholic commentary in J.P. Meier, *Matthew* (NTM 3; Wilmington, DE: Glazier 1980) 135–136.

29 See *Katechizm Kościoła Katolickiego*, 2 ed. (Poznań: Pallotinum 2002) 444, punkt 1864. See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, p. 1864, https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM [access: 18.06.2025].

30 See, for example, J.A. Broadus, *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (An American Commentary on the New Testament; Philadelphia, PA: American Baptist Publication Society 1886) 272; J. Wesley, *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament*, 12 ed. (New York: Carlton and Porter 1856) 44. This view is currently favoured by some Protestants who support dispensationalism. For more on this trend in theology, see M. Sweetnam, *The Dispensations: God's Plan for the Ages* (Lisburn: Scripture Teaching Library 2013).

mentioned above, who claimed that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit ultimately amounts to rejecting Christ's divinity.³¹ This sin offends the Holy Spirit because, by rejecting the divinity of Jesus, people reject that the Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Holy Trinity, is the *Spiritus Movens* of His mission on earth. Many proponents of this interpretation believe that the unforgivable sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit involves apostasy, understood as abandoning the Christian faith.³² This view is also shared by those who claim that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit does not relate to any specific transgression against God's commandments. Instead, it would involve a way of life that rejects the truth of God's revelation in the Holy Scriptures, inspired by the Holy Spirit.³³ Similar ideas are shared by scholars who argue that the unforgivable sin against the Holy Spirit involves rejecting the truth from God by someone who once believed in it.³⁴ Not far from this view are those interpreters who maintain that this sin is hatred of God and all that is related to Him.³⁵

The majority of interpreters believe that the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is the deliberate mislabelling of good as evil.³⁶ It involves the intentional and malicious rejection of good, viewing good as evil and evil as good. This sin destroys a person's ability to distinguish between good and evil, thereby precluding repentance and conversion. For this reason, it is a sin that cannot be forgiven.

Another variation of this interpretation is the denial of the Holy Spirit's activity, which results in the rejection of God's graces, which He mediates, and especially the salvific act offered by God in Jesus Christ.³⁷ In essence, it is a sin of unbelief that rejects salvation through the Holy Spirit. A mutation of this view is to mock the activity of the Holy Spirit and to attribute His actions to the forces of evil. Therefore, this sin essentially consists in attributing to Satan the good that is accomplished by the power of God.³⁸ It is not a matter of a general evaluation of God's action in human life, but of denying the Holy Spirit's action in the rebirth in faith and the sanctification of humanity, and attributing this agency to Satan.

³¹ See A. Barnes, *Barnes' Notes on the New Testament*, 8 ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel 1962) 59.

³² This view is typical of Protestant Reformed Churches that refer to John Calvin's interpretation. Two representative authors can be given as examples: W. Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel according to Matthew* (NTC; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker 1973) 528–529; E.H. Palmer, *The Person and Ministry of the Holy Spirit: The Traditional Calvinistic Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker 1974) 177–186. A similar view is expressed by C.K. Barrett, *Holy Spirit and the Gospel Tradition* (London: SPCK 1947) 106.

³³ See G.C. Berkouwer, *Sin* (Studies in Dogmatics; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1971) 343–344.

³⁴ For example, F. Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia 1950) I, 573.

³⁵ See J. Müller, *Christian Doctrine of Sin* (trans. W. Urwick) (Edinburgh: Clark 1885) II, 422.

³⁶ See Combs, "The Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit," 70. Such a view is held, for example, by E.T. Thompson, *The Gospel according to Mark and Its Meaning for Today* (Richmond, VA: John Knox 1954) 81; W. Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew*, revised ed. (The Daily Study Bible; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox 1975) II, 44; R.V.G. Tasker, *The Gospel according to St. Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary* (TNTC; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1962) 128; H.B. Swete, *The Holy Spirit in the New Testament* (London: Macmillan 1910; reprint Grand Rapids, MI: Baker 1964) 117.

³⁷ See, for example, W.T. Hogue, *The Holy Spirit: A Study* (Chicago, IL: Rose 1916) 386; J.O. Sanders, *The Holy Spirit of Promise: The Mission and Ministry of the Comforter* (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott 1940) 135.

³⁸ This view is supported, for example, by H.H. Hobbs, *An Exposition of the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker 1965) 154–155; J.F. Walvoord, *Matthew: Thy Kingdom Come* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press 1974) 89.

The systematic overview presented here is somewhat simplified and, as a result, does not cover all the nuances of each interpreter's approach. Contemporary theologians, especially those of the Protestant tradition, occasionally publish articles that present what they consider to be new and original approaches to this issue. However, other scholars believe that these proposals are mostly mere variations on existing ideas and do not offer any new perspectives.

One such attempt is, for example, the proposal by Scott N. Callaham, who seeks to demonstrate that 'blasphemy against the Holy Spirit means radically rejecting the sign of the New Covenant, hence the offender experiences the covenant sanction of irrevocably being "cut off".³⁹ Considering the possibility of breaking the covenant with God by rejecting the Holy Spirit as the sign of the New Covenant, which results in an irreversible, deliberate and voluntary renunciation of salvation, undoubtedly brings a new perspective. However, this interpretation fits into the established trend of understanding blasphemy against the Holy Spirit as apostasy from God.

Another more recent and noteworthy proposal is presented by Myk Habets, who attempts to interpret the gospel pericopes about the unforgivable sin against the Holy Spirit from the perspective of Trinitarian theology.⁴⁰ The author points out that in chapter 12, Matthew argues that blasphemy against the Father (not mentioned in Matt 12:31–32: *sic!*) or the Son will be forgiven. However, it is different from deliberate rejection and blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. This is because through the work of the Holy Spirit, it has been possible to reveal the messianic identity and mission of the incarnate Son of the Father. Thus, blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is, in fact, the unpardonable sin of blasphemy against the whole Trinity. In light of the *status quaestionis* presented above, it can be concluded that this idea does not differ from existing proposals. It has the merit of highlighting the role of the Holy Spirit as the revelator of Jesus' messianic identity and of emphasising that the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is ultimately a sin against the triune God.

The multitude of often divergent views presented by past and present interpreters, as indicated here, leads to the conclusion that there is no consensus on how to understand the unforgivable sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. For this reason, we consider it appropriate to explore this topic further.

3. Interpretation of Mark 3:28–30 and Parallels in the Narrative Context and the Presence of this Theme in Other Sources

It appears that the above attempts to define blasphemy against the Holy Spirit overlook the fact that Jesus' statements on this subject differ slightly in the accounts of each of the three

39 See S.N. Callaham, "Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit: Rejecting the Sign of the Covenant," *HBT* 45/1 (2023) 37.

40 See M. Habets, "Jesus, the Spirit, and the Unforgivable Sin: A Contribution from Spirit Christology," *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 12/1 (2018) 39–57.

Evangelists and are placed in different narrative and theological contexts in their works. Moreover, a parallel logion worth comparing with the versions given by the Synoptics is also found in the *Gospel of Thomas*. To complete the picture, it would also be helpful to consider the version reconstructed in the hypothetical Q source. The exegetical procedure will include an explanation of these pericopes in the literary and theological context of each text. By closely examining these passages in context, we aim to highlight the differences between how each Evangelist perceives it and identify what they have in common regarding blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

Mark 3:28–30	Matt 12:31–32	Luke 12:10	Q source 12:10	Gos. Thom. 44
<p>²⁸ Ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι πάντα ἀφεθήσεται τοῖς υἱοῖς τῶν ἀνθρώπων, τὰ ἁμαρτήματα καὶ αἱ βλασφημίαι ὅσα ἐὰν βλασφημήσωσιν ²⁹ ὃς δ' ἂν βλασφημήσῃ εἰς τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον, οὐκ ἔχει ἄφεσιν εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα, ἀλλὰ ἔνοχος ἐστὶν αἰωνίου ἁμαρτήματος. ³⁰ ὅτι ἔλεγον Πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον ἔχει.</p>	<p>³¹ Διὰ τοῦτο λέγω ὑμῖν, πᾶσα ἁμαρτία καὶ βλασφημία ἀφεθήσεται τοῖς ἀνθρώποις, ἡ δὲ τοῦ πνεύματος βλασφημία οὐκ ἀφεθήσεται. ³² καὶ ὃς ἐὰν εἴπῃ λόγον κατὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, ἀφεθήσεται αὐτῷ ὃς δ' ἂν εἴπῃ κατὰ τοῦ πνεύματος τοῦ ἁγίου, οὐκ ἀφεθήσεται αὐτῷ οὔτε ἐν τῷ αἰῶνι οὔτε ἐν τῷ μέλλοντι.</p>	<p>¹⁰ Καὶ πᾶς ὃς ἐρεῖ λόγον εἰς τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, ἀφεθήσεται αὐτῷ τῷ δὲ εἰς τὸ ἅγιον πνεῦμα βλασφημήσαντι οὐκ ἀφεθήσεται.</p>	<p>καὶ ὃς ἐὰν εἴπῃ λόγον εἰς τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἀφεθήσεται αὐτῷ, ὃς δ' ἂν [εἴπῃ] εἰς τὸ ἅγιον πνεῦμα οὐκ ἀφεθήσεται αὐτῷ.</p>	<p>ΠΕΧΕ ΙC ΧΕ ΠΕΤΑ ΧΕ ΟΥΑ Δ Π ΕΙΩΤ' CΕ ΝΑ ΚΩ ΕΒΟΛ ΝΑ Q' ΑΓΩ ΠΕΤΑ ΧΕ ΟΥΑ Ε Π ΨΗΡΕ CΕ ΝΑ ΚΩ ΕΒΟΛ ΝΑ Q' ΠΕΤΑ ΧΕ ΟΥΑ ΔΕ Δ Π ΠΝΑ ΕΤ ΟΥΑΔΒ CΕ ΝΑ ΚΩ ΔΝ ΕΒΟΛ ΝΑ Q' ΟΥΤΕ ΘΗ Π ΚΑΒ ΟΥΤΕ ΘΝ Τ ΠΕ⁴¹</p>
<p>²⁸ Amen, I say to you: All things will be forgiven the sons of men, the sins and the blasphemies with which they may have blasphemed. ²⁹ But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit has no forgiveness forever, but is guilty of an eternal sin. ³⁰ For they were saying: He has an unclean spirit.</p>	<p>³¹ Therefore, I say to you: Every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. ³² And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, neither in this age nor in the one to come.</p>	<p>¹⁰ And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but to the one blaspheming against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven.</p>	<p>And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him.</p>	<p>It is said: He who speaks something against the Father, they will forgive him, and he who speaks against the Son, they will forgive him. But he who speaks something against the Spirit, which is Pure/Holy, they will not forgive him, neither on earth nor in heaven.</p>

3.1. Mark 3:28–30

The immediate context of Jesus' declaration that 'whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit has no forgiveness forever, but is guilty of an eternal sin' (3:29) is the accusation made against Him by the scribes arrived from Jerusalem that He had made a pact with Beelzebub,

⁴¹ Critical text by M. Linssen, *The True Words of Thomas (Interactive Coptic-English Translation)* (Version 1.9.5), https://www.academia.edu/42110001/The_true_words_of_Thomas_Interactive_Coptic_English_gospel_of_Thomas [access: 12.02.2025]. See also B. Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures: A New Translation with Annotations and Introductions* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday 1987) 388.

the ruler of evil spirits (3:22–30).⁴² This event is part of a sequence of episodes recounted at the beginning of the Gospel of Mark. It strongly echoes the first episode (1:1–8), which recounts the activity of John the Baptist on the Jordan River: ‘John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins’ (1:4). Right after that, he says: ‘I baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit’ (1:8). Immediately after this announcement by John the Baptist, Mark recounts that Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee to be baptised by John in the Jordan (1:9). As Jesus emerges from the water, the Holy Spirit descends upon Him, and the voice of the Father is heard from heaven: ‘You are my beloved Son, in you I am well pleased’ (1:11). Immediately following this messianic investiture, the Spirit leads Jesus out into the wilderness where, for forty days and nights, His divine sonship is tested by the Devil. These events set the stage for Jesus’ subsequent activity: the reader is aware that Jesus is the beloved Son of God acting on His behalf in the Holy Spirit. Likewise, throughout the rest of the Gospel of Mark – in His teaching and miracles – Jesus acts by the power of God in the Holy Spirit.

Immediately after the temptation in the wilderness, Jesus returns to his home in Galilee (1:14) to fulfil his mission of proclaiming the kingdom of God through words and miracles in the Holy Spirit. Travelling through Galilee, Jesus teaches and heals people of various illnesses, attracting ever larger crowds. This activity is met with resistance from the scribes, who try to discredit Him in the eyes of the crowd of listeners.

The event we are analysing here fits into the narrative context presented of Jesus’ teaching and working of miracles. The episode in Mark 3:28–30 is immediately preceded by the story of the calling of the twelve disciples (3:13–19) and a mention that Jesus’ kindred (relatives) came to take Him away, because rumours had spread that He had lost His mind (3:20–21). This brief mention is the first element of a pattern centred on Jesus’ response (3:23–29) to the accusation levelled against Him by the scribes who had come from Jerusalem, claiming that He had Beelzebub within Him and was casting out evil spirits by his power (3:22). The pattern mentioned above is as follows:⁴³

A – Jesus’ activity and the arrival of His relatives (3:20–21)

B – Accusation against Jesus by the scribes (3:22)

C – Jesus’ response to the scribes (3:23–29)

B’ – The author’s comment reminding about the accusation (3:30)

A’ – Another mention of Jesus’ relatives and His words about true kindred (3:31–35)

42 R. Jordan demonstrates the significance of this verse in the context of Mark 3:20–35 to the development of the Christological message of the entire Gospel of Mark (“The Significance of Mark 3:20–End for Understanding the Message of Mark’s Gospel,” *ExpTim* 124/5 [2013] 225–230). In contrast, E.E. Shively highlights the apocalyptic language of this pericope, viewing it as a theological diagnosis of the conflict between God and demonic forces (*Apocalyptic Imagination in the Gospel of Mark: The Literary and Theological Role of Mark 3:22–30* [BZNW 189; Berlin – Boston, MA: De Gruyter 2012] 348–373).

43 See A. Malina, *Ewangelia według Świętego Marka, rozdziały 1,1 – 8,26* (NKB.NT 2.1; Częstochowa: Edycja św. Pawła 2013) 246.

Immediately after this event, Mark interrupts the narrative to begin again with Jesus, the Twelve, and a large crowd at the Sea of Galilee, where He teaches them in parables (4:1–34). The Evangelist then recounts Jesus' continued journey with the disciples through Galilee (until the end of chapter nine). It was a time abundant in Jesus' teaching and spectacular miracles. Chapter 10 begins the story of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem, the site of His capture, death and resurrection.

We have briefly outlined the immediate and broader context of Jesus' response to the accusation by the scribes from Jerusalem (3:28–30),⁴⁴ as it differs from the way this event is presented by the other two Synoptics, which is of considerable importance when considering the theological function of each of these statements.

The immediate context of Jesus' response to the scribes who had come from Jerusalem (3:23–29) is the accusation that 'He has Beelzebub, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out the demons' (3:22). This is a continuation of the hostility of the scribes and Pharisees, which had escalated since the beginning of His public ministry. Mark informs us in 3:22 that this time the opponents came from Jerusalem to underline their higher status and the seriousness of the accusation. They attack both Jesus personally (He has Beelzebub) and His actions (the power to cast out evil spirits). In essence, this is an accusation that Jesus performs all the miracles through the power of the ruler of demons, i.e. He is possessed by an evil spirit. This is an attack at the very heart of His identity as defined in the first chapter: the Son acting on the Father's mandate and inspired by the Holy Spirit. This identity is confirmed by the testimony of John the Baptist in 1:8 and the testimony of the voice from heaven in 1:11. These testimonies were verified during the test of identity in the wilderness (1:12–13) and in the miracles performed by Jesus up to that point.

From the perspective of cultural anthropology, the entire situation described in 3:22–30 reflects the challenge-and-response dynamic that is part of the game of honour.⁴⁵ The accusation brought against Jesus by the scribes of the Jerusalem establishment should be regarded as a very serious charge, a challenge intended to deprive Him of honour/reputation/dignity, thereby discrediting Him in the eyes of the crowds following Him and undermining His identity as the Son of God (Mark 1:1) and an exorcist acting on the authority of the Father and inspired by the Holy Spirit.⁴⁶

In a game of honour, the accused may immediately surrender or accept the challenge, defending themselves with arguments and possibly raising the stakes. Jesus takes up the challenge. He builds his response in three stages. First, He shows the absurdity and logical

⁴⁴ A more detailed and multifaceted view of the placement of passage 3:22–30 in the narrative of the entire Gospel of Mark can be gleaned from reading D. Rhoads – J. Dewey – D. Michie, *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel*, 3 ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress 2012).

⁴⁵ This mechanism is expertly presented by B.J. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology*, 3 ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox 2001) 25–50.

⁴⁶ For more on the interpretation of Jesus' confrontation with His opponents in Mark from this perspective, see J. Kręcidło, *Honor i wstyd w interpretacji Ewangelii. Szkice z egzegezy antropologiczno-kulturowej* (Lingua Sacra. Monografie 1; Warszawa: Verbinum 2013) 25–80.

fallacy of His opponents' accusation by using a short parable about a kingdom divided against itself (3:23–26).⁴⁷ Second, He tells a parable about how one has to tie up a strong man to plunder his house, again showing that the accusation against Him is false (3:27). The third stage of Jesus' response is a solemn declaration, beginning with 'amen', concerning the unforgivable sin against the Holy Spirit (3:28–29).⁴⁸ This declaration is a legal and sapiential statement. From the perspective of the logic of honour and shame, one might expect this conflict to escalate further with Jesus' opponents raising the stakes. This should be done by responding to His explanation and accusation and formulating further accusatory arguments. However, Mark does not mention this at all. On the contrary, he merely repeats the original accusation with which the scribes provoked Jesus to respond: 'For they were saying, He has an unclean spirit' (3:30).

For readers familiar with the rules of the game of honour, it is clear that since the opponents did not raise the stakes, they acknowledged their defeat, unable to find any arguments against Jesus' apologia and the accusation made against them in the statement about the unforgivable sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Usually, when the Evangelists recount such confrontations between Jesus and His opponents in a game of honour, they take care to make the readers aware of the audience's reaction, because according to the rules of this game, it is the witnesses who are not directly involved who give the final verdict on who has gained honour and who has lost it (which is known as the 'public court of reputation'). The author of the analysed episode immediately moves on to the story of the arrival of Jesus' relatives, which was mentioned in 3:20–21 and interrupted in order to recount Jesus' confrontation with the scribes. In doing so, the author concludes the *inclusio* with Jesus' declaration of true kindred, i.e. Jesus' true family (3:31–35),⁴⁹ leaving it up to the reader to decide on Jesus' victory in this confrontation.

Moving on to a more detailed analysis of Jesus' statement about the unforgivable sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (3:28–29), it should be noted that the concentric structure clearly shows that these words are not addressed either to Jesus' natural family or to the crowd standing outside and inside the house where Jesus was (external *inclusio*). These declarative sentences/statements are addressed to the scribes from Jerusalem, His adversaries, who accuse Him of performing exorcisms by the power of Beelzebub.

47 See R.A. Guelich, *Mark 1–8:26* (WBC 34A; Waco, TX: Word Books 1989) 169–173. See also A. Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress 2007) 217–221. The author provides a detailed exegesis of the pericope, analysing its rhetorical structure and socio-religious context. She also draws attention to its use of parallel structures and the importance of the broader context of conflict with religious leaders.

48 A good explanation of the exegetical details can be found in the commentaries by R.A. Guelich, *Mark 1–8:26*, 173–175; J. Marcus, *Mark 1–8: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 27; New Haven, CT – London: Yale University Press 2002) 280–284; R.T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 2002) 167–170; Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary*, 229–233.

49 For a broader context, see J. Kręcidło, "Koncepcja honoru rodziny w Ewangeliu wg św. Marka," *AK* 166/1 (2016) 12–26.

This observation is confirmed by Jesus' first words in 3:28: Ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν 'Amen, I say to you.'⁵⁰ After the declarative 'amen' announcing the great importance of the words that follow, Jesus indicates their addressees: 'I say to you.' The context indicates that the addressees here are those who had levelled the most serious accusation against Him, namely that He was a servant of Beelzebub, identified with Satan. Therefore, the sin that Jesus is about to speak of can only be committed by those who would make the same accusation against Him as the scribes from Jerusalem were making at that moment.

Jesus calls this sin blasphemy (βλασφημία, βλασφημέω).⁵¹ The basic dictionary meaning of these words is to verbally insult someone, curse them, or use abusive language towards them. In the Septuagint, this term was not restricted to referring to such behaviour directed against another person, but also against God and His representative/anointed one = king (see 2 Kgs 19:6; 1 Macc 2:6; 2 Macc 8:4; 10:35; 15:24; Dan 3:96). In such cases, the gravity of the blasphemy is much greater, and the offence is more serious and requires redress. There is also unforgivable blasphemy (see the first part of this article for more on this topic). This meaning was adopted by the authors of the New Testament (see, for example, Matt 26:65; Luke 5:21; John 10:33, 36; Rev 13:1, 5; 16:11; 17:3).

In the Gospel of Mark, the Jewish establishment repeatedly accuses Jesus of blasphemy against God. Its first instance is found in the context of the pericope we examined earlier, namely 2:7. This accusation refers to Jesus' words addressed to the paralytic he healed: 'Your sins are forgiven (verb ἀφίημι)' (2:5). The scribes present did not respond to these words verbally, but the omniscient narrator informs the reader that in their hearts (minds) they were convinced that Jesus had blasphemed, because only God alone can forgive sins (2:7). Knowing their thoughts, Jesus heals the paralytic to prove the truth of His words that He is the Son of Man who acts on God's authority and has the power to forgive sins (2:10).

In the narrative following Mark 3:22–30, i.e. 7:22, the term blasphemy appears to denote that which can make a person unclean. It is not specified whether this refers to blasphemous thoughts or words directed at a person or God.⁵² Another instance of βλασφημία in reference to Jesus is found in 14:64. The context here is the trial of Jesus before the high priest, the elders, and the scribes (14:53–65). The high priest asks Jesus: Σὺ εἶ ὁ χριστὸς ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ εὐλογητοῦ 'Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed?' (14:61). He answers: Εγώ εἰμι, καὶ ὄψεσθε τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐκ δεξιῶν καθήμενον τῆς δυνάμεως καὶ ἐρχόμενον μετὰ τῶν νεφελῶν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ 'I am; and you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power and coming with the clouds of heaven' (14:62). The high priest's reaction is to tear his clothes, after which the entire council unanimously pronounces the

⁵⁰ On the uniqueness of Jesus' use of this formula in the Gospels, see J. Strugnell, "Amen, I Say Unto You' in the Sayings of Jesus and in Early Christian Literature," *HTR* 67/2 (1974) 177–182.

⁵¹ W. Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3 ed. (ed. F.W. Danker) (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press 2000) 178; J.H. Thayer, "blasphémia," *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson 2023), <https://biblehub.com/greek/988.htm> [access: 29.04.2025].

⁵² The translator of the Polish Millennium Bible renders the noun βλασφημία as 'obelgi' [insults].

death sentence on Jesus according to Jewish law: ‘You heard the blasphemy [ἤκούσατε τῆς βλασφημίας]; [...] And they all condemned him as deserving of death’ (14,64). In 15:29, the verb βλασφημέω makes its last appearance in Mark in a sentence describing the abuse hurled at Jesus dying on the cross by passers-by. The chief priests and scribes also appear here (15:31), for whom this event is a falsification of His divine prerogatives: ‘He saved others, himself he cannot save; the Messiah, the king of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, that we may see and believe’ (15:31b–32a).

In Mark 3:28–29, the theme of blasphemy appears three times in Jesus’ declarations beginning with ‘amen’ addressed to those who accused Him of performing exorcisms by the power of Beelzebub (3:22). The first time, Jesus declares: πάντα ἀφεθήσεται τοῖς υἱοῖς τῶν ἀνθρώπων, τὰ ἁμαρτήματα καὶ αἱ βλασφημίαι ὅσα ἐὰν βλασφημήσωσιν ‘All things will be forgiven the sons of men, the sins and the blasphemies with which they may have blasphemed’ (v. 28). He immediately follows it with: ὅς δ’ ἂν βλασφημήσῃ εἰς τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον, οὐκ ἔχει ἄφεσιν εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα, ἀλλὰ ἐνοχός ἐστιν αἰωνίου ἁμαρτήματος ‘But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit has no forgiveness forever, but is guilty of an eternal sin’ (v. 29). As mentioned above, this remark is a declarative/sapiential statement. It does not directly refer to the accusation made by the scribes in 3:22 that Jesus was acting by the power of Beelzebub, nor does it have a strict logical connection with the two previous parables in the immediate context, which illustrate the baselessness of this accusation. However, there is no doubt that the statement is addressed to Jesus’ accusers.⁵³ The charge of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is therefore addressed directly to them.

In the first part of this statement (v. 28), Jesus compares blasphemy in general with any other sin and declares that, like any other sin, it will be forgiven. He goes on, however, to give a special case where the sin of blasphemy cannot be forgiven. This statement becomes clearer when we relate it to Jesus’ accusation of blasphemy by the scribes mentioned earlier (2:7). The reason for this accusation was that, in their view, by uttering to the paralytic the words ‘your sins are forgiven you’ (2:5), Jesus had blasphemed against God by ascribing to Himself God’s prerogatives (2:7). In their view, Jesus’ action was sacrilegious and punishable by death (see Exod 20:7; Lev 20:1–5; 21:10–15; 24:10–16; Deut 13:1–11).⁵⁴ In 3:28–29, Jesus rebukes his opponents for committing blasphemy against God, boldly attributing to Him the power and authority of Beelzebub rather than that of the one God. There is no direct indication here that this unforgivable sin of blasphemy is directed at God. However, readers of the Gospel of Mark can be certain of this, as it is indicated by the context of the previous narrative (chapters 1 and 2): John the Baptist’s testimony that Jesus will baptise/act in the Holy Spirit, the voice of the Father from heaven affirming that He is His beloved Son, Jesus being led into the wilderness by the (Holy) Spirit. It should also be noted that

⁵³ See Malina, *Ewangelia według Świętego Marka*, 253.

⁵⁴ See L.W. Levy, *Treason against God: A History of the Offense of Blasphemy* (New York: Schocken Books 1981) 45–60; T. Hägerland, *Jesus and the Forgiveness of Sins: An Aspect of His Prophetic Mission* (SNTSMS 150; New York: Cambridge University Press 2011) 82–105; D. Johansson, “‘Who Can Forgive Sins but God Alone?’ Human and Angelic Agents, and Divine Forgiveness in Early Judaism,” *JSNNT* 33/4 (2011) 351–374.

in Mark's previous narrative, all Persons of the Holy Trinity appear explicitly in action. The reader should therefore have no doubt that the entire Holy Trinity – the triune God – is revealed in the words and deeds of the historical Jesus. It is by the mandate of the Father, the Son of God and the Holy Spirit and by their power that the earthly Jesus teaches and performs miracles. To accuse Him of doing exorcisms by the power of Beelzebub is therefore an audacious blasphemy against God, in whom they believe. The person of the Holy Spirit here represents God at work in the ministry of Jesus. He is the guarantor of the truthfulness of Jesus' mission. Rejection of this by the scribes is tantamount to renouncing God, namely, apostasy.

It should be noted that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is not mentioned here by Jesus as an exception to the rule that all sins and blasphemies will be forgiven (3:28). This rule is to apply to the fullest extent. However, those who blaspheme against the Holy Spirit, i.e. against the triune God, exclude themselves from among those whom God wishes to show forgiveness. In his commentary on this passage, Artur Malina states the following:

Z takiego zestawienia wynika, że bluźnierstwo przeciw Duchowi Świętemu nie jest jakimś wyjątkiem w powszechnym odpuszczeniu grzechów, ograniczeniem powszechnego przebaczenia ze strony Boga czy grzechem na wieki nieodpuszczonym. Jest grzechem wiecznym tylko z tego powodu, że osoba, która bluźni przeciw Duchowi Świętemu, wyklucza się sama z Bożego działania przynoszącego bez żadnego wyjątku odpuszczenie wszystkich (*panta*) grzechów i bluźnierstw” [This comparison demonstrates that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is not an exception to God's universal forgiveness of sins, nor does it constitute a limitation on God's forgiveness, nor is it a sin that cannot be forgiven. It is an eternal sin only because the persons who blaspheme against the Holy Spirit exclude themselves from God's action of granting, without exception, forgiveness for all (*panta*) sins and blasphemies].⁵⁵

Therefore, Jesus' logion about blasphemy against the Holy Spirit should not be interpreted as a unique sin, a special category, somehow excluded from God's forgiveness. It is the sin of audacious self-exclusion by attributing satanic powers to God, and thus rejecting the salvation that the triune God offers in Jesus Christ.

3.2. Matthew 12:31–32

The placement of the episode where Jesus speaks about the unforgivable sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (Matt 12:31–32) differs slightly in the Gospel of Matthew from that in the Gospel of Mark. As the structure of a text determines the interpretation of the statements it contains, it must be examined to see the implications of placing Jesus' logion in this particular context in Matthew.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Malina, *Ewangelia według Świętego Marka*, 255.

⁵⁶ Highly recommended monographs that analyse in detail the development of the narrative of the Gospel of Matthew include J.D. Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story* (Philadelphia, MA: Fortress 1988) (of particular interest is the analysis of Matt 1–14 on pages 1–94); D.R. Bauer, *The Structure of Matthew's Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (JSNTSup 31; Sheffield: Almond Press 1988) (especially pages 37–108). See also A. Paciorek,

As in Mark's narrative, Jesus' statement about blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is part of His teaching in Galilee, where He returned after His baptism in the Jordan and temptation in the wilderness (chapters 3–4). However, in Mark, Jesus' declaration about the unforgivable sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is made at the beginning of His ministry. Matthew, on the other hand, moves it a little further, after Jesus had already taught the crowds repeatedly in various locations in Galilee and performed many miracles. Matthew ensures that the reader is aware that Jesus' teaching encompassed the entire region of Galilee, and that the crowds that followed Jesus came not only from Galilee but also from Judea, the Decapolis, Transjordan, and even Syria (4:12–17). 23–25) At the very beginning of His ministry (as in Mark 1:16–20), Jesus calls the first disciples (4:18–22).

Before Matthew begins to describe in detail Jesus' teaching in various places in Galilee and the miracles He performed there, he pauses to present Jesus' great speech, known as the Sermon on the Mount (chapters 5–7), which is preceded by the Eight Beatitudes (5:3–12). In this speech, Jesus conveys the fundamental principles of his teaching, which is why it has rightly come to be known as the constitution of the kingdom of God.⁵⁷ The Sermon on the Mount was delivered to the crowds and to the first disciples who had just been called. Unlike Mark, Matthew does not mention that Jesus had opponents – the scribes – at this early stage of His ministry. After delivering the extensive Sermon on the Mount, Jesus continues His teaching in various places in Galilee (chapters 8–9). In recounting this, Matthew focuses primarily on the miraculous healings and other miracles performed by Jesus (such as calming the storm on the lake: 8:23–27), which confirm His messianic identity and mission.

Another key moment in Matthew's narrative is the selection of the twelve apostles (10:1–4) and their sending out on mission (10:5–16). Jesus concludes his missionary speech with the following message: 'Behold, I send you as sheep in the midst of wolves; therefore, be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves' (10:16). From this point on, the situation becomes less idyllic. Jesus foretells the persecution of His disciples, urges them to be courageous, and points to the necessity of standing firm in their faith on His side (10:17–42). Matthew concludes this part of the narrative with the following comment: 'And it came to pass, when Jesus finished instructing his twelve disciples, he departed from there to teach and preach in their cities' (11:1). The entire eleventh chapter depicts Jesus' continued preaching in Galilee. His dissatisfaction with how His teachings and accompanying miracles are being received is emphasised. The strongest reproach comes in the word 'woe' directed at the towns that disregarded His teaching (Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum) (11:20–24). This stage ends with Jesus calling all who are weary and carrying heavy burdens to come to Him, as He will give them rest (11:28–30).

This is immediately followed by Jesus' first direct confrontation with the Pharisees, who accuse Him of allowing His disciples to pluck heads of grain on the Sabbath, thereby

Ewangelia według św. Mateusza, rozdziały 1–13 (NKB.NT 1.1; Częstochowa: Edycja św. Pawła 2005) 15–320.

⁵⁷ For a more detailed analysis, see Kręcidło, *Honor i wstyd w interpretacji Ewangelii. Szkice z egzegezy antropologiczno-kulturowej*, 105–179.

breaking the religious law. Jesus refutes their accusation by referring to examples from the Scriptures where the Sabbath rest was not observed, and it was not considered a religious transgression (12:1–8). After the first charge, the Pharisees bring another accusation against Jesus, who healed a man with a paralysed (literally: withered) hand on the Sabbath. After conferring among themselves, the Pharisees decided that Jesus must be put to death (12:14). After this event, Matthew informs the reader: ‘But Jesus, knowing, withdrew from there; and many followed him, and he healed them all’ (12:15). At the same time, the Evangelist assures the reader that all this is happening so that the Old Testament prophecies may be fulfilled (he quotes Isa 42:1–4).⁵⁸

After presenting scriptural evidence that Jesus is the Beloved Servant of God (12:18–21), Matthew proceeds to recount the next (third) confrontation between Jesus and His opponents, which provides the immediate context for His declaration of the unforgivable sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (12:22–32). As highlighted above, in the parallel text of Mark, Jesus’ opponents were the scribes from Jerusalem, who brought charges against Him in response to His numerous healings: ‘He has Beelzebub, and by the power of the ruler of the demons he casts out the demons’ (Mark 3:22). However, Matthew does not mention the presence of the scribes, but states that Jesus’ accusers are the Pharisees (as in the previous two situations in Matthew). The second significant difference is that the action of the Pharisees is directly triggered by His healing of the demon-possessed man who was both blind and mute. Matthew does not mention whether Jesus’ other miracles and teachings contributed to the Pharisees’ accusation in 12:31–32.

Another difference between the two narratives of this event is that Mark places Jesus’ logion about the unforgivable sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit after two parables, which are a response to the accusation of acting by the power of Beelzebub. Matthew, on the other hand, describes the situation more broadly and in a slightly different sequence. First, Jesus performs an exorcism on a man who is both blind and mute, possessed by an evil spirit. The crowds are amazed at this miracle (12:23), while the Pharisees accuse Him of casting out evil spirits by the power of Beelzebub (12:24). Jesus then responds with a parable about a kingdom divided against itself, exposing the absurdity of the accusation, parallel to Mark. Jesus concludes this brief argument by stating: ‘But if by the Spirit of God I cast out the demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you’ (12:28). Immediately afterwards, Jesus tells the second parable found in Mark, about a strong man who must be tied up before his house can be plundered. Jesus sums up this parable and the entire episode with the statement: ‘The one who is not with me is against me, and the one who does not gather with me scatters’ (12:30). At least two things should be noted here. Firstly, after the apologia presented in the first parable, Jesus solemnly declares that He performs exorcisms by the power of the Spirit of God (i.e. the Holy Spirit) – and not by the power of Beelzebub,

⁵⁸ On the use of this prophecy in Matt 12:18–21, see J.H. Neyrey, “The Thematic Use of Isaiah 42,1–4 in Matthew 12,” *Bib* 63/4 (1982) 457–473; R. Beaton, “Messiah and Justice: A Key to Matthew’s Use of Isaiah 42:1–4,” *JSNT* 22/75 (2000) 5–23.

as His opponents allege. Moreover, these miracles should serve as a sign for everyone of the coming of the kingdom of God, whose arrival they await. Secondly, their radical rejection of Jesus and accusations that He acts by the power of Beelzebub/Satan is in fact 'scattering', i.e. acting against God Himself, whose emissary is Jesus acting by the power of the Spirit of God (12:30). Immediately afterwards, Matthew recounts Jesus' statement regarding the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, along with His explanation (12:31–37). Jesus's logion about blasphemy against the Holy Spirit differs slightly from Mark's account (which we will return to later), and His commentary on it is absent from that Gospel.

The immediate context in Matthew's narrative structure differs slightly from that in Mark. In Mark, after Jesus' logion on blasphemy against the Holy Spirit and the Evangelist's brief remark recalling the accusation levelled against Him by the scribes from Jerusalem, the Evangelist places Jesus' reaction to the call of His relatives (led by His mother) who wanted to see Him (3:31–35). Immediately afterwards, Mark recounts Jesus' teaching through parables (4:1–34). After Jesus' logion about blasphemy against the Holy Spirit and the commentary on it, Matthew continues with the story of yet another challenge/accusation levelled at Jesus by the Pharisees (and also by the scribes) (12:38–42). This time, they demand that He give them a sign to prove His authority (12:38). Jesus responds that they will only receive the sign of Jonah, which He describes as the sign of the Son of Man and links to the truth of His resurrection from the dead (three days and three nights of the Son of Man in the heart of the earth: 12:40).⁵⁹ This is to be a sign of conversion for them, similar to that of Jonah, which was a sign for the people of Nineveh. Jesus' last comment on this situation – the action continues in the same place, starting with the Pharisees' accusation that He acts by the power of evil spirits – is an argument that an unclean spirit that leaves a person returns to that person with multiplied power, because it finds a house that has been swept and put in order for it. Jesus' comment at the end of this pericope (12:45b) makes it clear that He is referring to the fate of His opponents who have not accepted His teaching. The term 'unclean spirit' (Greek: τὸ ἀκάθαρτον πνεῦμα) in 12:43 can be understood as referring to an evil spirit in general and may refer intratextually to the spirit that possessed the man healed by Jesus in 12:22. In this way, the pericope in 12:43–45 provides a structural closure to the *inclusio*. It sets the context for interpreting Jesus' statement about the unforgivable sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (12:31–32).⁶⁰ The final element

⁵⁹ See C.S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1999) 351–353. Keener analyses Matt 12:40 in detail in the context of the sign of Jonah, referring to Old Testament parallels (Jonah 1:17) and Jewish messianic expectations. The author also discusses the historical and theological implications of the reference to 'three days and three nights' in relation to Jesus' resurrection. See also D.A. Hagner, *Matthew 1–13* (WBC 33A; Dallas, TX: Word Books 1993) 354–357. This author analyses Matt 12:40 in the context of Jesus' polemic with the Pharisees, noting the symbolism of Jonah as a foreshadowing of His death and resurrection. The author also provides the cultural background and possible interpretations of the phrase 'three days and three nights' in Jewish tradition.

⁶⁰ See R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (NICNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 2007) 492–494. France focuses on the allegorical message of Matt 12:43–45 and links it to the polemical context of Jesus' dispute with the Pharisees in Matt 12.

of this scene (unity of place) is the appearance of Jesus' mother and other relatives outside, and His declaration that the criterion for being part of His family is doing the will of the Father (12:46–50). In this way, Matthew returns to Mark's narrative flow and continues it similarly, recounting Jesus' teachings in parables (chapter 14).

Having pointed out the similarities and differences in the placement of Jesus' logion about blasphemy against the Holy Spirit in the narrative of the Gospel of Mark, which we consider a more primary source, and in Matthew's version of these events, we should now point out the similarities and differences in the wording of the logion itself in both Gospels. In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus' logion about blasphemy against the Holy Spirit was formulated once and unequivocally (see above). This is not the case in the Gospel of Matthew, where we can find three explanations by Jesus in the pericope 12:22–37 of what this sin consists of, each time from a slightly different perspective.⁶¹

In his first mention of this issue, Jesus compares Himself to the 'sons of his opponents', who also perform exorcisms, and His opponents do not accuse them of doing so by the power of Beelzebub (this theme was present in Mark): 'And if I cast out the demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast them out? But if by the Spirit of God I cast out the demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you' (12:27–28). This is a compelling argument that should convince Jesus' opponents to accept the truth that the exorcisms He performs are done by the Spirit of God/Holy Spirit (ἐν πνεύματι θεοῦ) and are signs of the coming of the kingdom of God.

After illustrating this statement with a parable, Jesus takes up an apologetic theme, convincing His opponents that He performs exorcisms by the power of God and not Beelzebub, as His opponents allege (12:31–32).⁶² By beginning his speech in v. 31 with διὰ τοῦτο (therefore), Jesus refers to the entire preceding context (starting in v. 22) and not only to the last statement in v. 30.⁶³ Combined with the phrase λέγω ὑμῖν (I tell you) that follows immediately afterwards, these words are declarative and invite the reader to take what is said next as a binding rule. In the context of the Pharisees' accusation that Jesus acted by the power of Beelzebub, the following words should be read as a continued response to this accusation (a game for honour). In light of this event, Jesus' next words are an accusation directed at his accusers. This is the gravest of accusations, which is an adequate response to their serious charge of usurping God's prerogatives (i.e. the sin of sacrilege, punishable by death). Jesus' declaration has two parts. The first is πάντα ἁμαρτία καὶ βλασφημία ἀφεθήσεται τοῖς ἀνθρώποις, ἡ δὲ τοῦ πνεύματος βλασφημία οὐκ ἀφεθήσεται 'Every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven' (v. 31). Although

61 For a detailed exegesis of this pericope, see W.D. Davies – D.C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew* (ICC; London – New York: Clark 2004) II, 324–341; J. Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 2005) 492–506.

62 For a detailed explanation of the verses in question, see U. Luz, "The Unforgivable Sin: Matthew 12:31–32 and Its Theological Implications," *Studies in Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 2005) 141–158.

63 See Combs, "The Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit," 66 (footnote 96).

it is not explicitly stated that this refers to the Holy Spirit, it is clear from the context of the previous statement in 12:28. The act of blasphemy should be understood here as a derogatory statement⁶⁴ aimed at the Holy Spirit, that is, God Himself (as explained earlier). Such a sin cannot be forgiven according to the religious laws of Judaism, which Jesus' opponents also followed.

Jesus continues with his retort (v. 31), which is an accusation against the Pharisees, His opponents in the analysed situation. This retort is also a general rule that should always apply to everyone. This is evident, as this generalisation continues the statement made earlier in v. 30. It follows that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven (τοῖς ἀνθρώποις) (v. 31b) – this is the other side of the statement that every blasphemy and sin will be forgiven (v. 31a). Thus, blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (v. 31b) is the only exception to the rule of universal forgiveness of sins by God (v. 31a).

Verse 32, a continuation of Jesus' statement, clarifies this issue as follows:

καὶ ὅς ἐὰν εἴπῃ λόγον κατὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, ἀφεθήσεται αὐτῷ ὅς δ' ἂν εἴπῃ κατὰ τοῦ πνεύματος τοῦ ἁγίου, οὐκ ἀφεθήσεται αὐτῷ οὔτε ἐν τούτῳ τῷ αἰῶνι οὔτε ἐν τῷ μέλλοντι

'And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, neither in this age nor in the one to come.'

From a syntactic standpoint, this statement is composed of two complex sentences that use the *modus eventualis* syntactic structure.⁶⁵ This structure acts as a *modus realis* for the future, i.e. it presents a situation that may occur if the condition given in the subordinate clause is fulfilled. However, in the previous sentence (v. 31), the doctrine of the impossibility of forgiving sins against the (Holy) Spirit was stated in the indicative mood. The first of the two sentences in *modus eventualis* in v. 32 provides an explanation primarily concerning a hypothetical situation that could occur in the future (this is the basic use of this mode), but it can also express a general rule without being limited to individual cases. Therefore, whoever speaks a word (ὅς ἐὰν εἴπῃ λόγον), or blasphemes against the Son of Man (κατὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου), will be forgiven (ἀφεθήσεται αὐτῷ). However, Jesus' statement later in the verse, also in the *modus eventualis*, excludes this possibility: but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit (ὅς δ' ἂν εἴπῃ κατὰ τοῦ πνεύματος τοῦ ἁγίου) will not be forgiven (οὐκ ἀφεθήσεται αὐτῷ). The statement goes on to explain that such blasphemy will not be forgiven, neither in this age nor in the one to come, i.e. it will never be forgiven (οὔτε ἐν τούτῳ τῷ αἰῶνι οὔτε ἐν τῷ μέλλοντι).

Thus, Jesus makes a clear distinction in these two sentences in v. 32 between blasphemy against the Son of Man, which is forgivable, and blasphemy against the Holy Spirit,

⁶⁴ For more, see Combs, "The Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit," 76–77 (including footnote 99).

⁶⁵ This grammatical structure is well explained in F. Blass – A. Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (trans. and revision R.W. Funk) (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press 1961) 182–186, 200–204; J.H. Moulton – N. Turner, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek. III. Syntax* (Edinburgh: Clark 1963) 100–104, 279–283; D.B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan 1996) 446–452, 477–480.

which can never be forgiven. The key to understanding this contrast is to define what blasphemy is (here): ‘a word spoken’ against the Son of Man. The phrase ‘Son of Man’ is one of Jesus’ favourite self-descriptions in the Gospels. It has been subject to numerous, often contradictory, interpretations.⁶⁶ It appears that the scholars who see this self-definition as Jesus highlighting his humanity are correct. The intertextual reference to Dan 7, which speaks of the Son of Man coming with the clouds of heaven, is also relevant here. This figure should be linked to the messianic expectations prevalent in Judaism at the dawn of a new era. Therefore, blasphemy against Jesus as an extraordinary Man–Teacher, Miracle Worker and Messiah can be forgiven. In the second conditional sentence, this is contrasted with blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, which can never be forgiven. Those who interpret the phrase *ὅς δ’ ἂν κατὰ τοῦ πνεύματος τοῦ ἁγίου* as blasphemy against the divine nature of Jesus are wrong.⁶⁷ Undoubtedly, this refers to the Holy Spirit as a Person of the Holy Trinity, by whose power the historical Jesus, the promised Messiah, teaches and heals.⁶⁸ Thus, two types of blasphemy are juxtaposed here. The first of these, although grave, can be forgiven, since it involves a verbal denial and persistent rejection of the truth that Jesus is the promised Messiah. It is therefore a sin of unbelief in His divine mission, expressed in words. Perhaps we should also consider various negative assessments of Jesus’ ordinary human behaviour; for example, His perception as a glutton and drunkard in contrast to the ascetic John the Baptist (see Matt 11:16–19). However, blasphemy against the Holy Spirit cannot be forgiven, as it essentially denies that God Himself is revealed in Jesus the man by the power of the Holy Spirit. Rejecting this truth is tantamount to rejecting God and His salvific action in the world. Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is, in essence, apostasy and thus cannot be forgiven.

3.3. Luke 12:10

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus’ statement about blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is found in a completely different geographical and chronological context than that of Mark and Matthew. As shown above, these two Evangelists placed this statement in the context of Jesus’ public activity in Galilee, each in slightly different circumstances. Luke, on the other hand, places this logion a little later in the chronological order, during Jesus’ journey with his disciples to Jerusalem (starting in Luke 9:51).⁶⁹ Therefore, the situational context of this logion is different, and this fact should not be ignored in its interpretation.

Luke 9:51 makes it clear that, according to God’s will, Jesus’ teaching and healing ministry in Galilee has come to an end, and the second stage, which will lead to the finale, is

66 For a more detailed discussion, see J. Kręcidło, “Jezus Syn Człowieczy w ogniu współczesnej debaty egzegetycznej,” *Jezus Chrystus Syn Boży i Syn Człowieczy* (ed. J. Kręcidło) (StS 6; Kraków: Wydawnictwo La Salette Księży Misjonarzy Saletynów 2015) 45–60.

67 For more on this topic, see Combs, “The Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit,” 77.

68 Combs, “The Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit,” 77.

69 The narrative aspect of this gospel is discussed, for example, by M.A. Powell, *What Are They Saying about Luke?* (New York: Paulist Press 1989) 35–76, 97–124; R.C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation*. I. *The Gospel according to Luke* (FF: New Testament; Philadelphia, PA: Fortress 1991) 1–286.

about to begin. Luke outlined this finale in the preceding context, where Jesus urges: 'Take these words into your ears: for the Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men' (9:44). However, Jesus' disciples did not understand this and argued among themselves about who was the greatest (who would have the place of honour next to Him) (9:46–49). The last scene of Jesus' activity in Galilee, according to Luke, is the disciples' uncertainty whether someone outside their group, casting out evil spirits in His name, is doing something forbidden (9:49). Jesus answers firmly: 'Do not hinder; for whoever is not against you is for you' (9:50). With regard to the issue at hand, it is worth noting that the final point of the narrative of Jesus' activity in Galilee is the subject of exorcism, which was the immediate context for the previous statement about blasphemy against the Holy Spirit in Mark and Matthew.

At the beginning of the new section (Jesus' journey with his disciples to Jerusalem), Luke suggests to the reader that the events unfolding are the result of God's will being fulfilled and that Jesus is consciously taking these actions: 'And it came to pass, when the days of his ascension were being fulfilled, he set his face to go to Jerusalem' (9:51). Jesus' journey to Jerusalem is recounted in considerable detail by Luke, who devotes ten chapters (ending in 19:28) to presenting Jesus' teachings and miracles. In contrast, Matthew covers it in only two chapters (19–20), and Mark in just one (10). The exegetes rightly stress that in Luke's pragmatic strategy, the chapters describing Jesus' journey to Jerusalem represent a crucial central section.⁷⁰ The broader context of Jesus' logion about blasphemy against the Holy Spirit in Luke is the teaching on how to live by faith. A closer context that should be considered in interpreting Jesus' logion about the unforgivable sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is the teaching on perseverance in prayer (11:1–13),⁷¹ which ends with the words: 'If then you, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the Father from heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him' (11:13). This is where the Holy Spirit comes in, who is to be seen by believers as the greatest of gifts. This teaching is illustrated by Jesus' exorcism, whereby He casts out an evil spirit from a mute man (11:14). Unspecified witnesses also accuse Jesus of doing this by the power of Beelzebub (11:15). He responds with two parables (about a kingdom divided against itself and a strong man) – parallel to the other two Synoptics, but not appearing in the immediate context of the previous (Mark) or following (Matthew) passages. After this confrontation, Jesus teaches on various matters while travelling to Jerusalem (11:24–36). He then condemns the hypocrisy of the Pharisees (11:37–44) and the lawyers (11:45–54), who reproach Him for insulting

70 This has already been noted, for example, by F.L. Godet, *A Commentary on the Gospel of St. Luke*, 3 ed. (New York: Funk & Wagnalls 1890) 283–288. See also Combs, "The Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit," 81.

71 See J.A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke X–XXIV: Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (AB 28A; Garden City, NY: Doubleday 1985) 897–911; D.L. Bock, *Luke 9:51–24:53* (BECNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic 1996) 1037–1053.

them with His accusations against them.⁷² Jesus directs the word ‘woe’ at each of these groups of the Jewish establishment several times.

The immediate context of Jesus’ logion about blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (12:10) is the pericope 12:1–12,⁷³ at the beginning of which He warns His disciples, in the presence of the crowds, to beware of ‘the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy’ (12:1). After this pericope, the narrative continues with Jesus’ journey to Jerusalem, during which He carries on teaching about various matters related to faith and calls His listeners to conversion. In these subsequent teachings during the journey to Jerusalem, we do not find any significant continuation of the thoughts contained in 12:1–12.

It is worth examining the internal structure of pericope 12:1–12 in terms of the addressees of Jesus’ logion in 12:10. As mentioned above, in 12:1, Jesus warns His closest disciples to beware of the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. He addresses this admonition in the second person plural and continues this direct way of addressing (you) until verse 12:8a, which is already the immediate context of the logion about sin against the Holy Spirit. In 12:4, Jesus calls His disciples friends, which is a sign of great intimacy: Λέγω δὲ ὑμῖν τοῖς φίλοις μου ‘But I say to you, my friends.’ After these words, He urges them not to be afraid, for they are important to God, so much so that even the hairs on their heads are counted (12:4–7). The last teaching addressed only to the disciples (you) is the logion about the Son of Man, also found in parallel texts in Mark and Matthew:

Λέγω δὲ ὑμῖν, πᾶς ὃς ἂν ὁμολογήσῃ ἐν ἐμοὶ ἔμπροσθεν τῶν ἀνθρώπων, καὶ ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ὁμολογήσῃ ἐν αὐτῷ ἔμπροσθεν τῶν ἀγγέλων τοῦ θεοῦ, ὁ δὲ ἀρνησάμενός με ἐνώπιον τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἀπαρνηθήσεται ἐνώπιον τῶν ἀγγέλων τοῦ θεοῦ

‘But I say to you, everyone who confesses me before men, the Son of Man will also confess him before the angels of God; but he who denies me before men will be denied before the angels of God’ (12:8–9).

This instruction is addressed to the disciples (‘I say to you’), but it applies to everyone, as indicated by the phrases ‘everyone’ and ‘he who’. It follows from this context that Jesus addresses this instruction to His disciples, but there is no indication that the second part of this statement, which is a warning, also applies to them, since they are His friends (12:4) who ‘confess him’.⁷⁴ The meaning of the phrase ‘Son of Man’ does not differ from that ex-

⁷² See J.A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke X–XXIV*, 934–948; J. Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34* (WBC 35B; Dallas, TX: Word Books 1993) 666–677.

⁷³ See I.H. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1978) 511–519; J. Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34*, 675–683. In his exegesis of Luke 12:1–12, the author focuses on the literary and theological significance of the pericope in Luke’s narrative. He highlights the criticism of the Pharisees’ hypocrisy, the eschatological call to profess faith, and the role of the Holy Spirit in the face of persecution, with reference to parallels in Matt 10 and Mark 3. See also J.B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (NICNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1997) 483–490. The author of this commentary interprets Luke 12:1–12 in a social and theological context, highlighting the contrast between the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and the authenticity of Jesus’ disciples. He analyses the motives for courage, persecution, and the work of the Holy Spirit, noting their relevance to Luke’s community in the face of trials.

⁷⁴ See Bock, *Luke 9:51–24:53*, 1007–1010; Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 511–513.

plained above in the analysis of the parallel text in Matthew. Without a doubt, the closest disciples of Jesus, who are the addressees of these words about confessing the Son of Man, are His friends. It appears that this was communicated to them so that it would become part of their future teaching during the post-Paschal period.

Verse 12:10, which is often the main focus of our attention, is the climax of Jesus' argument for accepting or rejecting Him:

Καὶ πᾶς ὃς ἐρεῖ λόγον εἰς τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, ἀφεθήσεται αὐτῷ τῷ δὲ εἰς τὸ ἅγιον πνεῦμα βλασφημήσαντι οὐκ ἀφεθήσεται

'And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but to the one blaspheming against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven.'⁷⁵

This logion juxtaposes blasphemy against the Son of Man (πᾶς ὃς ἐρεῖ λόγον εἰς τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου) with blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (τῷ δὲ εἰς τὸ ἅγιον πνεῦμα βλασφημήσαντι). It is consistent in content with the second part of Jesus' parallel statement in Matt 12:32. However, while the *modus eventualis* structure was used in Matt 12:32, Luke's version uses the *modus realis* (the conjunction εἰ is missing in the antecedent of the conditional clause, but it should be implied here). The verbs in the logion in Luke 12:10 are in the future tense. These words refer to something that may happen in the future based on a causal relationship: blasphemy against the Son of Man will be forgiven, while blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will not. From a semantic perspective, Luke 12:10 is consistent with Matt 12:32 and has the same significance. The future verb forms used in the *modus realis* in 12:10 suggest that this statement should be interpreted in the sense of the *modus eventualis* used in Matt 12:32 (see above).

After uttering this logion, which is a general rule, Jesus again addresses His disciples (you) in 12:11, returning to the direct message concerning them personally (see 12:1–8a above). This return to a direct mode of expression makes it clear that the logion in 12:10 was not an exhortation directed at them. This is also confirmed by the instruction in the last two verses of this pericope, which encourages the disciples to submit to the guidance of the Holy Spirit during the coming persecutions:

And when they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not be anxious about how or what you should defend yourselves or what you should say; for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say (12:11–12).

Therefore, it is clear that the disciples, who were friends of Jesus, should not be afraid that they might blaspheme against the Holy Spirit. By placing Jesus' logion in 12:10 in the context of teaching addressed to His disciples and removing the immediate context of Jesus' confrontation with the scribes (as in Mark) or the Pharisees (as in Matthew), Luke made it a universal rule. The unpardonable sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit can

⁷⁵ See Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke X–XXIV*, 960–962; Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34*, 680–682; Bock, *Luke 9:51–24:53*, 1114–1116.

be committed by any person who denies that Jesus is the Son of God, acting by the power of the Holy Spirit. This category includes opponents of the historical Jesus who reject His divine mission and prerogatives. However, for the post-Paschal Church, Jesus' logion in Luke 12:10, by isolating it from the context of direct confrontation, becomes a universal rule: anyone who denies that Jesus is the Revelator of God and acts by the power of the Holy Spirit, that is, of the triune God Himself, commits an act of unbelief and excludes themselves from those whose sins have been forgiven and who have become beneficiaries of the gift of salvation.

4. A Broader Perspective on the Topic

In seeking an answer to the question posed in the title of this article, it is necessary to broaden the scope of the sources analysed to include texts that are not usually taken into account by exegetes and theologians who focus primarily on the search for an unambiguous dogmatic solution. First, we want to compare the synoptic pericopes analysed above on the unforgivable sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit with a hypothetical reconstruction of the relevant logion in the Q source. If this source existed, then the logion in Q 12:10 influenced the way this theme, taken from Mark, was understood by Matthew and Luke. In addition, the New Testament canon contains two other texts that at least indirectly refer to the unforgivable sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit: Heb 6:4–6 and 1 John 5:16. We also believe that logion 44 from the apocryphal *Gospel of Thomas*, which addresses this issue, should be given consideration. In our analysis of these texts, we will employ the same research method as in the previous paragraph, albeit with less detail. First, we will present the context of a given statement in the analysed source. Then, we will explain its exegetical details from the perspective of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

4.1. Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit and Q 12:10

The theme of the unforgivable sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit also appears in Q 12:10. This hypothesised, reconstructed document is a collection of Jesus' sayings, dated to ca. AD 50–70, which predates the Gospels of Matthew and Luke.⁷⁶ It contains material common to these two Evangelists and absent from the Gospel of Mark. It consists mainly of Jesus' logia (e.g. blessings, the Lord's Prayer, ethical teachings, etc.); it is considered wisdom literature, with some apocalyptic elements.⁷⁷ Q probably originated in a Judeo-

⁷⁶ For a good introduction to topics related to the Q source, see A.D. Jacobson, *The First Gospel: An Introduction to Q* (Sonoma, CA: Polebridge 1992); B.L. Mack, *The Lost Gospel: The Book of Q and Christian Origins* (San Francisco, CA: Harper 1993); D.R. Catchpole, *The Quest for Q* (Edinburgh: Clark 1993); R.A. Horsley – J.A. Draper, *Whoever Hears You Hears Me: Prophets, Performance, and Tradition in Q* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International 1999).

⁷⁷ See J.S. Kloppenborg, *Excavating Q: The History and Setting of the Sayings Gospel* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress 2000) 39–34.

Christian environment in Galilee or Syria and was addressed to a community awaiting the imminent Parousia.⁷⁸

Based on the consensus of exegetes who, referring to the two-source theory, accept the existence of the Q source, the reconstructed fragment of the text in question in the original Greek would have the following form (see table at the beginning of section 3 of this article): καὶ ὅς ἐὰν εἴπῃ λόγον εἰς τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἀφεθήσεται αὐτῷ, ὅς δ' ἂν [εἴπῃ] εἰς τὸ ἅγιον πνεῦμα οὐκ ἀφεθήσεται αὐτῷ. We propose the following literal translation of this logion into English: 'And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him.'

This particular reconstruction of the logion is argued as follows: in Matt 12:32, Jesus' statement was expanded with the addition of 'neither in this age nor in the one to come', which is an editorial development typical of eschatology.⁷⁹ Luke, on the other hand, retains a simpler form, closer to the presumed Q, placing this logion in the context of teaching about confessing Jesus before people (Luke 12:8–12). The key terms in the reconstructed Q 12:10 are 'speak a word against', which corresponds to 'blaspheme' and 'Holy Spirit' (τὸ ἅγιον πνεῦμα). These indicate the seriousness of sin. On the other hand, the phrase 'Son of Man' in Q is typical of logia about Jesus as an eschatological mediator, which differentiates Q 12:10 from Mark 3:28–30, which refers to 'sons of men'.⁸⁰

Since the Q source is not a narrative, but a collection of Jesus' sayings without a strictly defined internal structure, we present here only the location of logion 12:10 within what appears to be a thematically coherent block of Jesus' teaching contained in 12:2–12, in which the following elements stand out: a warning against hypocrisy (12:2–3); an encouragement to profess one's faith fearlessly (12:4–7); a teaching about the Son of Man as judge (12:8–9); the logion about blasphemy against the Spirit (12:10); the promise of the Spirit's help at times of persecution (12:11–12). As a coherent thematic unit, it highlights the importance of staying true to Jesus when faced with persecution and the role of the Holy Spirit.⁸¹ This may reflect the situation of a community experiencing persecution or rejection by its Jewish neighbours (cf. the previous context in Q 11:47–51). In this historical context, logion 12:10 could have been a warning against rejecting Jesus' teaching and the Holy Spirit, especially amid the heated debates between Judeo-Christians and other Jewish groups.⁸²

Jesus' logion in Q 12:10 consists of two opposing statements. The first is about forgiving those who speak against the Son of Man (ὅς ἐὰν εἴπῃ λόγον εἰς τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἀφεθήσεται αὐτῷ) (12:10a). The second is about not forgiving those who speak against the

⁷⁸ D.C. Allison, *The Jesus Tradition in Q* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International 1997) 3–7.

⁷⁹ See Kloppenborg, *Excavating Q*, 134–135.

⁸⁰ This is argued, for example, by C.M. Tuckett, *Q and the History of Early Christianity: Studies on Q* (Edinburgh: Clark 1996) 194–195.

⁸¹ J.M. Robinson – P. Hoffmann – J.S. Kloppenborg, *The Critical Edition of Q: Synopsis Including the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, Mark and Thomas* (Minneapolis, MN – Leuven: Fortress – Peeters 2000) 286–296.

⁸² See Tuckett, *Q and Early Christianity*, 197–198.

Holy Spirit (ὅς δ' ἂν [εἴπῃ] εἰς τὸ ἅγιον πνεῦμα οὐκ ἀφεθήσεται αὐτῷ) (12:10b).⁸³ Both statements contain the syntactic construction of *modus eventualis*, which takes on the meaning of *modus realis* to refer to the future. This is identical to the syntactic structure in the parallel passage in Matt 12:32 (see the detailed explanation above). As in Matt 12:32, but unlike Luke 12:10, the verb βλασφημέω is not used, but the twice-used phrase εἶπη λόγον εἰς should be attributed the same meaning of blasphemy as εἶπη λόγον κατὰ in Matt 12:32 (see above). As one might expect, given the reconstruction of the Q source, logion 12:10 is a theological synthesis of Matt 12:31–32 and Luke 12:10. This logion is closer to Luke's version. It does not introduce any theological concepts concerning the unforgivable sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit that would go beyond the material common to Matthew and Luke.

As for the reference to Mark 3:28–30, where blasphemy against the Spirit is a specific act of attributing to Satan the power behind Jesus' exorcisms, logion Q 12:10 lacks such a narrative context. It is more general and timeless, forming a binding rule, which suggests that it served as a universal warning to the community that was the depository of the Q source in its struggle to bear witness to the Holy Spirit working in the Church.⁸⁴ Compared to Mark 3:28–30, Q 12:10 also emphasises the contrast between the Son of Man (forgivable sin) and the Holy Spirit (unforgivable sin), which may reflect the development of theology after the resurrection, when the latter became central to the experience of the Church,⁸⁵ as evidenced by the Acts of the Apostles. The logion in Q 12:10 thus has a paraenetic function – it warns against falling away from faith in difficult times, thereby strengthening the identity of the community.⁸⁶

Scholars of logion Q 12:10, considering the theme of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, put forward three proposals regarding its function and theological significance. Some emphasise the continuation and universality of synoptic traditions in this regard, arguing that Q 12:10 originates from early Christian tradition, close to Mark, but acquires a broader context in Q. Blasphemy against the Spirit would then consist in rejecting the Spirit as the source of Jesus' revelation, especially in the face of persecution, when the Q community relied on the Holy Spirit as the One who would strengthen them in their profession of faith (as indicated by the context of Q 12:11–12).⁸⁷ In this context, blasphemy against the Holy Spirit would refer to the deliberate rejection of Jesus' teaching after His resurrection, when the Spirit is active in the Church.⁸⁸ Other scholars maintain that Q 12:10 was a warning to the Q community, which had been rejected by other

⁸³ See Kloppenborg, *Excavating Q*, 135–136.

⁸⁴ This view is held, for example, by J.D.G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit: A Study of the Religious and Charismatic Experience of Jesus and the First Christians as Reflected in the New Testament* (London: SCM 1975) 45–47; Kloppenborg, *Excavating Q*, 137–138.

⁸⁵ See Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit*, 48–49.

⁸⁶ Tuckett, *Q and Early Christianity*, 198–199.

⁸⁷ This is argued, for example, by Kloppenborg, *Excavating Q*, 136–137.

⁸⁸ See Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit*, 46–48.

Jews. Blasphemy against the Spirit could refer to rejecting the Holy Spirit's work in Jesus' teachings, which was equivalent to rejecting God's work.⁸⁹ They argue that the logion reflects tensions between Judeo-Christians and the synagogue. Sin against the Son of Man (e.g. misunderstanding Jesus' earthly mission) is forgivable, but rejecting the Holy Spirit working in the Church after the resurrection is unforgivable because it closes the door to faith.⁹⁰ Other exegetes draw attention to the eschatological seriousness of the sin of blasphemy mentioned in Q 12.10. Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is unforgivable because it signifies hardness of heart towards the One who leads to salvation in the face of the coming judgement (see the previous context in Q 12:8–9). This logion would thus reinforce the call to faithfulness.⁹¹ In Q 12:10, the Holy Spirit represents God's presence in the here and now, and blasphemy against Him would be to reject this presence, which consequently excludes participation in eternal life.⁹²

To sum up, the following conclusions can be drawn regarding the theme of the unforgivable sin against the Holy Spirit in the hypothesised reconstruction of the Q source. Unlike in the Synoptic Gospels, where this sin is associated with a specific act against Jesus, this logion is universal, warning against rejecting the Holy Spirit as the source of revelation and inspiration in faith and in the apostolic work of the Church. In the context of Q, blasphemy against the Holy Spirit means hardness of heart towards the message of the Gospel, especially in the face of persecution, during which the Holy Spirit supports the witness of faith (12:11–12). The logion has a paraenetic function in Q, calling for faithfulness and warning of the eschatological consequences of unbelief. Its open formula allows for a variety of interpretations, from ethical to apocalyptic, making it important for understanding the theology of Q. The inclusion of this hypothetical source in the discussion seeking an answer to the question 'What is the unforgivable sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit?' appears productive, as it opens up the possibility to recontextualise parallel synoptic statements at the level of a universal rule binding on the Church of all times.

4.2. Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit and Heb 6:4–6

The Epistle to the Hebrews is an anonymous work traditionally attributed to Saint Paul. However, most modern scholars believe that it was written by someone else, possibly from the circle of Hellenistic Christians (e.g. Apollos or Barnabas). This letter was written before or shortly after the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in AD 70. It was addressed to Christian communities, probably of Jewish origin, experiencing persecution (10:32–34) and repression from their former co-religionists. Its addressees faced the threat of abandoning their faith in Christ.⁹³ In light of these problems, Hebrews emphasises the superiority

⁸⁹ This view is held, for example, by Tuckett, *Q and Early Christianity*, 195–196.

⁹⁰ This is the conclusion of, for example, Allison, *The Jesus Tradition in Q*, 106–107.

⁹¹ A.J. Hultgren, *The Rise of Normative Christianity* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress 1994) 54–55.

⁹² See R. Cameron, *Sayings Traditions in the Apocryphon of James* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress 1984) 89–90.

⁹³ See H.W. Attridge – H. Koester, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia, PA: Fortress 1989) 8–10.

of Christ as the High Priest of the New Covenant, whose sacrifice once and for all forgives all sins (9:11–14).

In the broader context of the epistle, the pericope in 6:4–6 is part of a series of warnings (2:1–4; 3:7–4:13; 10:26–31; 12:25–29) that call for perseverance in faith and caution against rejecting grace.⁹⁴ This passage resolves the addressees' doubts about salvation: whether it can be lost, and whether apostasy is irreversible.

The analysed passage from Hebrews is found in the middle of the paraenetic section (5:11–6:20), which is part of a discussion on the superiority of the Melchizedek priesthood (Heb 5:1–10; 7:1–28). In the immediate context of Heb 5:11–14, the author criticises the spiritual immaturity of his audience and calls on them to place greater emphasis on progress in faith than on rituals (6:1–3) (e.g. penance, baptism), which are to be secondary to a more profound knowledge and understanding of Christ.⁹⁵ In this context, the passage of interest in 6:4–6 is a warning. This is followed by an example of the earth 'drinking in the rain' and 'producing plants that are useful', thus receiving blessings for those who cultivate it (6:7). It is contrasted with the earth, which 'produces thorns and thistles' and will ultimately be burned (6:8). Following this warning, the author encourages his audience to diligently improve themselves in Christian hope (6:9–12). The final element of this *paraenesis* is the promise of God's faithfulness (6:13–20).

In passage 6:4–6, the author states emphatically:

For it is impossible, those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and became partakers of the Holy Spirit [μετόχους γενηθέντας πνεύματος ἁγίου], and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, and having fallen away, to renew them again to repentance, crucifying again for themselves the Son of God and putting him to open shame.⁹⁶

This statement begins with the emphatic assertion ἀδύνατον γάρ 'for it is impossible' (6:4a) with strong rhetorical overtones. The scholars believe this phrase does not mean absolute ontological impossibility, but rather a very high degree of difficulty.⁹⁷ Those who have not received the gift of salvation are referred to as παραπεσόντας, those who 'have fallen away' (6:6a). This is the active participle form in the aorist tense of the verb παραπίπτω, which indicates a state of rejection resulting from a single action (the basic aspect in the aorist tense). This signifies a deliberate rejection of faith, not an accidental sin. In the context of the epistle as a whole, this may indicate a return to Judaism or an abandonment of faith in Jesus due to pressure from those around them.⁹⁸ Based on the letter, five attributes of

⁹⁴ T.R. Schreiner, *Commentary on Hebrews* (BTCPC; Nashville, TN: B&H 2015) 186–187.

⁹⁵ See Attridge – Koester, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 171–172; W.L. Lane, *Hebrews 1–8* (WBC 47A; Dallas, TX: Word Books 1991) 139–140.

⁹⁶ Full text in the original version published by Nestle-Aland 28: Ἀδύνατον γὰρ τοὺς ἅπαξ φωτισθέντας, γευσάμενους τε τῆς δωρεᾶς τῆς ἐπουρανίου καὶ μετόχους γενηθέντας πνεύματος ἁγίου καὶ καλὸν γευσάμενους θεοῦ ῥῆμα δυνάμεις τε μέλλοντος αἰῶνος, καὶ παραπεσόντας, πάλιν ἀνακαταίξιν εἰς μετάνοιαν, ἀνασταυροῦντας ἑαυτοῖς τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ παραδειγματίζοντας.

⁹⁷ See, for example, Lane, *Hebrews 1–8*, 141.

⁹⁸ Lane, *Hebrews 1–8*, 142.

those who have fallen away from the faith can be identified in keeping with 6:4–5: (a) they have been ‘enlightened’ (φωτισθέντας) once, yet they ‘have fallen away’ from the faith. In the context of 10:32, the term ‘enlightened’ refers to conversion or baptism, signifying the acceptance of faith and spiritual enlightenment;⁹⁹ (b) they ‘have tasted the heavenly gift’ (γευσαμένους τε τῆς δωρεᾶς τῆς ἐπουρανίου). This suggests the experience of the grace of salvation, perhaps in the context of the Eucharist or baptism;¹⁰⁰ (c) they ‘have shared in the Holy Spirit’ (μετόχους γενηθέντας πνεύματος ἁγίου). This indicates a profound experience of the Spirit, e.g. through charismatic gifts;¹⁰¹ (d) they ‘have tasted the goodness of the word of God’ (καλὸν γευσαμένους θεοῦ ῥῆμα). This refers to the acceptance of the gospel and Christian teaching; (e) they have experienced ‘the powers of the age to come’ (δυνάμεις τε μέλλοντος αἰῶνος). This may indicate their experience of eschatological signs, e.g. miracles, which foretell the kingdom of God.¹⁰²

Despite receiving such wonderful gifts, these people scorned them and ‘then have fallen away’ from faith (6:6a). This resulted in it being impossible (ἄδύνατον γάρ in 6:4a) ‘to restore them again to repentance’ (πάλιν ἀνακαινίζειν εἰς μετάνοιαν), since they are apostates ‘crucifying again’ (ἀνασταυροῦντας) the Son of God and ‘holding him up to contempt’ (παραδειγματίζοντας). These terms imply a deliberate, public rejection of Christ’s sacrifice, rendering it impossible to return to conversion.¹⁰³

As can be inferred from the above contextual analysis and the message of Heb 6:4–6, the central theme of this passage is apostasy from the faith and having ‘shared in the Holy Spirit’ (μετόχους γενηθέντας πνεύματος ἁγίου) is given as one of the attributes of the members of the community before falling away from faith. Despite the seemingly obvious conclusion arising from this text, some exegetes read it as a voice in the discussion on the unforgivable sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Scholars’ opinions on this matter can be broadly classified into three groups.

Some exegetes maintain that Heb 6:4–6 explicitly expresses the teaching on the unpardonable sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. The following three main arguments are presented to support this view. The first results from the very fact of the addressees’ participation in the Holy Spirit (6:4) and then their deliberate rejection of Him, which can be compared to the situation in Mark 3:28–30 and par.¹⁰⁴ The second argument pointing to the similarity with the previously analysed texts from the Synoptic Gospels is the irreversibility of this process. The author of Heb 6:6 writes about it being impossible ‘to

99 See C.R. Koester, *Hebrews: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 36; New York: Doubleday 2001) 321.

100 This is the view of P. Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1993) 320–321.

101 See Attridge – Koester, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 173.

102 See Schreiner, *Commentary on Hebrews*, 190.

103 See Koester, *Hebrews*, 323–324.

104 This is the view presented by W. Grudem, “Perseverance of the Saints: A Case Study from Hebrews 6:4–6 and the Other Warning Passages in Hebrews,” *The Grace of God, the Bondage of the Will: Historical and Theological Perspectives on Calvinism* (eds. T.R. Schreiner – B.A. Ware) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker 1995) 155–158.

restore them again to repentance', which resembles the unforgivable blasphemy against the Holy Spirit due to the hardness of heart.¹⁰⁵ The third argument supporting the theme of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit in Heb 6:4–6 is the phraseology in v. 6 of crucifying Christ again and exposing Him to ridicule, which is seen as an act of public blasphemy, analogous to attributing to Satan the deeds that Jesus performs by the power of the Holy Spirit (see Matt 12:31–32).¹⁰⁶

The second group is exegetes who claim that Heb 6:4–6 refers to the sin of apostasy, which should not be confused with blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. The argumentation in this case can also be broken down into three main points. The first argument refers to the historical context, where 6:4–6 supposedly refers to those Christians of Jewish origin who, under pressure of persecution, returned to their original faith, thus rejecting their belief in Jesus as the Messiah. Therefore, it would not be a sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, but apostasy – the rejection of the only way of salvation offered in Jesus Christ.¹⁰⁷ The second argument presented by supporters of this thesis highlights the distinction between the two sins. This blasphemy, as mentioned in the Gospels, involves attributing the works of the Holy Spirit to Satan, which is a specific act of hostility towards God. On the other hand, Heb 6:4–6 speaks of falling away (*παραπεσόντας*), understood as a rejection of faith, without necessarily being connected to blasphemy.¹⁰⁸ The third argument put forward by exegetes is the absence of terminology relating to blasphemy in Heb 6:4–6, which is key to the Synoptic Gospels analysed above.¹⁰⁹ Furthermore, Heb 6:4–6 is considered a warning against the virtual impossibility of returning to repentance once apostasy has occurred, rather than a definition of unforgivable sin in the evangelical sense.¹¹⁰

The third group of exegetes draws parallels between Heb 6:4–6 and blasphemy against the Spirit, but avoids equating these sins, pointing to their different contexts and purposes. These authors note that both Heb 6:4–6 and Mark 3:28–30 and par. refer to a deliberate and irreversible rejection of God's work: in Hebrews through apostasy after experiencing the Spirit, and in the Gospels through blasphemously attributing the works of the Spirit to Satan.¹¹¹ Furthermore, it should be noted that Heb 6:4–6 is a paraenetic text addressed to the community in order to prevent apostasy, whereas blasphemy against the Holy Spirit in the Gospels is more of an individual act of hostility towards Jesus, committed

¹⁰⁵ Grudem, "Perseverance of the Saints," 156.

¹⁰⁶ See Attridge – Koester, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 175. Wayne Grudem, on the other hand, in his analysis of the warnings in Hebrews, suggests that this passage may refer to the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, particularly in the context of consciously rejecting grace after having experienced Christianity fully. However, he emphasizes that the text is paraenetic rather than doctrinal and does not necessarily refer to the situation described in Matt 12:31–32. See Grudem, "Perseverance of the Saints," 157–158.

¹⁰⁷ See Lane, *Hebrews 1–8*, 142–145.

¹⁰⁸ This is rightly noted by Attridge – Koester, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 173–174.

¹⁰⁹ See Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 320–322.

¹¹⁰ Such a conclusion is drawn, for example, by Koester, *Hebrews*, 324–326.

¹¹¹ See Schreiner, *Commentary on Hebrews*, 191–193.

in the specific context of His ministry.¹¹² The analysed passage from Hebrews refers to the rejection of Jesus Christ's salvific sacrifice without any connection to blasphemy, which is crucial in the passages presented in the Synoptic Gospels.¹¹³

In conclusion of the exegetical analysis of Heb 6:4–6 and the opinions of commentators presented, it should be noted that this pericope does not directly mention the unforgivable sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. There are similarities between this text and the passages from the Gospel analysed above, such as the conscious rejection of God's action and the apparent irreversibility of its consequences. However, it should be assumed that Heb 6:4–6 refers to apostasy in the context of persecuted Christians of Jewish origin, and not to blasphemy in the evangelical sense. Key differences include the absence of blasphemy terminology in Hebrews and a different historical context (the Christian community in Hebrews vs Jesus' opponents in the Gospels). It is also important to note the parænetic purpose of Hebrews, which is to prevent apostasy, not to define the doctrine of unforgivable sin.

4.3. Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit and 1 John 5:16

In-depth studies on the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit sometimes also refer to 1 John 5:16 as a source text. Although this verse does not contain any terminology suggesting this interpretation, it does introduce a distinction between a 'sin leading to death' and 'sin not leading to death'. Hence, this verse evokes associations with the unforgivable sin mentioned in the Gospels (Matt 12:31–32 and par.).

In the English translation, 1 John 5:16 reads as follows:

If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death [ἁμαρτία μὴ πρὸς θάνατον], he shall ask, and life will be given to him, to those sinning not leading to death. There is a sin leading to death [ἁμαρτία πρὸς θάνατον]; I do not say that he should pray concerning that.¹¹⁴

This statement likely emerged during the heated debate between the Johannine communities at the end of the 1st century AD, marked by internal divisions, possibly due to Gnostic or Docetic heresies (for example, see 2:18–19; 4:1–3).¹¹⁵ Its immediate context is chapter 5, in which the author focuses on the certainty of faith, victory in Christ and the power of intercessory prayer (5:14–15). While 5:16, which is of interest to us, is part of the teaching on the community's responsibility for sinners. It introduces an enigmatic distinction between

112 Schreiner, *Commentary on Hebrews*, 192; D.A. deSilva, "Hebrews 6:4–8: A Socio-Rhetorical Investigation," *TynBul* 50/1 (1999) 44–47.

113 See F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, revised ed. (NICNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1990) 149–151.

114 Original version from the Nestle-Aland critical edition 28: Εάν τις ἴδῃ τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ ἁμαρτάνοντα ἁμαρτίαν μὴ πρὸς θάνατον, αἰτήσῃ, καὶ δώσει αὐτῷ ζωὴν, τοῖς ἁμαρτάνουσιν μὴ πρὸς θάνατον. ἔστιν ἁμαρτία πρὸς θάνατον· οὐ περὶ ἐκείνης λέγω ἵνα ἐρωτήσῃ (E.E. Nestle – B.K. Aland, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 28 ed. [Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft 2012]).

115 See R.E. Brown, *The Epistles of John* (AB 30; Garden City, NY: Doubleday 1982) 30–35.

a 'sin leading to death' (ἁμαρτία πρὸς θάνατον) and 'sin not leading to death' (ἁμαρτία μὴ πρὸς θάνατον).¹¹⁶

The analysis presented in this article demonstrates that, in the Gospels, blasphemy against the Holy Spirit involves deliberately attributing the action of the Holy Spirit (e.g. exorcism) to Satan (Mark 3:28–30 and par.), which is considered an unforgivable sin. Thus, we want to seek an answer to the question: Does the 'sin leading to death' mentioned in 1 John 5:16 correspond to this blasphemy, or does it refer to a different kind of transgression? First, we will outline the arguments of commentators who answer this question in the affirmative, and then we will present the arguments of those who oppose this view.

Authors who endorse identifying the 'sin leading to death' in 1 John 5:16 with blasphemy against the Holy Spirit give three reasons to support this view. The first perceived parallel is the irreversibility of sin in both cases. For the author instructs in 1 John 5:16 that one should not pray for those who commit 'sin leading to death', which is somewhat reminiscent of the unforgivable blasphemy against the Holy Spirit in the Gospels (Matt 12:31–32). The absence of the call to prayer may indicate a sin that excludes the possibility of forgiveness, as does the deliberate rejection of the work of the Holy Spirit.¹¹⁷ The second argument in support of identifying the two sins, as stated by the proponents of this thesis, is the broader context of 1 John, which strongly underlines the Holy Spirit as the witness to the truth about Christ (for example, see 4:2–6; 5:6–8). Thus, the 'sin leading to death' could be related to the rejection of this truth. Such a 'sin leading to death' tantamount to blasphemy against the Holy Spirit would be, for example, the deliberate rejection of Jesus' incarnation and divinity (4:3).¹¹⁸ The third argument is that 'sin leading to death' implies an attitude of hardness of heart, similar to that presented in Mark 3:29. If the sinner in 1 John 5:16 rejects faith in Jesus as the Messiah despite clear evidence from the Holy Spirit, then this sin can be compared to the evangelical blasphemy.¹¹⁹

The opposite hypothesis, which does not identify the sin referred to in 1 John 5:16 with blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, has more supporters and arguments. First of all, it is noted that 1 John 5:16 does not contain the blasphemy terminology, which is crucial in the relevant texts of Mark 3:29–30 and par. In 1 John 5:16, there is mention of 'sin leading to death', which is a broader concept and can refer to various ways of 'falling away', not necessarily related to blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.¹²⁰ The second argument is derived from reading 1 John 5:16 in the context of the Johannine community dynamics. Some of its members had left (2:19) and actively refuted the faith (e.g. by denying the incarnation, see 4:2–3). In this context, the 'sin leading to death' is more likely to denote a permanent apostasy or heresy that excludes the sinner from the community than a specific blasphemy

¹¹⁶ S.S. Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John* (WBC 51; Waco, TX: Word Books 1984) 295–297.

¹¹⁷ See Brown, *Epistles of John*, 612–614.

¹¹⁸ Brown, *Epistles of John*, 613.

¹¹⁹ This is argued, for example, by I.H. Marshall, *The Epistles of John* (NICNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1978) 248–250.

¹²⁰ See Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, 298–299.

against the Holy Spirit.¹²¹ It should be noted that the author does not forbid praying for such a person, but merely does not recommend it, which differs from the absolute unforgiveness of the sin of blasphemy in the Gospels. Other supporters of this position point to differences in the nature of sin. Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit in the Gospels is a concrete act of hostility by opponents to Jesus performing miracles. On the other hand, 'sin leading to death' in 1 John is associated with a permanent rejection of faith in Christ or with moral decline (e.g. hatred of brothers and sisters in 3:14–15),¹²² but it is likely to have nothing to do with blasphemy. The final argument against linking 'sin leading to death' in 1 John 5:16 with blasphemy against the Holy Spirit stems from the practical purpose of this statement, which is part of the instructions for intercessory prayer in the community.¹²³ 'Sin leading to death' can be understood here as conduct that leads to spiritual or physical death¹²⁴ (e.g. through a permanent rejection of faith).

We favour the middle ground taken by some scholars who see similarities but avoid equating the sin referred to in 1 John 5:16 with blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.¹²⁵ The similarity lies in the fact that both sins involve a deliberate rejection of God's action: in the Gospels, through the denial of Jesus' miracles performed by the power of the Holy Spirit, and in 1 John, through apostasy, which involves rejecting the truth about Christ or distorting this truth through heresy. However, differences in the context in which these statements were made (Jesus' polemic with His opponents vs a doctrinal and/or ethical crisis within the community) and the lack of common terminology make it impossible to equate these sins. We believe that 'sin leading to death' is a broader concept that can include various types of persistent rebellion, but not necessarily blasphemy in the strict sense.

4.4. Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit and the *Gospel of Thomas* 44

Jesus' statements on the unforgivable sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit in the Synoptic Gospels (Mark 3:28–30; Matt 12:31–32; Luke 12:10) find their counterpart in logion 44 of the apocryphal *Gospel of Thomas*, written between AD 100 and 150 (manuscript discovered in Nag Hammadi Codex II, 2 in 1945),¹²⁶ which has survived in the Sahidic dialect of Coptic.¹²⁷ It is not a narrative but a collection of 114 sayings of Jesus, which,

¹²¹ This is stressed, for example, by K.H. Jobes, *1, 2, and 3 John* (Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan 2014) 239–241.

¹²² See C.G. Kruse, *The Letters of John* (Pillar New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 2000) 190–193.

¹²³ See R.W. Yarbrough, *1–3 John* (BECNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic 2008) 308–311.

¹²⁴ Cf. Acts 5:1–11; 1 Cor 11:30.

¹²⁵ For example, see D.L. Akin, *1, 2, 3 John: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture* (NAC 38; Nashville, TN: B&H 2001) 206–208.

¹²⁶ Some scholars claim that this text may contain a significant amount of material recorded in the 1st century AD, when the canonical Gospels were being compiled. For more, see A.D. DeConick, *The Original Gospel of Thomas in Translation: With a Commentary and New English Translation of the Complete Gospel* (LNTS 287; London: Clark 2007) 2–5.

¹²⁷ A few passages in Greek have also survived (P. Oxy. 1; 654 and 655), but it is presumed that the original language of the Gospel of Thomas is Syriac. The Greek versions on the papyri are consistent with the Coptic

according to tradition, were written down by the apostle Thomas.¹²⁸ Many of these logia, often using slightly different wording, can be found in the canonical Gospels. The *Gospel of Thomas* (*Gos. Thom.*) exhibits Gnostic influences, yet it is not an entirely Gnostic work, as it combines elements of wisdom, apocalyptic, and proto-Gnostic thought.¹²⁹ This text was probably addressed to an early Christian community seeking esoteric knowledge (*gnosis*) that leads to salvation through understanding oneself and divine reality.¹³⁰ This work was probably composed in Syria or Egypt, where Jewish, Christian and Hellenistic influences overlapped. This text may have originated in interaction with early Christian communities that fought to preserve orthodoxy and strengthen the institutional Church.¹³¹

The context of logion 44 is a sequence of statements concerning the ethics of Christian life and doctrinal assertions (logia 42–46). It is preceded by logion 43, which speaks of recognising the source of Jesus' words, and followed by logion 45 on the fruit of the heart. However, the lack of narrative continuity means that logion 44 functions as an independent statement, which resonates with synoptic parallels.¹³² Although in the context of the *Gospel of Thomas* as a whole, logion 44 fits into a broader reflection on the role of the Holy Spirit in revelation and salvation.

After this general introduction, we proceed to analyse logion 44 in the context of the subject matter of this article. In our exegesis, we will rely on our original translation of this text, without referring to Coptic terminology:

It is said: He who speaks something against the Father, they will forgive him, and he who speaks against the Son, they will forgive him. But he who speaks something against the Spirit, which is Pure/Holy, they will not forgive him, neither on earth nor in heaven.

This logion can be divided into three parts: blasphemy against the Father, against the Son and against the Holy Spirit. The text suggests that both the insult to the Father and to the Son do not have irreversible consequences and can be forgiven. In contrast, blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven ('neither on earth nor in heaven'). This highlights the exceptional gravity of this sin, with the absolute exclusion of forgiveness.¹³³

original, confirming the stability of the text transmission. See T.O. Lambdin, "Introduction to the Gospel of Thomas," *Nag Hammadi Codex II, 2–7 together with XIII, 2**, *Brit. Lib. Or.* 4926(1), and *P. OXY.* 1, 654, 655. I. *Gospel according to Thomas, Gospel according to Philip, Hypostasis of the Archons, Indexes* (ed. B. Layton) (NHS 20; Leiden: Brill 1989) 53–94.

¹²⁸ The following introductions to the Gospel of Thomas are recommended: H. Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels: Their History and Development* (Philadelphia, PA: Trinity Press International 1990); R. Valantasis, *The Gospel of Thomas* (New Testament Readings; London: Routledge 1997); A.D. DeConick, *Recovering the Original Gospel of Thomas: A History of the Gospel and Its Growth* (LNTS 286; London: Clark 2006).

¹²⁹ See M.W. Meyer, *The Gospel of Thomas: The Hidden Sayings of Jesus* (San Francisco, CA: Harper San Francisco 1992) 11–15.

¹³⁰ E. Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York: Random House 1979) 128–130.

¹³¹ Such a view is given in S.J. Patterson, *The Gospel of Thomas and Jesus* (Sonoma, CA: Polebridge Press 1993) 17–20.

¹³² See DeConick, *Original Gospel*, 167–168.

¹³³ This is noted, for example, by Meyer, *Gospel of Thomas*, 85–86.

The phrase ‘neither on earth nor in heaven’ reinforces the rhetoric of irreversibility. This may reflect the Gnostic dichotomy between the material and spiritual worlds.¹³⁴

Comparing logion 44 with parallel statements in Mark 3:28–30, Matt 12:31–32 and Luke 12:10, a clear difference emerges: in the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus’ statement is linked to specific situations related to His thaumaturgic activity (see above). In logion 44, however, there is no narrative context, which gives Jesus’ statement a universal character.¹³⁵ The lack of narrative context makes this logion more abstract, directed at anyone who rejects spiritual revelation, rather than at a specific group (such as the scribes or Pharisees in the Synoptic Gospels). As in Luke 12:10, blasphemy against the Son of Man is forgivable. However, in the *Gospel of Thomas*, unlike in Luke, the forgiveness of this sin is extended to God the Father. This is a unique approach.¹³⁶

How should this blasphemy (literally, ‘saying something’) against the Holy Spirit be understood in the context of the Gnostic character of the *Gospel of Thomas*? Indeed, in the *Gospel of Thomas*, the Holy Spirit is not often mentioned directly. Apart from logion 44, He appears only twice, and indirectly (in logion 3 in the phrase ‘know yourselves’¹³⁷ and in logion 53 in the phrase ‘circumcision in spirit’). Logion 44, on the other hand, suggests the central role of the Holy Spirit in revelation. Therefore, blasphemy against Him may imply a rejection of divine *gnosis*, which in Gnostic thought is the key to salvation.¹³⁸

It should be noted that logion 44 unmistakably refers to the synoptic tradition of the unforgivable sin against the Holy Spirit. However, in a Gnostic or proto-Gnostic context, this changes the focus of the message. This logion retains an early Christian tradition, closely related to the Gospel of Mark, but adapted for the Gnostic audience of the *Gospel of Thomas*. Blasphemy against the Spirit is unforgivable because it implies a rejection of the divine revelation that the Spirit communicates through Jesus.¹³⁹ In the Synoptic Gospels, this sin involves deliberately denying Jesus’ miracles as works of the Holy Spirit (Mark 3:30). However, in the *Gospel of Thomas*, there is no such context of miracles, and thus blasphemy may refer to the rejection of Jesus’ words as a source of *gnosis*.¹⁴⁰ In the Gnostic context, the Holy Spirit represents the inner divine spark or knowledge that believers discover within themselves. Blasphemy against the Spirit is the rejection of this knowledge, which is equivalent to spiritual death, because it prevents a return to the divine *pleroma* (fullness).¹⁴¹ Therefore, logion 44 may be a warning against the hardness of heart towards revelation,

134 See Pagels, *Gnostic Gospels*, 132–133.

135 This was rightly pointed out by R. McL. Wilson, *Studies in the Gospel of Thomas* (London: Mowbray 1960) 96–98.

136 See Layton, *Gnostic Scriptures*, 389.

137 In the Gnostic understanding, to ‘know yourselves’ is the work of the divine spark or Spirit that dwells within man. Although the phrase ‘Holy Spirit’ is not found here, experts on the subject suggest that logion 3 reflects the Gnostic vision of the Spirit as a force of revelation, similar to that in logion 44. See Pagels, *Gnostic Gospels*, 128–130.

138 See DeConick, *Original Gospel*, 169.

139 DeConick, *Original Gospel*, 168–170.

140 See Patterson, *Gospel of Thomas*, 45–46.

141 Pagels, *Gnostic Gospels*, 134–135.

which in the *Gospel of Thomas* is perceived as more individual and esoteric than in the canonical Gospels.¹⁴² Hence, Jesus' statement in logion 44, although embedded in the synoptic tradition, serves a more ethical function in the *Gospel of Thomas* – the emphasis is placed on calling for respect for divine revelation. Unlike the Synoptic Gospels, where sin is a specific act, in the *Gospel of Thomas*, it can refer to an attitude towards the truth of the Christian faith.¹⁴³ In the Gnostic context, blasphemy against the Spirit, parallel to the statements of Jesus analysed above from the Synoptic Gospels, can be seen as a rejection of inner enlightenment, which is a prerequisite for salvation.¹⁴⁴

In summary, it can be concluded that Logion 44 of the *Gospel of Thomas* is a clear reference to the synoptic tradition of the unforgivable sin against the Holy Spirit, but it takes on a new meaning within the context of this work. Unlike in the canonical Gospels, where this sin is associated with a specific act of hostility towards Jesus as a miracle worker, in the *Gospel of Thomas*, it has a more universal and esoteric character, referring to the rejection of divine revelation or *gnosis*. The Gnostic or proto-Gnostic context suggests that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is the hardness of heart towards the inner truth, leading to spiritual death. Although the logion retains the rhetoric of irreversibility present in the Synoptic Gospels, the lack of a narrative framework makes it open to various interpretations, ranging from an ethical warning to a metaphysical reflection on salvation.¹⁴⁵

Conclusions

In this article, we have set ourselves the task of answering the *crux interpretum*, which is the unforgivable sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. After outlining a broader background to this issue, we presented the Old Testament context for understanding blasphemy against God. We demonstrated that such a concept existed in pre-Christian Judaism and had a well-established Hebrew terminology (see Lev 24:10–23; Exod 22:27; 1 Kgs 21:1–16; Isa 8:21). Blasphemy against God is not clearly defined in these texts, and therefore could involve uttering God's name without due reverence or even the sole fact of uttering His name. However, in the Old Testament, we do not find any phrase that would specify blasphemy against God as a transgression against the Spirit (of God).

The presented *status quaestionis* concerning the unforgivable sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit has proved that from the earliest statements of the Apostolic Fathers on this subject to the present day, there is no consensus on the nature of this sin. The solutions proposed throughout Christian history and in modern times can be logically arranged into four categories. The first includes a small number of theologians who deny the existence of

¹⁴² See Meyer, *Gospel of Thomas*, 86–87.

¹⁴³ Meyer, *Gospel of Thomas*, 87. This idea also appears, for example, in the aforementioned logion 3, where the Spirit is also mentioned.

¹⁴⁴ See Pagels, *Gnostic Gospels*, 136.

¹⁴⁵ Pagels, *Gnostic Gospels*, 136.

the unforgivable sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. The second comprises the followers of Augustine of Hippo, whose proposal was advocated in the Middle Ages, according to which unforgivable blasphemy against the Holy Spirit consists in denying the salvation offered by God and rejecting reconciliation with Him at the moment of death. The third group encompasses authors who claim that this sin was a concrete, one-time transgression committed by the opponents of the historical Jesus, who accused Him of casting out evil spirits by the power of Satan. The fourth category is represented by the largest number of contemporary theologians who argue that the unforgivable sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit can be committed by people at all stages of salvation history, initiated by the incarnation of the Son of God. However, these authors disagree so strongly on the specific answers they propose that there is no prospect of any consensus.

In the search for an answer to the question posed in the title of this article, we proposed to analyse each of the three pericopes from the canonical Gospels dealing with this issue independently in the context of each of these works. The second novelty was the expansion of the research field to include logion 12:10 from the hypothesised Q source, passages from Heb 6:4–6 and 1 John 5:16, and logion 44 from the apocryphal *Gospel of Thomas*.

These analyses led to several important conclusions. First of all, the differences in content and context between parallel passages in the Synoptic Gospels dealing with this topic allow the commentator to take a broader view of the issue. Our analyses show that individual Evangelists and the early Christian communities they represented may have had slightly different views on this topic. In Mark 3:28–30, this sin consists in the audacious self-exclusion of a person from those to whom God offers forgiveness and salvation. This self-exclusion involves denying the truth that Jesus acts by the power of the Holy Spirit and thus rejecting the salvation that the triune God offers in Christ. In the Gospel of Matthew (12:31–32), with reference to Mark, the emphasis is shifted from contrasting unforgivable blasphemy against the Holy Spirit with any other sin that can be forgiven to juxtaposing blasphemy against the Son of Man with blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. The first of these, although grave, can be forgiven, since it involves a verbal denial and persistent rejection of the truth that Jesus is the promised Messiah. It is therefore a sin of unbelief in His divine mission, declared before others. However, blasphemy against the Holy Spirit cannot be forgiven, as it essentially denies that God Himself is revealed in Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit. Rejecting this truth is tantamount to rejecting God and His salvific action in the world, i.e. apostasy. Luke the Evangelist presents us with logion 12:10 in a form similar to Matthew's. However, he isolates it from the context of Jesus' confrontation with His opponents, thereby rendering it as a universal rule, according to which the unforgivable sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit entails denying that God Himself is at work in Jesus' words and deeds. Refusing Jesus as the unique Teacher and Miracle Worker is a forgivable sin, but refusing His messianic mission and that God Himself works in Him by the power of the Holy Spirit is an act of unbelief and self-exclusion from the community of the saved. Therefore, it can be concluded that each of the three Evangelists placed a slightly different emphasis on understanding the sin of blasphemy against

the Holy Spirit; however, in essence, it is a sin of apostasy – the rejection of God revealed in Christ. Inclusion of the anthropological and cultural perspective (the mechanism of the game for honour) in the analyses allows us to see in Mark and Matthew the nuance of the unforgivable sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit as a refusal to give God the glory that is due to Him. It involves an attempt to diminish His reputation and power in favour of the forces of evil represented by Beelzebub. Therefore, this sin does not entail solely denying God's agency, but its consequence is to take the side of the forces of evil (it is an either-or situation).

We broadened our understanding of the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit by analysing four other texts in which this topic also appears (albeit indirectly in Heb 6:4–6 and 1 John 5:16). The first of these is logion 12:10 in the hypothesised Q source. This logion has a paraenetic function in Q, calling for faithfulness to God and warning against the eschatological consequences of unbelief in God revealed in Christ. The inclusion of this non-narrative source has made it possible to draw attention to the recontextualisation of the synoptic understanding of the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit as a more universal principle applicable to the Church of all times. An exegetical analysis of Heb 4:4–6 has led us to conclude that this text does not directly address the unpardonable sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. However, it should be assumed that Heb 6:4–6 refers to apostasy in the context of persecuted Christians of Jewish origin, and not to blasphemy in the sense presented in the Synoptic Gospels. Key differences include the absence of blasphemy terminology in this passage and a different historical context (the Christian community in Hebrews vs Jesus' opponents in the Gospels). When examining the relationship between the parallel passages from the Synoptic Gospels and 1 John 5:16, as analysed in this article, both similarities and differences are apparent. The similarity lies in the fact that both the sin against the Holy Spirit (Synoptic Gospels) and the 'sin leading to death' (1 John) presuppose a deliberate rejection of God's action: in the Gospels, through the denial of Jesus' miracles performed by the power of the Holy Spirit, and in 1 John, through apostasy denying the truth about Christ or heresy distorting this truth. As we demonstrated, differences in the context in which these statements were made (Jesus' polemic with His opponents vs a doctrinal and/or ethical crisis within the community) and the lack of common terminology make it impossible to equate these sins. The last text analysed in this article with regard to blasphemy against the Holy Spirit was logion 44 from the apocryphal *Gospel of Thomas*. This passage clearly refers to the synoptic tradition of the unforgivable sin against the Holy Spirit, but this theme is more universal and esoteric in the *Gospel of Thomas*. Its universal character derives from the non-narrative structure of the *Gospel of Thomas* and the significant role assigned to the Holy Spirit in this work for the transmission of divine revelation. Its esoteric nature, in turn, derives from the Gnostic origins of this text. This context suggests that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is the hardness of heart towards the inner truth, leading to spiritual death. Therefore, it offers a slightly different perspective on the reality of the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit: it does not entail, as in the Synoptic Gospels, rejecting God revealed in Jesus Christ, but in closing oneself off to the truth that God reveals to

us in our hearts, the ultimate consequence of which is closing oneself off to salvation and spiritual self-destruction.

To sum up the entire analysis, it can be concluded that a tendency to recontextualise the teaching on the unforgivable sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is evident in the Synoptic Gospels. The Evangelists Mark and Matthew place Jesus' logion in two slightly different narrative contexts, but with a shared conviction that this sin ultimately arises from rejecting the fact of God's revelation in Jesus Christ in favour of attributing His works to Satan. By placing this logion in a context that indicates that it is a truth that the disciples are to pass on in their (post-Paschal) teaching, Luke the Evangelist guides the reader to interpret Jesus' teaching on the sin of blasphemy as a universal tenet. If we accept the existence of the hypothesised Q source, we can surmise that Luke drew inspiration for his universal view of this issue from Q 12:10. The other three texts analysed in this article (Heb 6:4–6; 1 John 5:16, and *Gos. Thom.* 44) do not offer significant contribution to answering the question posed in the title of this paper, but they do provide background knowledge that allows us to look at the issue under consideration from a broader theological and cultural perspective.

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