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Volume 9

# Healer

*Reception of Jesus as healer during Early Christianity and Today*



Edited by

**Zorodzai Dube**

HTS Religion & Society Series  
Volume 9

# Healer

Reception of Jesus as healer  
during Early Christianity and Today



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Volume 9

# Healer

Reception of Jesus as healer during  
Early Christianity and Today

EDITOR  
**Zorodzai Dube**



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The publisher (AOSIS) endorses the South African 'National Scholarly Book Publishers Forum Best Practice for Peer Review of Scholarly Books'. The manuscript was subjected to rigorous two-step peer review prior to publication, with the identities of the reviewers not revealed to the author(s). The reviewers were independent of the publisher and/or authors in question. The reviewers commented positively on the scholarly merits of the manuscript and recommended that the manuscript be published. Where the reviewers recommended revision and/or improvements to the manuscript, the authors responded adequately to such recommendations.

## Research Justification

The book explores the established field of healing narratives in the New Testament by focusing on the remembered tradition regarding Jesus' healings and comparing them with those of other healers such as Asclepius. A sub-theme to the book is to investigate the reception of Jesus as a healer in various African communities. The book exposes the various healing methods employed by Jesus such as exorcism, touch and the use of spittle. Like any other healing performances that reflect the healthcare system of a given culture, Jesus' healings were holistic: healing the bodily pain, restoring households and combatting stigmatisation and marginalisation. The book demonstrates Jesus' healing activities as 'shalom' performances that seek to re-establish peace in all its social dimensions. With regard to the reception of Jesus as a healer in the African context, the book elaborates the sacrificial lamb motif and the need of restoring the relationship with God. All the contributions in the book present a unique and original perspective in understanding Jesus as a healer from an African healthcare system. Most African societies do not see healing as a cure for bacteria or virus that is typical in biomedical healthcare systems. Instead, within most African societies, healing speaks to broader social categories of peace, hospitality, absence of violence and harm, and peace with the spiritual world. From an African perspective, healing encompasses restoration of the physical community, and spiritual dimension pervades all the contributions. Against the background of these perspectives, this scholarly book endorses the insight gained from theories about Jesus as a healer who amended the broken cosmological world of the sick. From these contributions, prayer and the role of religious practitioners, such as prophets and healers, are transforming the broken spiritual canopy. Such an interpretation provides new ideas about the function of various healing rituals and an African understanding of healthcare. The methodology applied represents multidisciplinary perspectives concerning healthcare within the first-century Judeo-Christian context and today's African context. It also contributes to an understanding of Africans' use of the model of western medicine by comparing such a use with patients' personalist worldview and religious practices and rituals in Africa. The book targets academic specialists in the areas of 'Healing in the Jesus Tradition' and 'medical anthropology'. It takes the established field of healing in the New Testament further by exploring how Jesus was remembered as a healer within the broader Judeo-Christian and Greco-Roman healthcare systems and the reception of his healing activities in various African contexts. The similarity report of an iThenticate™ analysis confirms that the book contains no plagiarism and represents original and innovative research.

**Zorodzai Dube**, Department of New Testament and Related Literature, Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa



# Contents

Abbreviations and Tables Appearing in the Text and Notes	xiii
List of Abbreviations	xiii
List of Tables	xiii
Notes on Contributors	xv
Acknowledgements	xix
Declarations	xxi

## Section 1: Historical paradigms and theory

---

<b>Chapter 1: Shalom practices: Theorising Jesus' healing practices</b>	<b>3</b>
<i>Zorodzai Dube</i>	
Abstract	3
Introduction	4
Highlight of previous approaches	5
Shalom theory: Restoration and celebrations	8
Mark's healing Jesus as a restorer of Shalom	11
Shalom towards kinship and household economic fortunes	11
Shalom towards gender roles	15
Celebratory aspects	17
<b>Chapter 2: Therapeutic paradigms in the public ministry of Jesus</b>	<b>19</b>
<i>Jesse Mugambi</i>	
Abstract	19
Introduction: Healing as a focus of the public ministry of Jesus	20
Occupational therapy	21



Cultural therapy	23
Family therapy	24
Genealogical therapy	26
Theocentric therapy	27
Cosmo-centric therapy	29
Eschatological therapy	31
Bio-centric therapy	33
Ideological therapy	34
Liturgical therapy	36
Ritualistic therapy	37
Ontological therapy	38
Charismatic therapy	39
Mystical therapy	39
Class-based therapy	41
Anthropocentric therapy	42
Juridical therapy	44
Homiletic therapy	45
Epistemic therapy	46
Counselling paradigms	46
Normative paradigms	47
Ecclesiological paradigms	48
Pneumatological paradigms	48
Dialectical paradigms	49
Festive paradigms	50
Historic paradigms	51
Edifying objective	51

<b>Chapter 3: Greco-Roman healing tradition of Asclepius vis-à-vis Jesus as the <i>Messianic Healer</i> in the Gospels tradition: Implications for healing ministrations in contemporary African churches</b>	<b>53</b>
---	-----------

***Chris U. Manus***

Abstract	54
----------	----

Methodology	55
Greco-Roman healing tradition: Asclepius the healer	55
Jesus as the Messianic Healer in the Gospels tradition	59
Occasions of healing by Jesus	60
Kinds of healing Jesus performed	60
Jesus' motivation for healing people	62
The healing approaches adopted by Jesus	63
Contrasts between Asclepius and Jesus' healings	64
Some observations	65
Implications for healing ministrations in contemporary African churches	67
<b>Chapter 4: Jesus as a healer in the Greco-Roman context: Implications for healing and wellness in Africa</b>	<b>71</b>
<i>Richard M. Bariu</i>	
Abstract	71
Introduction	73
Healers and healing narratives in the Greco-Roman context	74
<i>Iliad</i>	76
<i>Odyssey</i>	77
Beyond Homer (6th century BC to 5th century BC)	78
<i>Iatroi</i> in literature	79
Asklepios, a healer	81
Healing methods in the Greco-Roman context	82
Healing by spittle	83
Power words 'come out of him' Mark 9:25 and Philostratus, Life 4:20; Lucian, Lies 11, 16; PGM IV:3013	84
Exorcism	84
Use of someone's name	84
Use of physical aid	85
New Testament's portrayal of Jesus as a healer	86
Jesus healing by spittle	89
Implications for healing and wellness in Africa	91
Jesus' use of spittle in Mark 3	94

Speaking words that have restorative power ( <i>dunamis</i> )	94
Illness and disease that threaten life	94
Illness and disease threaten order	95
Supposition	95

## **Section 2: Contextual paradigms**

---

### **Chapter 5: A feminist perspective to the discourses of Jesus' healings in contemporary Africa 99**

**Loreen Maseno**

Abstract	99
Feminist perspectives	100
At the level of knowledge production	101
Knowledge is situated	102
Feminist perspectives at the level of methodology (the assumptions that guide how particular research is to be undertaken)	102
Feminist perspectives at the level of method (means of gathering evidence)	103
Subject or object nature of the research	103
Feminist perspectives to the discourses of Jesus' healing in Africa	104
Case 1: Anita	105
Case 2: Angela	107
Analysis of case 1 and case 2	108
Wellness	110

### **Chapter 6: Orality and memory – Jesus' healing of the leper in Mark 1:40–45: An example of the re-enactment of Jesus' healing ministry in contemporary African Churches 113**

**Chris U. Manus**

Abstract	114
Orality	115
Memory	118
Brief analysis of the text in its synoptic tradition	122

The context	122
<i>Re-reading</i> the story as an example for the <i>re-enactment</i> of Jesus' healing tradition by some African Healing Prophets	125
Testimonies	129
<b>Chapter 7: From other ways of bleeding to other ways of healing: Reading Mark 5:21-34 with the marginalised</b>	<b>131</b>
<i>Rose Nyirimana</i>	
Abstract	131
Introduction	132
The socio-scientific approach and the Tri-Polar Exegetical Model	134
The use of the Tri-Polar Exegetical Model	135
The context that informs the reading of the text	136
The plight of women from Burundi, the DRC and Rwanda	137
Misuse of sex: Sexuality and sexual harassment in the Great Lakes Region	139
Blood discharge, as a part of the system of control for women	140
Background and context of Mark 5:21-34 in the view of the plight of women	143
The literary reading of the text (Mark 5:21-34)	143
The plight of women in the Greco-Roman and Jewish contexts	143
Purity Law in the book of Leviticus	146
Literary location of the event in Mark 5:21-34	148
Jesus and the bleeding woman in Mark 5:21-34	150
The impact of the ailment of bleeding on the woman's life	152
The woman's public confession and Jesus' response: A breach of official transcripts	154
The healed woman, an inspiration for other suffering women	156
The woman's strategies as a mirror for the self-healing way of process	157
Suggestions	159

<b>Chapter 8: Reading the miracles of Jesus: Exorcisms – From an African context</b>	<b>161</b>
<i>Elliot Tofa</i>	
Abstract	161
Introduction	162
Data-collection methods	164
Miracle workers in the ancient Mediterranean: The case of Jewish and Greco-Roman <i>theios aner</i>	165
Jesus as a healer and exorcist in Apocryphal Gospels and Infancy Narratives	167
Reading exorcism miracles of Jesus from an African context: Insights from social scientific criticism and cultural studies	170
Evil spirits, healing techniques and the making of spiritual meanings	172
Evil spirits in the ancient Mediterranean and the African contexts: A discussion	178
Insights	180
<b>Chapter 9: <i>Yeshua</i>, the poured politics of healing</b>	<b>183</b>
<i>Hlulani Mdingi</i>	
Abstract	183
Healing: Existential or biological significance	184
Document hypothesis and wisdom	194
Black people worship <i>Yeshua</i> and white people worship Jesus	203
Systematic theological reflection of healing	206
Insights	212
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>213</b>
<i>Zorodzai Dube</i>	
Conclusion	213
<b>References</b>	<b>217</b>
<b>Index</b>	<b>235</b>

# Abbreviations and Tables Appearing in the Text and Notes

## List of Abbreviations

AICs	African Initiated Churches
AIDS	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
ARV	Anti-retroviral Medication
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
KJV	King James Version
NKJV	New King James Version
SCOAN	Synagogue Church of All Nations

## List of Tables

Table 3.1: Instances of healing activities done by Jesus in the four Gospels.

61



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# Declarations

## **Declaration of reworked contributions**

I declare that the following chapter is a substantially reworked section and has been incorporated with the permission of the author and the publishers:

Chapter 2, 'Therapeutic Paradigms in the Public Ministry of Jesus', is based on 'Christological Paradigms in African Christianity', in J.N.K Mugambi & Laurenti Magesa (eds.), *Jesus in African Christianity: Experimentation and Diversity in African Christology*, pp. 136-161, Acton Publisher, Nairobi, Kenya.

## **Plagiarism declaration**

I declare that all contributions contained herein are original and that the editor made an effort, through the use of Turnitin™, to ensure that all ideas from other sources are acknowledged. Where application of contributions that were previously published elsewhere was required, permission from the publishers was granted.

## **Declaration concerning scholarly discourse**

The book targets academic specialists in the areas of 'healing in the Jesus tradition' and 'medical anthropology'. It takes the established field of healing in the New Testament further by exploring how Jesus was remembered as a healer within the broader Judeo-Christian and Greco-Roman healthcare systems and the reception of his healing activities in various African contexts.



**Section 1**

# **Historical paradigms and theory**





# Shalom practices: Theorising Jesus' healing practices

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## ■ Abstract

What about shifting our focus from Jesus, the healer, to the people who experienced healing? Although Jesus is one of the main characters, the healing stories in the New Testament are about individuals or communities that struggle to find the healing that falls on one or many of the household members. As we are not told about the rest of the patients who did not receive healing, behind these stories are memories of loss, pain and shame. These stories provide a glimpse of a healthcare system and the struggles that people faced in maintaining their family and community bonds. Yet, in most of the New Testament commentaries about

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Jesus' healing, the focus is on Jesus' identity as Christ and his power to heal various ailments. Little or no reference is made towards the people who were healed. Yet, a closer look at these stories reveals that the sick person initiates the encounter by shouting, calling, touching or being at a strategic place to meet Jesus. Seemingly, all the healing stories start with the expression of pain and misery by the sick person. In addition, again, after Jesus' healing, the narrative returns to the jubilation by the restored person. Even after a private session and request by Jesus not to tell anyone, the clear and dramatic scene of celebration is clear from the previously sick person running back into the village, announcing his or her new healed condition. One cannot fail to hear the imaginary exclamation, 'I am healed!' 'I am healed!' 'I am healed!'. During such commotion, the neighbours and fellow village people would come out from their homestead, some in disbelief and some to share in the celebration, 'who healed you!' 'who healed you!' 'who healed you!'. Building upon Ernest van Eck and Andries van Aarde's suggestion that the healing stories deal with restoring the person to his or her role within the community or household, I propose the Shalom theory. In the Hebrew Bible, the term 'shalom' implies completeness, soundness, welfare and peace (Jdg 6:23). Today, in most Mediterranean societies, the term 'shalom' is used as a common greeting. I used the Shalom theory to argue that the healing stories are community celebration stories of restoration; the return of peace and normalcy to the once sick person and the household. Keeping this perspective, I conducted an imaginative reading of the healing stories, focusing on how the community joined in celebration, possibly through songs, feast and dance upon seeing their loved ones restored.

**Keywords:** Shalom; Celebration; Healing; Restoration; Jesus.

## ■ Introduction

Among the many challenges, African biblical scholarship faces the inability to theorise the subject under discussion. The healing

stories are no exception. The starting point is asking what the African biblical reader hears on reading the healing stories. Since its arrival, African readers of the Bible have been engaging in mirror or contextual reading of the Bible. At the onset, being within a personalistic worldview where illness is interpreted from the perspective of the gods or ancestral spirits and the crucial role of religious practitioners, the African reader of the Bible resonates with the worldview behind the New Testament narratives. To an African biblical reader, the pain expressed while seeking healing, the role of Jesus as a healer and the celebrations after the healing are familiar images within an African context. Similar to most subsistent and peasant communities whereby sickness disrupts relationships, peace and functions within the household, receiving or getting healing is a point of great relief whereby the once sick person and the entire household celebrate. Healing is a point of shalom, of peace and of completeness. This study attempts to theorise Jesus' healing practices as shalom moments that evoke individual and community celebrations. By taking this stance, I shift attention from Jesus to imagining the possible atmosphere surrounding the stories.

## ■ Highlight of previous approaches

While the recent archaeological discoveries made by Papyri Oxyrhynchus, Nag Hammadi and Codex Sinaiticus discovered fragments of biblical text in Egypt, the current and complete version of the Bible came to Africa through modern missions and colonisation. Knowing this is important because it allows us to investigate the first encounters between the Jesus of the Bible and African believers. Concerning cosmology, Africans do not hold the idea of competing religious beliefs. Instead, among Africans, religion is seen as functional based on its efficacy (Mbiti 1990:5). Upon encountering the western Christianity, Africans began to flock to church, and some were employed at various mission stations. Here, one can deduce that the attraction towards Christianity was varied – employment opportunity, status, security and many others. No sooner did the African reader

accept Christianity as one among many of their belief practices than they realised that the dominant character within the New Testament is a man called Jesus – who healed the sick, cast out demons and rose from the dead. The testimony about Jesus was so compelling that even African kings were interested to hear more about Jesus. Where is he? Can we meet him? Is he married? – One can imagine the various questions that the character of Jesus raised. To their disappointment, Jesus' narration in the Bible could not be physically met; he was long dead. Instead, people needed to read and believe in him, and through the Holy Spirit, he would reciprocate by meeting their needs. It is important to note that African readers had experience with their ancestors who play similar roles of empowering, providing and offering protection.

However, theological perspectives stating that Jesus' acts of healing should be understood from the view of God's love upon humanity and that by healing Jesus exercises divine power and is still alive are found in most Bible colleges and seminaries (Howard 2001; Kee 1983). Being God's embodiment and through his healing, Jesus expressed God's love. The challenge with this view is that to an African, it does not answer the question: how does Jesus heal. The world of the Bible and the experiences of the people remain disparate.

African readers who were not satisfied by modern or western explanations regarding Jesus as the healer provided an alternative explanation of their own, saying that Jesus is a forensic healer similar to Sangoma. Such an explanation is found among the African initiated churches (AICs) who branched off from protestant churches – Methodist, Lutheran and Baptist – because of differences in the interpretation of the Bible, its meaning, its relevance to the African people and perceived incidences of racism towards the African worshippers (Chitando 2004:1; Daneel 2004:118). Characteristically and as an expression of their own theology, the AICs wear white garments and conduct services under a tree, mimicking Jesus' regalia and itinerary modus operandi. Healing and prophecy are central to their services.

Most of the church service is about casting demons and anointing worshippers with oil or water. They interpret the Bible from the perspective of African cosmology, where the spiritual world is believed to be inseparable from the natural world. Here, Jesus is understood as the Sangoma type. Jesus is believed to have the power to heal any form of sickness and social issues. Given that the AICs are of different types, some use healing rituals such as white cloth, water and oil. Because oil is also used by African traditional healers, others prefer the use of only water (Chitando 2004:1). In these religious settings, Jesus is a *forensic healer* who interprets the spiritual world of the believers that has a direct bearing on their current situation. A healer prophet in these churches usually provides a diagnosis, saying 'I see in the spiritual world that there is a dark spirit upon your family, and to remedy this, all family members should wash with holy water before going to bed'. The contemporary forms of such healing practices involve giving adherents water or various charms to pass exams, get employment, make the most beautiful girl love you, secure employment and/or making one's spouse faithful in a relationship. As Africans always see the natural as infused by the supernatural, Jesus, the forensic healer, will continue to be relevant to most African Christians (Chitando 2004:1; Daneel 2004:118).

Recently, through the use of social scientific theories, some New Testament scholars use the model of a shaman to describe Jesus. A shaman model is used to refer to a religious practitioner who serves several roles, such as being a diviner and an exorcist and performing political, economic and social advisory roles (Craffert 2008; Moxnes 2003), most of what are known as territorial spirits; ancestral spirits whose jurisdiction covers a large area such as Chaminuka in Zimbabwe, Mandela in South Africa and Nyerere in Tanzania are examples of a shamanic model.

My perspective of shalom builds on the social scientific model of restoration inspired by Ernest van Eck and Andries van Aarde. A perspective that sees healing as restoration suggests that, in their social context of subsistence and peasantry, the healing stories are narratives that restore the subject to the household

(Van Eck 1993:27). In proposing the Shalom theory perspective that is augmented by orality and medical anthropological ideas, healing stories were restorative; yet, their apparent main intention is celebrating a moment of despair, pain and dislocation that was restored to normalcy. While Jesus is the instigator, the main scene is focused on the healed person, his or her family, and his or her community who share an unimaginable moment of happiness, peace and reversal of fortunes. As mentioned, this perspective comes from the assumption that the healing stories come from oral subsistent cultures whose worldview is personalistic. Within such contexts, healing is a relationship reset with the spiritual world, the household and the community. Within a personalistic worldview, a further straining of the relationship with God or ancestors, because of illness, results in separation from the community and God or the ancestor. Therefore, healing is a celebration of several social connections – physical and spiritual.

## ■ Shalom theory: Restoration and celebrations

Informed by ideas from orality and the medical anthropology healthcare system, the Shalom theory perspective approaches the healing stories from the perspective of the healed and his or her household or community as narratives of celebration concerning the completeness, soundness, welfare and restoration that ensue from the moment of healing (Foster 1976:775). At the onset, we should understand that within the personalistic worldview, healing is a reversal of the spiritual condition that causes illness. Unlike in the biomedical worldview whereby sickness is caused by virus and bacteria, in the personalistic worldview, illness is viewed as indicative of the spiritual world. Being sick has two main sources: firstly, the alien spirits have attacked the person with illness; and secondly, the ancestral spirits are angered and they opened upon for illness and indication of their displeasure (Mbiti 1990:12). Within such a context, healing is not merely the absence of disease but the holistic restoration of an individual to a state of spiritual and physical peace.

A similar meaning exists in most ancient Mediterranean societies whereby shalom refers to peace and restoration to God. That peace is both physical and spiritual is illustrated by the daily greeting among the Shona people of Zimbabwe who greet each other, saying *mwakadini* [in reference to the person] or *kwakadini* [in reference to land], which can be literally translated as ‘how is your peace’. The responded would say *kwakanyarara*, meaning the land is at peace.<sup>1</sup> Shalom or peace is the state of tranquillity or a state of contentment or satisfaction. The assumption is that being or life is in a precarious condition to several vicissitudes of life. In many non-western subsistent or peasant societies, the idea of individual agency that is mostly expressed in western worldview is minimum. Because the ancestors and alien spirits control people’s fate, life antennas should be on alert to sense any negative fate. Such a state of peace and tranquillity can be disrupted by the occurrence of a funeral or any tragedy in the village. If tragedy occurs, the response would be *mashati* or *manenji*, meaning the land is grieving, is troubled or has been disrupted. As definition, shalom among the Shona people translates to wellness or wholeness of existence.

A similar definition is found in the biblical tradition – in both the Old and New Testament, shalom was defined as a state of peace in the holistic sense, including political, social and economic spheres (Jdg 6:23–24; Ex 17:15). Throughout the Old Testament, each time the nation of Israel faced a political enemy, that situation signified an absence of peace, absence of God. Equally, catastrophes such as drought and hunger were understood as the absence of shalom or God. Israel lived out its daily rituals of life in search of shalom. Sabbath-keeping, Jubilee celebration and many others were celebrated as activities that would bring shalom (Lv 27:15–23). Importantly for the Jews, shalom was not illusionary or futuristic – its presence or absence was defined based on the existential conditions of the people (Swartley 2006:29, 2007; Tite 1995:301). Given this as theory, shalom is the

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1. Note that the Shona culture requires greeting people every time you meet them, even those you met a few minutes ago.



peace evidenced in social, political and economic realities of the people emanating from God's presence. Shalom starts with the variable that God is peace and he interacts with his world from the perspective of peace. Significantly, each morning Jewish people would greet each other by saying 'shalom', ritualising God's presence and peace among them. Conversely, the absence of peace being characterised by war, famine, corruption and violence signifies the failure to reciprocate a basic attribute of God – peace or shalom – and is ultimately a denial of the presence of God.

The Shalom theory acknowledges the unevenness of life; life is constantly disrupted by moments of violence, war and inequality. Indeed, these 'life humps' are not ideal and their emergence reminds of the concern for the need for an ideal – shalom. As an illustrative example, when driving and encountering a road hump, expectedly or unexpectedly, the driver quickly restores normalcy. The continuation of the 'life hump' is a lack of normalcy; it is chaos. However, life humps function as a sharp reminder for getting back to normalcy. Throughout history, humanity constantly restores chaotic life realities – war, violence, famine through various means, including war. The return of order or normalcy is shalom, restoration.

Among the Shona and Ndebele people, the return to normalcy or order is a point of celebration. Traditionally because of fear of attack by animals and various dangers during the trip among many Bantu cultures, travelling was a risky endeavour. Several stories are told of people who travel and never return home. Given such context, traditionally many African families perform a mini-celebration, for example, after the father or any member of the household returns from a trip. Equally, upon return from circumcision rituals performed for a son, a mini-celebration is performed. Big events that define restoration or return to order are celebrated by bigger feasts. For example, one year after the death and mourning of a family relative, the family celebrates the return and restoration of the deceased spirit with the ancestral spirits and household during a special occasion called *Mukweerere*

or bringing back ceremony. Here, Jan Assmann's idea concerning the importance of commemorative events is useful (Assmann 2013:15). Shalom, understood as restoration, is a commemorative event whose accompanying atmosphere is dance, song and praise. I take this perspective to read through selected passages in Mark's gospel.

## ■ **Mark's healing Jesus as a restorer of Shalom**

The Shalom theory perspective allows a shift of attention from Jesus to the subject and then reveals the emotional world of celebration behind the stories. Unlike Matthew and Luke, who start with a description of Jesus' genealogy, Mark opens with a series of healing stories – the casting of the demon in the synagogue, the healing of Peter's mother-in-law, healing of several people who came to Peter's mother-in-law at night and the healing of the man with leprosy. In recording these stories, it seems Mark wants us to make one thing clear: the healing practices drastically restored the lives of the subjects. Because Jesus' healing practices were shalom, several years after they happened, they still brought happiness to the audience in Mark's gospel (70 AD). In focusing on the subjects who received healing, what social and spiritual conditions were broken because of illness, and how did the healing restore them?

## ■ **Shalom towards kinship and household economic fortunes**

The story about the healing of the man possessed by a demon in the synagogue suggests three social disruptions (Mk 1:22–28). Firstly, as a man and given his condition, the demon-possessed man could not provide for his family. In ancient societies, a man retained his honour by providing for his family (Moxnes 1997:13, 2003:29). Within the household, gender roles were divided between male and female members. While female members cooked, nursed the elderly and children, and were involved in

craft and various household duties, male members were involved mostly in outside duties including hunting and farming. Manhood was defined by the ability to provide for and protect one's family. Family status that equally refers to family honour was the accumulation of the family's social standing and wealth. Poverty and families with negative social perception were shunned and labelled by the community. Given this context, being possessed, the demon-possessed man could not perform crucial manhood duties. While being at the synagogue explains his level of demon possession as a non-violent man, yet still, demon-possessed people usually would be left alone to roam the street or even outside the village gates and forests (Mk 5:1-20). Secondly, because of his condition, he brought shame and stigma to himself and the household (Moxnes 1997:13). Because being possessed by a demon was equal to a curse, the condition of the demon-possessed man accrued a negative social image. In the eyes of the neighbours and other community members, one can imagine the negative image that the family derived because of their demon-possessed brother, father or uncle. Thirdly, demonology implies a broken relationship with God that needs to be restored. During the time of Jesus, any form of sickness was viewed as a spiritual curse because of the sins of either the patient or any of the parents (Jn 9:1-4). Such punishment would go away through prayer, confession and seeking forgiveness from God (Avalos 1999:38).

To illustrate, among most ethnicities in southern Africa, a disturbed mental condition is viewed as a curse from the spiritual world. As such, most families resort to an exorcist to cast out the evil spirit. Crucially, while the condition persists, the family of the possessed is branded as evil. Among villagers, the disturbed mental condition is believed to be a result of an avenging spirit, perhaps of a murdered person coming back to seek revenge. Such accusation has dire reciprocal consequences - it implies that the accused family cannot engage in intermarriages with other households. Within peasant and subsistent families, marriage helps to build kinship ties that would be crucial as

kinship and survival ties. Thus, having a mentally sick father or brother made the family to be viewed with suspicion; they were looked upon as a haunted household.

In re-reading the story from the perspective of shalom, I am interested in the shift from despair to celebration. In the story, Jesus met the possessed man in the synagogue. There was no explanation as to why he was at the synagogue. Given that synagogues functioned as healing sites by the priest, the man was looking for healing. However, his condition did not allow him to make such rational decisions. Could his condition be read as a metaphor for several other men and, therefore, the inability of men to provide for their household (Dube 2018:1)? Given that Mark wanted to push for the argument that Jesus is the healing Messiah, the healing of the demon-possessed man could be seen as a significant story for the community. A cure for demon possession was rare and, usually, the patient would eventually succumb to his condition.

To indicate that demon possession was a culturally significant phenomenon, the process of exorcism was a tough tug-of-war between the power of Jesus and that of the demon. Scholars such as Richard Horsley and Ched Myers suggest that the talking demon is a metaphor for the oppressed people of the Roman Empire through its extractive rules that made the people mad (Horsley 2001:121; Myers 2019:39). Their explanation misses the medical anthropological perspective associated with an emic reading of the story. Thus, the language of demonology should be considered as the social cultural worldview associated with the healthcare system of Jesus' time.

Within personalistic healthcare systems, healing takes the form of exorcism of the invisible spiritual power. In the story, the demon challenged and touted Jesus not to cast it out: *what have I to do with us Jesus of Nazareth; have you come to destroy us?* (Mk 1:24). An anthropologist, Jean Comaroff, notes the relationship between religious, mythical language and social processes, arguing that 'healing reveals how existing symbolic categories

subsume chaotic experience and also how perceptions of an expanding socio-cultural domain may transform these categories themselves' (Comaroff 1980:637). Demon possession could be seen as symbolic structures that destroy the normal life by separating a man from his family and removal of kinship ties. By taunting and negotiating, the demon intends to keep the status quo of dislocation.

The casting of the demon is the restoration point that ushers celebrations (Mk 1:23). Through exorcism, the broken cosmology is mended, making him functional as a father and neighbour; he is reunited with his family. In this story, shalom celebration is:

1. Restoration of gender roles and thereby restoration of honour by making the man assume his household duties. Commemorative memory, as Jan Assman reminds us, has the power to recall emotions. Jurgen Habermas talks about how social identities expressed through clothing and materiality entrench social class. Here, the man's inability to contribute makes him lose his honour, which also made him assume a particular habitus – no happiness and, possibly, no kinship. By being able to work for his family again, the man regains honour for his family and neighbours (Assmann 2013:15). Because of Mark's focus on Jesus, there was no indication regarding how his household first met him. Perhaps, the news of his restoration had already gone ahead of him. It is also possible that some men from the synagogue travelled with him to his household and along the street, shouting and telling others that the man was now restored. Using the Shalom theory, the story is not as dry as it seems – it is a story of individual and community celebration. Upon seeing him from a distance, relatives flocked to him and invited neighbours to join in the celebrations. That day's dinner must have been a feast with other villagers.
2. More so, shalom is the restoration of the economic fortunes of the household as the man goes back to provide for the family. After being healed, the man could join others within the household in providing labour. The story does not tell how the

immediate family feel about one of their members not contributing. However, it is plausible to assume that the restoration bridged the relationships within the household. The celebratory mood could be carried to the fields and many places where he went.

3. Given that the family would not be seen as haunted anymore, shalom is the restoration of honour and kinship ties. Every household needed to be seen in good light. One can imagine that the healing of the man presented different narratives about the image of the family. After healing, no longer would they be seen as a household with a mad father or uncle.

The Shalom perspective from this story touches different levels and facets of the household – the celebration of the healed man and also the celebration by the household.

## ■ Shalom towards gender roles

The second healing story of the healing of Peter’s mother-in-law has similar traumatic realities. At the onset, it raises the question, ‘what is the identity of a mother within peasant and subsistent societies?’. Illustratively and as an analogue, among the Shona people of Zimbabwe there is a proverb that says *musha mukadzi* [household is wife]. Insight into such a central role of African women within the domestic household is less emphasised in favour of the less favourable image of an oppressed woman under the yoke of patriarchy. By prescribing that ‘household = wife’, the proverb raises the status of women, who serve as the binding factors in a household. Central to their role is childbearing, which is tied to the issue of labour and kinship. By bearing children, a woman is bearing labour, which makes the household survive. The opposite is that her inability to bear children signifies a curse over her, her biological family and her husband’s family.

In addition, concerning gender roles, while her husband works in the field, she provides labour by cooking and cleaning the homestead. A homestead where the wife is present is known for

being smart. When visitors arrive, it is her duty to be hospitable and make them feel welcome. The honour of the husband is intrinsically intertwined with her conduct around the household and towards the neighbours (Moxnes 1997:13).

The story in Mark 1:30–31 makes us ask – what happens to the household if the mother gets sick. The story concerning Peter's mother-in-law reminds us about how illness disrupts gender roles. Importantly, the news of her sickness may have been conveyed by Peter to Jesus after the synagogue event. As an aside, the story reminds us that Peter was married; hence, his question to Jesus, asking, 'we left everything to follow you, what shall we gain from following you?' (Mk 10:28; Mt 19:27; Lk 18:28). That the news of her sickness was told outside the domestic space signifies that her condition was concerning. Among many households within southern Africa, sick relatives are nursed at home. Upon hearing about her condition, neighbours would come to see her. There is a proverb that says *ndenda rakatya hama* [sickness disappears upon seeing relatives]. John Pilch remarks that personalistic healthcare systems are dyadic, meaning that upon being sick and as a show of solidarity, relatives visit (Pilch 2000:65). As such, even relatives who reside far off would travel long distances to see sick family members in the villages. Illustratively, most Africans see sickness as a point of transition that could end in either death or recovery (Mbiti 1990:145). An African perspective to the story regards Jesus' visit to Peter's mother-in-law as indicative of a dyadic culture.

Upon arriving at the household, Jesus went to where the patient lay in pain and proceeded to touch and lift her up, thereby restoring her. Anna Beavis comments that, within a personalistic worldview, healers are believed to possess powers that are contagious upon coming in touch with a sick person. In this story, the belief that powerful healers ooze with healing power is expressed through Jesus, who touched and lifted the woman to recovery (Beavis 2011:53). Mark reports that she took up and served the guests, signifying that her healing restored shalom in two ways:

1. By being healed, she was restored to perform her gender role. From Mark's story, we can infer the psychological reaction of the woman and of the family members. Given that, for a while, she could not perform her gender roles, we can assume that she was exuberant in regaining her health and ability to serve.
2. Her restoration retained the homestead space as a place for hospitality. We can imagine that relatives who came from the fields and other areas, upon seeing her fit and fully restored, were happy. Happy peasant and subsistent households express their joy through singing and dancing. We could also imagine that when Jesus informed the family concerning his departure, they requested him to stay and join them for dinner.

Using Comoroff's earlier argument, sickness is explained from symbolic structures of normal vis-à-vis abnormal. What is abnormal is a woman lying sick which affected the natural function of the household. In this case, healing entails amending of cosmology by reconstructing the worldview. Therefore, the gesture of lifting her up signifies the amendment and return to order. Given this, Mark intended his listeners to know that by serving Jesus and the guests, the woman was fully restored, which adds to the arête concerning Jesus as the best folk healer (Dube 2018:1).

## ■ Celebratory aspects

This section theorises Jesus' healing practices from the perspective of shalom, suggesting that, if approached from the perspective of the audience, the stories reveal restoration at various levels – personal, household, community and spiritual. By healing, Jesus restores the previously sick person to his family, making the latter resume his or her role as father, mother, sister and/or neighbour. Given the dyadic and orality context from which the stories were told, the stories have a celebratory tone that is conveyed through dancing, laughter and singing. Plausibly, the restoration of a mad man to being a father or uncle and the



restoration of a sick woman unleashed individual and community emotions. In reading them, one can imagine friends and relatives bursting into singing and dancing upon receiving the news of restoration. Because of shalom, what seemed a lost, unrecoverable and desperate situation was reversed.

# Therapeutic paradigms in the public ministry of Jesus

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## ■ Abstract

In this 'Edifying objective' chapter, emphases are identified in the healing ministry of Jesus, with the appreciation that the list is not exhaustive: (1) occupation, (2) culture, (3) family (4) genealogy, (5) theocentric, (6) cosmo-centric, (7) eschatological, (8) bio-centric, (9) ideological, (10) liturgical, (11) ritualistic, (12) ontological, (13) charismatic, (14) mystical, (15) class-based, (16) anthropocentric, (17) juridical, (18) homiletic, (19) epistemic, (20) counselling, (21) normative, (22) ecclesiological, (23) pneumatological, (24) dialectical paradigms, (25) festive paradigms and (26) historic paradigms.

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**Keywords:** Therapeutic paradigms; Theocentric; Cosmo-centric; Eschatological; Ritualistic.

## ■ Introduction: Healing as a focus of the public ministry of Jesus

Jesus is not only a healer of the whole range of disorders as attested in the miracles narrated in the Canonical Gospels. Illness and health, viewed from the broad perspective regarding the public ministry of Jesus, are conditions that affect individuals and communities, families and nations, the rulers and the ruled, and the leaders and their followers. Thus, a study of Jesus as the healer invites us to explore the whole range of conditions in public and private life: happiness or grief, sadness or joy, hope or despair, and illness or health. Jesus is portrayed in the Canonical Gospels as the one to whom people from various backgrounds, geography and all kinds of sickness flock to for healing.

Christianity spread within the Greco-Roman context where Jesus was known as a preacher and miracles worker within the Jewish context and the larger Roman Empire. It might appear at first as if 'Messiah' and 'Christ' are synonymous, but a study of the cultural background of these titles shows that each of them has its own distinct shades of meaning (Bultmann 1956:70). Here I give a broad description concerning healing meant during Jesus' time by looking into several passages. In each section and description of healing, an attempt is made to reflect on the relevance to contemporary African Christianity. It will become clear that some of the emphases may not be currently appropriate in African Christianity and that there are others which are less popularised but more culturally relevant in various expressions of African Christianity – both rural and urban.

The role of Jesus as a healer who restored people from various ailments is very important in the Gospels. There has been some scepticism among empiricists concerning the authenticity of these gospel accounts. Recently, through the rise and emphasis on alternative non-western healthcare system, knowledge

regarding the various forms of healing has surfaced through an emic understanding of healing from other contexts. For example, most non-western healthcare systems use psychosomatic healing-related procedures such as casting out demons (Mugambi 1989b:10). It is widely appreciated that the religious disposition influences a patient's response to treatment; it may facilitate or hinder healing. To those who sort healing from other healers, Jesus requested the expression of faith. In the African cultural setting where psychotherapy and socio-therapy are familiar and appreciated, the role of Jesus as a healer is prominent. For many African Christians, Jesus replaced the traditional healer, because the Christian ministry also included medical centres that promote Western science-based treatment (Mugambi 1989b:12). Jesus' method of healing and the context within which he operated is similar to that of the African healthcare system whereby healing is a restoration of the physical and the spiritual aspects of the person (Mugambi 1989b:12).

When scientific medicine fails, patients turn to religion, both in the form of African Traditional Religious practices and various Christian forms. In addition to scientific treatment, most Africans entrust their health to God, presupposing that the expertise of doctors is ultimately accountable to divine power and authority – irrespective of whether or not the experts acknowledge divine intervention in the healing process. Healing is a subject worthy of more exploration in African Christian theology. Both 'traditional African' and 'scientific Western' approaches to illness and health are open to further theological scrutiny. The following sketches are a summary of the various emphases in the healing ministry of Jesus. It is interesting that most public engagements of Jesus began or ended with healing sessions – associating Jesus more with healing than with preaching.

## ■ Occupational therapy

In the four Canonical Gospels, Jesus encounters both his followers and critics in their occupations, and they recognise him as someone who is skilled in particular crafts. For example, Jesus

called his first four disciples from their fishing trade and promised to make them 'fishers of men' (Mt 4:18-22). This metaphor could be meaningful among people familiar with the fishing industry. Later on in his public ministry, Jesus demonstrates his competence in fishing when he directs his disciples to cast their nets at the appropriate place for a great catch of fish (Jn 21:1-13). The Gospel, according to St John, links the fishing occupation with the mission of evangelisation and shows that the two occupations need not be in conflict. The disciples seem to have returned to their fishing occupation after the crucifixion but were compelled by their encounter with Jesus to return to evangelisation.

Jesus also encounters other people such as the carpenter from Nazareth (Mt 13:55; Mk 6:3). Cynics from Nazareth did not see anything unique in the personality of Jesus. However, his followers recognised Jesus as someone who took his occupation very seriously, thereby winning respectability in his home area. The fact that Jesus is respected as the carpenter from Nazareth, and at the same time as someone proclaiming the kingdom of God, signifies that occupations need not be viewed as obstacles, hindrances or handicaps for Christian ministry. A third occupational focus can be discerned in the teaching ministry of Jesus. His followers recognised and respected him as one who 'taught with authority, not as the scribes' (Mk 1:22; Mt 7:29). There is no doubt in the four Gospels that Jesus is a highly respected teacher and because of that had followers and critics (Mt 9:11, 10:24, 17:24, 19:16, 23:18, 26:18; Mk 5:35; Jn 3:2, 11:28, 20:16).

These occupational foci show that our trades, crafts and professions can serve as a means of evangelisation. Jesus was respected as a leader in the occupations in which he was competent. He also appreciated the occupations of those who became his followers. In discussions with various individuals, he referred to their occupations as the means for the elaboration of his message (cf. Mt 22:34-41; Lk 11:45-52). In contemporary African Christianity, it appears as if the Christian faith is more appropriate for rural dwellers than for urbanites. The majority of population of tropical Africa is still based in the rural areas.

Yet, the occupational paradigms are relevant for both rural and urban occupations. It will be worthwhile to develop appropriate occupational paradigms for African Christianity. In 1973, a musical play was produced in the United States with the title *Jesus Christ Superstar*. In a culture dominated by show business, this appeared to be a catchy theme for a play, and it was later made into a film. Some people considered the film a sacrilege; others thought it was an artistic achievement. Theologically, the crucial question is whether the film correctly portrayed the occupational paradigm of Jesus as a movie star.<sup>2</sup>

## ■ Cultural therapy

As social beings, all persons are conditioned by the cultures in which they are brought up. Jesus was born a Jew and raised as such. On the eighth day, he was circumcised according to the Jewish custom, and at the age of 12, he was presented in the temple as demanded by the Jewish tradition (Lk 2:41-51). The Christological debates in the early Church revolved around the question of whether Jesus was bound by Jewish culture or whether he was above it. Niebuhr addressed himself to this question in his book, *Christ and Culture* (Niebuhr 2001:29). It is a correct observation that Jesus teaches convincingly and universally because of the inductive way in which he relates his message to the Palestinian and Greco-Roman setting. Instead of generalisations, Jesus gives examples. When he teaches about proper neighbourliness, he gives a contextual example portraying the ethnic prejudice of Jews against Samaritans and shows that despite their hypocritical piety, the Jewish leaders fail the test of good neighbourliness, whereas the humane Samaritan passes. Jesus expects us to replicate the same in our own contexts. The cultural paradigms in the New Testament are very useful in African Christianity, because they can help us to distinguish between conversion and acculturation. While conversion implies a radical change of worldview, acculturation is the contextualisation

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2. On this point see, for example, Murray (n.d.).

of practice without losing its original essence (Mbiti 1969:8, 1986:46).

Inculturation, if it does not arise from radical conversion, will not yield a lasting impact on African Christianity (Biko 1986:48). Conversion, if effective, will always lead to a shift in cultural orientation. However, that shift will not necessarily endorse the invading or any other culture. At best, it will yield new cultural insights leading to a fresh cultural renaissance (Assman 1976:43). Such a radical conversion is portrayed in St Peter, St Stephen, St Paul and others in the New Testament. The cultural frames of reference in the New Testament should help African Christians to cope effectively with the challenge of the Gospel to the African cultural and religious heritage. Such frames of reference can also help African Christians to appreciate the contribution of the African cultural heritage towards the evolvement of a distinct African Christianity (eds. Appiah-Kubi & Torres 1979:182). The Epistles are addressed to the communities of converts with specific needs and concerns – in Ephesus, Corinth, Colossae, Galatia, Philippi, Rome and Thessalonica. Thus, cultural and personal specificities require relevant and meaningful contextual interpretation.

## ■ Family therapy

Christianity as introduced in tropical Africa has tended to be overtly individualistic. Conversion to the Christian faith has often meant that the convert should break vital ties with his or her extended family (Cone 1975:57). Denominationalism has in many cases broken the unity of the family, when spouses and siblings belong to two or more denominations (or religions). It is not unusual in Kenya today, for instance, to find that the parents are Anglicans, some daughters are married to Catholics, some sons are Jehovah's Witnesses, others are Pentecostals and so on. Owing to denominational prejudices that came with the missionary package, it becomes difficult to affirm the unity of the Christian faith in such a family. It is fair to observe that denominational

antagonism and competition has often done greater damage than ethnocentrism – because denominationalism has undermined the extended family, whereas ethnic identity has promoted it. The Christian over-emphasis on individualistic piety, while useful for introspection, can, and often does, work against the Pauline trilogy of Faith, Hope and Love. The extended family in principle ought to be appreciated as a positive stabilising factor in society. In practice, however, an individualistic religious ethic will consider the extended family as a hindrance to ‘progress’ and ‘civilisation’. The Western missionary enterprise is partly responsible for the breakdown of the family unit in places where Christianity is established – owing to emphasis on individual salvation, focus on the soul and focus on life in heaven after death (Bahemuka 1983:107). The conversion of Cornelius and his household provides a key towards family emphasis in the building of community. Another reference point is the public ministry of Jesus. Apparently, both his immediate relatives and close associates accompanied Jesus in his ministry. The narratives on Mark 6:1-6 and John 2:1-17 suggest that the immediate relatives of Jesus often accompanied him in his public ministry. The incident at the Cana of Galilee is instructive on this point.<sup>3</sup>

In his public ministry, Jesus affirms his ties with his immediate and extended family, and at the same time, he distinguishes himself from the rest of his kith and kin through his unique ministry to the Jewish community in general and the world at large. This double identity of Jesus as a family member should be holistically maintained. Jesus is, at the same time, a member of his immediate family, the Jewish community and the universal community. As a member of his immediate family, he honours and obeys his father and mother. As a member of the Jewish community, he obeys and fulfils the law rather than abolishing it (Mt 5:17-20). As a member of the universal community, he transcends his immediate family and the Jewish community to serve Samaritans (Jn 4:39), Syro-Phoenicians (Mk 7:26; Jn 19:20, 7:35) and Romans (Mt 8:5; Mk 15:39; Lk 7:2).

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3. Jesus with his mother (and family) during the wedding at Cana in Galilee, John 2:1-12.



When it comes to the Jewish context, the idea of family as we know it today needs revision. Mostly, the Bible comes from a dyadic context whereby family assumes a broad definition of household and not merely one's immediate blood relatives. Family as a household houses the father and mother and also various extended family members who form small clusters around the household. What binds them together is common ancestry and kinship ties. In the Apostolic Church, the family was appreciated as a significant unit of conversion (Ac 16:15, 33). It is worthwhile also to remember that the first four disciples of Jesus were two pairs of brothers, and these four stabilised the disciples as a community of believers. There is of course the risk of overemphasising the immediate and extended family at the expense of the universal community in the actual management of the Church as a social institution. This risk could be coped with if conversion is distinguished from acculturation. For example, with the East African Revival Movement, the Christian fellowship 'family' concepts such as 'brother' and 'sister' are used; but it is understood that these concepts refer to the spiritual relationship rather than to natural kinship (Mugambi 2008:516).

## ■ Genealogical therapy

The Gospels according to Matthew and Luke present genealogical lists that link Jesus to his ancestors. Matthew's preface introduces Jesus as the Son of David, the Son of Abraham. Luke indicates that Joseph belonged to the house of David, thus suggesting that Jesus belonged to royal genealogy. Some African Christian theologians, notably Charles Nyamiti, have highlighted the ancestry of Jesus and extended it as a paradigm for African Christianity. According to this view, Jesus can rightly be regarded as our ancestor in the Christian faith. The semantic impact of this suggestion is to transform the normal meaning of the term 'ancestor' in the African heritage and accord to it a metaphysical rather than a biological significance. From a theological perspective, this would be permissible, provided that the semantic transformation generated clarity rather than confusion (Nyamiti 1986:29). In the Gospels, there

are several genealogical titles for Jesus. He is the Son of Abraham, Son of David, Son of Mary, Son of Joseph, Son of God and Son of Man. These titles make it possible for Jesus to comment directly on the strengths and weaknesses of Jewish ethnocentrism (cf. Mt 8:5-13). The new community should not focus its identity on the genealogy of kinship but rather should focus its identity on the genealogy of faith. What does this mean for contemporary African Christianity? In Catholic and Orthodox Christianity, there are traditions of canonising saints in the appreciation of their contribution to the nurturing of the Christian faith (Shorter 1973:120; Waliggo 1986:12). Within that tradition, some Ugandan Christians of the late 19th century have been canonised. The roll of honour for African Christians is still very small. Moreover, it appears that such appreciation requires the support of the parent churches abroad. When will African churches mature theologically and institutionally so as to establish their own ecclesiastical traditions? As Christian denominations in Africa celebrate their centenaries of the introduction of Christianity, this question of genealogical paradigms in African Christology should be seriously considered.

## ■ Theocentric therapy

In another significant strand of witness in the Gospels, Jesus is presented as the Son of God or as the inaugurator of the kingdom of God. The linkage of Jesus with God is very strong, particularly in the Gospels according to Mark and John. Mark's objective is to present Jesus as Messiah, the Son of God (Mk 1:1). Throughout this Gospel, evidence is adduced from witnesses who declare, after their profound encounters with Jesus, that he is the Son of God. Whereas the other two Synoptic Gospels (Matthew and Luke) devote considerable attention to the nativity, baptism and temptations of Jesus, Mark and John pass directly to the public ministry of Jesus, and through a wide range of witnesses, the reader is persuaded to share in this moving encounter with the Son of God. Thus in the Gospels of Mark and John, there is no attempt to contrive the linkage between Jesus and God; the public ministry of Jesus, in his encounter with those whom he

calls, heals, teaches and counsels, serves the purpose of declaring this link.

In the Gospel according to St John, the primary objective is to establish the theological link between Hebrew theology and the Greek philosophy of religion. According to one influential philosophical tradition as maintained by some Greek philosophers (the Epicureans), the world was held by a rational principle called *logos* (Richardson 1941:5). This principle was impersonal and non-moral. Even the conduct of Hellenic deities was not exempt from *logos*. Thus, the Greek gods could become angry, jealous, happy, sorrowful and malicious. In practice, the conduct of Greek gods differed from that of human beings only in degree. Hebrew theology, in contrast, maintained that YHWH was the God above all gods, all beings and all things, who brought the universe into being and continued to sustain it. The author of this Gospel endeavoured to reconcile these two intellectual traditions by showing that there was no essential contradiction between the Greek philosophy of religion and Hebrew theology. Again, as in the Gospel according to Mark, the writer of John's Gospel carefully adduced witnesses and arranged their testimonies in such a way as to effectively achieve his objective of showing that the Hebrew YHWH was identical with the Greek *logos* and had become incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth (Cullman 1959:195).

St Paul's missionary work among the Jewish diaspora in various Greco-Roman cities and his debates with Roman and Greek intellectuals helped to shape the theocentric Christology that was later to be crystallised in the Nicene Creed (Tillich 1968:86). In adducing evidence, Mark's Gospel is similar to John's. However, in the theological style, Mark is closer to the other two Synoptic Gospels (Matthew and Luke), while John's Gospel is closer to Pauline theology. To explain these affinities, it has been suggested that Mark's Gospel was written quite early and was used as a common source by the authors of Matthew and Luke, while the Gospel of John was written much later, after Pauline theology had already taken shape (Kelber 1978:141). In this section, it is sufficient to realise that the linkage of Jesus with

God is quite strong in the Gospels and that St Paul made it a central issue of concern in his Christology. In the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus clearly distinguishes himself from God and articulates his role as that of pointing the way to God or leading his followers to God (Schillebeeckx 1979:405). At his trial, Jesus was proved innocent for blasphemy, which would have been punishable by death according to the Jewish law. Yet, it was on the charge of blasphemy – of claiming to be God – that Jesus was crucified. What are the theological implications of these observations for African Christology?

The traditional African view of God ought to be related to African Christology. Thus, the task of interpretation, as was undertaken in the Gospel of John, in the Pauline epistles and in the epistle to the Hebrews, ought to be urgently embarked upon by the African Christian theologians. Hellenistic Christology may have sufficed for the Greco-Roman Church, but it needs to be reviewed in the African context with particular reference to the teaching and public ministry of Jesus. Considering the observations made in this section, it is consistent to note that the controversy at the Council of Nicaea between Hellenistic and North-African theologians was more than doctrinal. At the heart of the controversy were philosophical, ontological and cultural presuppositions that were incompatible and could not be reconciled by the Council of Nicaea, with the consequence that the monophysite interpretation was declared heretical. Contemporary African Christology needs to be as ecumenical as possible in order to promote as great a theological consensus as can be attained (Koyama 1976:8).

## ■ Cosmo-centric therapy

Saint Paul's Christology links the teaching of Jesus (the Gospel) with the cosmological self-disclosure of God. Thus, Paul maintains that neither Jew nor Gentile had any excuse for failing to respond positively to God's call. Repentance is a necessity for all human beings, and only through such repentance can the whole of creation be redeemed (Rm 1:20, 8:22; 2 Cor 5:17ff.). It is worthwhile

to quote some of these references at length for clarification. Paul writes in Romans 1:

For, the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men, who by their wickedness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse; for although they knew God they did not honour him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man or birds or animals or reptiles. Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonouring of their bodies amongst themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. (vv. 18–25)

The cosmo-centric emphasis is clear in this passage. Saint Paul understood his mission to be that of clarifying a revelation that God had already manifested in creation, both to Jews and Gentiles (Robinson 1963:145). In his teaching, Jesus referred his followers to nature and reminded them that God sustains not only history but also the cosmos as a whole (Mt 6):

[7]herefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor about your body, what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add one cubit to his life span? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O men of little faith? (vv. 25–30)

Both Jesus and Paul are emphatic that cosmological facts reveal God's concern, care and sustenance for creation. This self-disclosure ought to strengthen faith. In contemporary African Christianity, this insight is very relevant, especially considering

that this continent's population is predominantly rural. At the international level, the highly industrialised nations have at last accepted that industrialisation and urbanisation have been destructive for the environment, almost irreversibly. For economic rather than theological reasons, these nations now find it necessary to adopt policies that will reduce, if not halt, the rate of environmental degradation. What options do Africans have on this concern in caring for the environment? Whereas in North America and Europe the concern is to maintain affluence without causing environmental pollution, in the African context environmental degradation occurs while people are struggling to survive in very hostile environments - arid and semi-arid lands, over-crowded settlements - and under inappropriate land-use for the sake of monetary income. Christian theology will need to respond effectively and meaningfully to this cosmological dimension of Christology (Parrinder 1970:57).

## ■ Eschatological therapy

Towards the end of his public ministry, Jesus asked his disciples, '[w]ho do people say that I am?'. The disciples replied that most people associated Jesus with Elijah, Jeremiah, John the Baptist or one of the prophets. What does Jesus have in common with those persons who were associated with him in this answer? All these persons were ultimate optimists. They believed and proclaimed that in spite of social decadence and moral depravation, God would in the end raise a new virtuous generation through a remnant from the dying society. They were eschatological optimists. Jesus was associated with these eschatological optimists because his teaching was characteristically different from the intimidating and exploitative instructions of his contemporary rabbis and scribes. Under a powerful imperial regime, the multitudes that followed Jesus were encouraged to hear the proclamation that God (rather than the Roman emperor) was still in control and that before God all people were brothers and sisters.

In proclaiming hope, Jesus made a very strong impact in rural Palestine. Many peasants with their various social, political and economic issues flocked to him. While his death may have given a temporary confusion, his resurrection strengthened his followers in believing the alternative kingdom of God (Galot 1982:325). The Universal Church is the visible outcome of that mandate. It lives to facilitate this project. In contemporary Africa, this eschatological project remains a continuing challenge, especially because of the tendency to draw a sharp distinction between history and eschatology. Theologically, it is important to emphasise that the *Eschaton* is the culmination of history. Thus, there can be no eschatology without history. In his public ministry, Jesus made an impact on his followers not only because of what he *taught* them but also because of what he *did* for them to improve their physical and social conditions. Healing, teaching, counselling, feeding, encouraging – all were the integral components of the inauguration.

The African Church needs to emphasise this holistic approach to eschatology, in consistent obedience to Jesus' call to bring life in abundance. A pertinent question is whether patronising missionary perspectives can ever present the Gospel from the perspective of the oppressed, the poor, the powerless and the dispossessed (Gutierrez 1973:4). Unlike the missionary initiatives of the early centuries of Christianity, the European missionary enterprise, especially since the 19th century, has been so tied up with power, privilege and pomposity that it can hardly ever be worth emulating on the part of its converts. Thus, the converts must learn by default, not by emulating those that have introduced the Gospel. Fortunately, the Gospel has its direct appeal and requires no other mediator apart from the Holy Spirit and Inspiration from within. The Christian faith has grown exponentially in Africa not because of missionary initiatives, but in spite of most of them (Schreiter 1991:4).

## ■ Bio-centric therapy

It is quite clear that *Life* is one of the central concerns in the public ministry of Jesus. Earthly life is contrasted with eternal life. In Pauline theology, the contrast is between Flesh and Spirit, with degradation of the former and exultation of the latter. Jesus does not discredit the temporal aspect of existence. Rather, he emphasises that temporal existence is necessarily conditioned and limited within substance, duration and space. Life under such limitations cannot be full because it ends with death. External life, on the other hand, is not conditioned by the exigencies and contingencies of history. Its logic may appear inconsistent with historical demands, but ultimately it triumphs over death. The bio-centric emphasis in the teaching of Jesus can be illustrated by his encounters with several persons as reported in the Gospels. In the temptations (Mt 4:1-10), Jesus is urged to turn stones into bread for hungry people to eat. He responds that '[m]an does not live by bread alone, but by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord' (Dt 8:1-10). Thus, Jesus emphasises that the success of temporal existence is totally dependent on God's providence (Dussel 1976:22). The sharp contrast between temporal life and eternal life is shown in Matthew 16:

If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life? Or what shall a man give in return for his life? (vv. 24-28)

Jesus teaches that commitment to the demands of the Gospel may lead to temporal death, but it will guarantee eternal life. It is on the basis of this conviction that Jesus submits to his crucifixion to demonstrate the triumph of eternal life over temporal death. The teaching of Jesus also links eternal life with modesty and temporal life with pomp. A rich ruler goes to Jesus to enquire about the requisites for attaining eternal life (Mt 19:16-22; Mk 10:17-22; Lk 18:18-23). The man claims that he has followed all the commandments in the Torah, and yet, he is not at peace with



himself and with God. He is advised to sell everything he owns and concentrate on the demands of the Gospel. The man is saddened by this advice because power and wealth are depicted as being incompatible with eternal life.

What can we derive from these texts? Is it to be concluded that poverty is divine and affluence demonic? If we sanctify poverty on the basis of this text, what then will be the justification for the Church to be involved in social transformation? The bio-centric emphasis of Jesus is intended to remind us that human achievement is always dependent on God's providence (Boros 1967:13). Life at both temporal and eternal levels belongs to God and is therefore sacred. We do not have any right to violate life to satisfy our own temporal interests. In these days of environmental disintegration, this is a very pertinent caution. African Christian theologians need to closely examine the bio-centric focus in the teaching of Jesus to discern its implications for the Church in contemporary Africa and in the world as a whole.

## ■ Ideological therapy

Ideology can be concisely defined as the set of ideas on the basis of which a nation or cultural group distinguishes itself from others and organises its own programme to achieve its defined long-term goals within history. Philosophy can be a tool for the construction of an ideology, but philosophy itself is not ideology. Likewise, theology can be a tool for an ideology, but theology as an academic discipline is not ideology. Conversely, every ideology depends on philosophers and theologians for articulation, clarification and justification. Positively, theology can help to correct a dehumanising ideology (Novak 1966:24; Ramsay 1963:26). Negatively, it can become a tool for dehumanisation. At the beginning of his public ministry, Jesus declares that his mission is to proclaim the Good News, with the following content (Lk 4:16-22; Is 61:1-2):

- Preaching Good News to the poor.
- Proclaiming release of captives.

- Recovering sight for the blind.
- Setting at liberty those who are oppressed.
- Proclaiming the acceptable year of the Lord (Jubilee).

In his work, Jesus actually embarked on these activities and successfully accomplished them. Thus, the demands of the Gospel as outlined in this text are not metaphorical but actual. At the same time, Jesus emphasises that these demands extend beyond the temporal to the eternal levels of existence. Ideologically, the applicability of the teaching of Jesus at these levels has made it open to abuse. Some ideologies have used it to justify oppression, claiming that Jesus sanctifies poverty and acquiescence in temporal matters (Moltman 1974:277). Others have used it to rationalise ideological campaigns against oppressive regimes. We may, without contradiction, observe that the Gospel does not have a static relationship with any ideology. Its relationship with ideologies is always dynamic, providing a basis for commendation when consistency with the demands of discipleship is achieved and for condemnation when the ideology is inconsistent with Christian discipleship. It is erroneous, therefore, to associate the Gospel with any of the existing ideologies at a particular historical epoch and cultural environment (Moran 1966).

The observations just articulated have serious ideological implications for Christian theology in contemporary Africa. During the colonial period, Christianity tended to be used for the theological justification of colonial domination (Cleage 1968:9). There was a tendency to bless and sanctify imperial domination as a positive experience for colonial subjects. How can a liberating God condone oppression? In the post-colonial period, there has also been a tendency for Christianity to be used for the justification of neo-colonialism. The Gospel proclaims that liberation in the most comprehensive sense of the term, and the Church is challenged to make that proclamation a living experience for those to whom it has missionary responsibility. In ideological terms, Jesus is the ideal liberator, after the tradition of Moses (Mackintosh & Macaulay 1902). Whereas Moses was the liberator

of the Hebrews exclusively, Jesus is the liberator of every individual, every nation and every culture. Consistent with Jeremiah's prophecy, Jesus proclaims that God's guidance is sufficient, and no nation, individual or culture should serve as Lord over others because only God is the Lord of all.

## ■ Liturgical therapy

Jesus taught his disciples to pray and reminded them of the necessity to commit all endeavours to God in prayer. Matthew 6:7-15 offers a structure of prayer, which has become standard in Christian liturgy. As a prayer teacher and leader, Jesus emphasises humility as a virtue. He commends the Publican who was self-conscious of his low social esteem and humbled himself before God and condemns the Pharisee who boasted of his superficial religiosity. Liturgical relevance, simplicity and specificity are qualities recommended by Jesus to his disciples. In the incident often called the 'Cleansing of the Temple' (Mt 21:12-13), Jesus demands a separation between liturgy and commerce. The house of God should be the house of prayer, rather than a stock-exchange chamber.<sup>4</sup> What kind of liturgy would be most appropriate, relevant and effective for the Church in Africa? Naturally, Christian denominations that have been introduced to Africa from other nations have transplanted the liturgical forms evolved in the cultures from which the missionaries came. However, the Church takes root in a culture when the liturgy is creatively evolved within that culture (Idowu 1973:108). The liturgical expression of the Christian faith in various cultures will promote affirmation of the universal appeal of Christianity.

The use of mainly western rituals generates the impression that the Holy Spirit is culturally restricted. One of the factors contributing to schism has been rigidity in liturgical expression. Jesus sets his followers free to creatively and constructively evolve meaningful liturgy while remaining faithful to the prophetic

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4. See Matthew 21:12-13; Mark 11:15-17; Luke 19:45-46; John 2:14-16.

tradition. African Christian theology ought to help churches across Africa in the quest for contextual liturgical renewal (Dickson & Ellingworth 1969:24). At the same time, the leadership of denominations originating in Europe and North America would wish for a common liturgy globally, at the expense of diverse local expressions of the Christian faith. The tension is irreconcilable, unless and until the 'parent' denominations are also ready to incorporate some elements of liturgy from the churches they have established among foreign cultures abroad - including vestments and rituals. The pressures towards globalisation and contextualisation are driven more by politics and economics than by doctrines and theologies.

## ■ Ritualistic therapy

Jesus was brought up according to strict Jewish ritual. According to custom, he was circumcised on the eighth day. At the age of 12, he was presented at the temple, as was required of a first-born son. He respected the Sabbath laws and participated in the Passover rituals. When the Pharisees accused him of violating Jewish ritual, he confidently replied that he had not come to abolish but to fulfil (Mt 12:1-8). He was critical of ritual legalism that distorted the 'spirit of the law' merely for the sake of observing the 'letter of the law'. He taught, 'Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath' (Mk 2:27). Traditional African life is highly ritualistic. In its spread across Europe, Christianity incorporates European cultural practices that were not part of its Palestinian expression.

Faithfulness to Jesus and faithfulness to one's culture are not incompatible obligations. Commitment to the Gospel demands that one reviews and recasts one's culture and ritual according to the essential demands of that commitment. But missionaries cannot accomplish this task of reviewing and recasting. The converts themselves must undertake that responsibility (ed. Lindsay 1980:298). In Europe, Christianity acquired a truly European character when local Christians undertook to blend

imported traditions with local customs and rituals. A similar process will have to take place in Africa before Christianity can become characteristically African. It is the task of African Christian theologians to facilitate this process. As we have shown in this section, there is strong scriptural and theological justification for this task. Jesus as a fulfiller and reformer of ritual urges every local church to be ritually authentic.<sup>5</sup>

## ■ Ontological therapy

Ontology is the philosophical study of the origin, nature and destiny of being. Jesus is identified with God, the creator, especially in the first chapter of John's Gospel. In John 8:58, he instructed his Jewish critics, '[b]efore Abraham was, I am'. Thus, dealing with the ontological problem, Jesus traced his mission to the creation of the universe and emphasised that his cultural interaction with the Jewish community was an integral part of God's cosmic design. What are the implications of African ontology and cosmology for Christian theology? At present, it appears as if the Christian faith must necessarily conflict with African ontology. This impression, however, has arisen because African Christian theology has not yet taken African ontology and cosmology seriously. A recasting of Christian theology within the philosophical framework of African ontology and cosmology would yield new and interesting ideas that can enrich the Christian faith universally.

Consider for example the doctrines of 'heaven' and 'hell' in spatial categories at a time when astronomy and space technology have revolutionised our understanding of the cosmos. Traditional African cosmology is monistic, and these doctrines have a different meaning in a world where 'heaven' and 'hell' are here and now. Paul Tillich analogically presents God as the 'Ground of

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5. The Fifth Centenary of the European Reformation seems to herald the beginning of an African Reformation within the 'established churches', comparable to the Movement that Martin Luther sparked at Wittenberg on 31 October 1517.

Being'. This phrase arose from his endeavour to reconstruct Christian theism in the context of a changed understanding of the cosmos in 20th-century Europe (Tillich 1955:235–236). He then adjusted Christology accordingly. What will Christian theism mean in the context of African cosmology? How will Christology be adjusted? It may be argued that such recasting is unnecessary in view of the growing influence of the 'scientific' conception of the cosmos. However, it is important to recognise that this 'scientific' conception is also changing with new scientific discoveries and that the majority of Africa's population will continue to uphold their traditional cosmology for many decades (perhaps centuries) to come. The Christian faith must therefore be rendered intelligible to them in the context of their ontology and cosmology (Mbiti 1971).

## ■ Charismatic therapy

Jesus was endowed with incomparable spiritual gifts. His charismatic power was evident in his healing of various sicknesses and command of demons. People from various walks of life follow him as their only hope to the issues they faced. Through his power, he commanded his disciples to go and preach, teach, comfort, preach, heal and cast out demons. What does this emphasis on spiritual gifts imply for Christianity in Africa? There has been a tendency in some strands of African Christianity to restrict charisma only to preaching and conversion. However, St Paul reminds us that all spiritual gifts derive from God and must be used for God's purpose (1 Cor 12:1–30). All professions and careers are essential, for without them the society would not properly function. For this reason, the Gospel demands those who have accepted to become followers of Jesus, to take seriously whatever responsibility may be vested in them (Buhman 1982).

## ■ Mystical therapy

The mystical aspect of the ministry of Jesus is not very widely popularised in Western Christologies, although mysticism is an

integral part of Catholic and Orthodox ecclesiology. According to the synoptic tradition, Jesus' public ministry begins with his baptism by John in the River Jordan, followed by the temptations for 40 days in the wilderness (Mt 3-4). John, the Baptist, was a recluse and a mystic who appeared in public when he had a message to proclaim. The scene of baptism at the River Jordan appears to have been a ceremonial site set aside by John for that purpose, serving those who had committed themselves to his movement. Jesus, likewise, was a recluse and mystic who transcended John's proclamations. Forty days is a long time for someone to be away alone in the wilderness. Yet, the Synoptic Gospels present the temptations that Jesus overcame during that period of voluntary seclusion as a normal and integral part of his public ministry. Without the temptations, the Christian tradition would have inadequate clues to Jesus' response to his opponents. On many occasions, Jesus retreated into seclusion to meditate and pray.

Jesus often left his disciples and went to a quiet place for meditation and prayer (Mt 14:22-27, 26:36-46; Mk 1:35-39, 6:45-52, 14:32-42; Lk 9:28-36, 22:39-346). How can we reconcile Jesus' excellent oratory with his mysticism? The synoptic tradition answers this question for us by indicating that Jesus drew his power from God through meditation and prayer. It is as if he went into seclusion to recharge himself from time to time. The relevance of this mystical paradigm in contemporary African Christianity is worth exploring. In the early Church, monasticism and mysticism evolved as a criticism of worldly Christianity, which had been diluted by nominal adherence to the Church - especially following the toleration of Christianity in the Roman Empire after Constantine's Edict of Milan in 313 AD. In tropical Africa, mysticism is not a traditional institution, although religious leadership would include mystical tendencies among some of the traditional elders. It is an open question whether contemporary African Christianity needs the promotion of institutionalised mysticism.

The communal emphasis in African religiosity would seem to discourage it. However, meditation and prayer are indispensable

in the personal and corporate existence of the Church, both in Africa and elsewhere. It is worthwhile to add that prayer in African Christianity is conducted in a broad variety of modes – shouting and silence, dancing and kneeling, bowing and singing, in isolation and in multitudes, indoors and outdoors, with liturgy and spontaneously – the contrasts are endless! Likewise, the content of African prayer is broad in both word and scope (Mbiti 1986; Ndeti 1972).

## ■ Class-based therapy

Aristocratic attributes to Jesus recur throughout all the Gospels. The capital offence on which Jesus was crucified was that he had claimed to be ‘King of the Jews’. From the perspective of the Roman administration, represented by Pontius Pilate, such a claim was subversive against the Roman emperor (Caesar). At the same time, the claim was blasphemous against the Jewish faith, because the religious elite among the Jews considered Jesus to be a threat to their hitherto unchallenged power and authority. Yet, the followers of Jesus from all walks of life recognised and appreciated his power and authority, which they described in aristocratic terms. For example, the nativity accounts in Matthew and Luke portray Jesus as a descendant of the royal dynasty among the Hebrews, through Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and David. Blind Bartimeus addressed Jesus as the Son of David, thus acknowledging the royal status that Jesus enjoyed in the perspective of many followers.

The four closest disciples considered Jesus as a temporal king who would topple the regime in Jerusalem and then establish a new order characterised by justice, peace and love. When Jesus rejected this popular model of kingship, his disciples found it difficult to understand and appreciate the paradox of Jesus’ teaching concerning true greatness. According to Jesus, whoever wishes to be a master must be ready to be the servant of all. Whoever wishes to be the greatest must be prepared to become the least of all. Instead of entering Jerusalem riding a horse-drawn



chariot, he entered the city on a small donkey, and yet, the multitudes greeted him with proclamations as to a temporal king.

Monarchy is a rare political structure in traditional Africa. The majority of African peoples lived within acephalous socio-political structures (decentralised). Obedience to the 'king' or 'queen' was introduced to most African peoples by colonial authorities following the partition of Africa by the Berlin Treaty in the late 19th century. The titles of Jesus as *King* and *Lord* are alien to traditional African theologising. To express this insight differently, we may suggest that the affirmation of Jesus as King in African Christianity makes sense only if at the same time Jesus is identified with God. Thus, the theocentric paradigm would have to be integrated with the aristocratic paradigm to avoid contradiction and inconsistency (Ray 1976). Even without systematic theological articulation, such integration has already been effected among many African Christians.<sup>6</sup>

## ■ Anthropocentric therapy

In the synoptic tradition, Jesus is presented both as 'Son of God' and 'Son of Man'. Anthropocentric emphasis is especially prominent in the Gospel of Mark, despite the fact that it is the only gospel whose express objective is to present Jesus as the Son of God. The people with whom Jesus interacts recognise him as someone truly human but endowed with powers that derive only from God. According to Mark's Gospel, it is the Centurion who makes the final proclamation that Jesus is the 'Son of God', when he observes how Jesus dies. Thus, the crucifixion is anthropocentric and theocentric at the same time.

As the 'Son of Man', Jesus fulfils the expectations of the multitudes that follow him - healing, comforting, counselling, teaching, feeding and so on. He is recognised as an exemplary man. Jesus is also the 'Son of Woman' through whom the dignity

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6. The broad spectrum of titles attributed to Jesus may sometimes cause more confusion and clarity. Human monarchies are not reputed for humility.

of woman is manifested in Mary, his mother. The veneration of Mary in Catholic and Orthodox ecclesiology emphasises an important anthropocentric aspect – the central role of woman in biological and cultural succession. The Christian doctrine of incarnation derives its power from the anthropology of the Gospels. The broad spectrum of titles attributed to Jesus may sometimes cause more confusion than clarity. Human monarchies are not reputed for humility. Thus to assign the title of ‘King’ to Jesus, in view of his public ministry, would seem to be a play on words, rather than direct description of Jesus as described in the Canonical Gospels. The reign of God can best be contrasted, rather than compared, with human regimes.

In the temptations, Jesus refuses to act supernaturally so as to show that the claims of his mission are actually possible through faith. When Jesus sends his disciples on preaching and healing missions, he expects them to appreciate that despite their human limitations, they can serve as agents for God’s humanising work. These missions in the Gospels are the basis on which the Church has grown from a band of 12 disciples to a universal movement. Without an anthropocentric emphasis, the growth of the Church would be impossible. Yet without a theocentric focus, divine guidance would not be forthcoming.

Overlooking the anthropocentric emphasis in favour of the theocentric focus will yield an otherworldly Christianity which prospective converts are likely to reject because of irrelevance or meaninglessness. The two paradigms have to be maintained in balance. Feuerbach’s (1957:56) claim that Christian theology can be reduced to Christian anthropology is only partly true. Such reduction would at the same time reduce God to an idol, unless Christian anthropology would be guided by the limitless power of God.

African Christian theological reflection has to review the Christological debates in the early Church to determine how the anthropocentric emphasis might be blended with the theocentric focus. Unfortunately, the Christian missionary enterprise in Africa

has tended to become polarised between those missionaries leaning towards theocentric emphases and those in favour of anthropocentrism. Considering the holistic cosmology of the African heritage – in which God, humanity and nature are integrated in one reality – such polarisation delays and adversely affects the establishment of deep-rooted Christianity in Africa (Oduyoye 1986). This challenge is complicated by the missionary patronage that hampers and hinders originality, creativity and innovativeness in denominations with European and North American origins.<sup>7</sup>

## ■ Juridical therapy

The Gospels also show that Jesus was recognised and appreciated as someone very conversant with Jewish and Roman law. A lawyer went to him to ask for guidance concerning the Law of Moses and its relationship to the teaching of Jesus on eternal life. In narrating the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus showed that most legal problems arise in interpretation and contextual application rather than in formulation.

Jesus was challenged to give a categorical answer to the question whether it was lawful to pay taxes to Caesar (Mt 22:17; Mk 12:13-17; Lk 20:22). His reply is a clear demonstration of highly competent legal expertise. The woman caught in adultery went to seek legal refuge in Jesus, whom she respected as a fair judge. Jesus demonstrated that none of her accusers was innocent, even though she herself might have been at fault. She did not deserve to die under the cruel stoning of men who themselves might have been guilty of the same offence (Jn 8:1-11). The most striking illustration of Jesus' competence in law is discerned in his defence before Caiaphas, the High Priest, and Pilate, the Procurator of Judaea. Jesus showed that legal procedures were

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7. Patronage and Partnership are incompatible dispositions. It is impossible to be simultaneously a Partner and a Patron in a relationship. Thus, it is a great inconsistency when Western Missionaries in Africa describe themselves as 'Partners' of the individuals, communities and organizations they fund.

being overlooked merely because his opponents were determined to eliminate him at any cost. Both the Sanhedrin and the Roman administration undermined justice. Theologically, such travesty against justice made both Jewish and Gentile Elite collectively responsible for the crucifixion of Jesus. The Christian doctrine of universal forgiveness is derived from this fact – Jesus forgave all of them because they knew not what they were doing. (Mt 22:11–26; Mk 15; Lk 23). African Christology can explore the juridical paradigms in the New Testament for discerning relevance in contemporary African society. Jesus is the judge, advocate, counsel, mediator and custodian, all at the same time. What do these juridical attributes imply for various contexts in contemporary Africa? Jesus is also the king and servant at the same time. Under what contexts and circumstances can these titles and labels be applied, without causing conceptual and attitudinal confusion (eds. Fabella & Oduyoye 1988)?

## ■ Homiletic therapy

In the Synoptic Gospels, especially in the Gospel according to St Matthew, Jesus is portrayed as the excellent preacher from whom everyone should learn. The parables and other sayings are preserved to illustrate the lucidity of his preaching. Among the most famous collections is the ‘Sermon on the Mount’ in Matthew 5. It is recorded that multitudes would follow Jesus for days on end to hear him preach, and they would neither get bored nor abandon him in search of food. It was on one such marathon preaching tour that Jesus conducted the remarkable miracle of feeding the 4000 (Mk 8:1–10; Mt 15:29–39) and feeding the 5000 (Mt 14:13–21).

The role of Jesus as the perfect preacher can be linked to his prophetic vocation (ed. Hearne 1979:17). In both the Old and New Testaments, prophets are portrayed as individuals who had the unique gift of speaking convincingly to multitudes. They would proclaim the Will of God without fear or favour. Likewise, Jesus endeavoured to inaugurate the new order about which John,

the Baptist, had preached. Thus, many people associated Jesus with John, the Baptist, or one of the prophets (Mk 9:2-80). In African Christianity, the homiletic paradigm is popular, especially among evangelists and in most locally founded churches.

## ■ Epistemic therapy

Little is recorded about the adolescence and early adulthood of Jesus. How did he spend this part of his life before entering public ministry in his thirties? Luke's Gospel gives a clue. According to Luke 2:52, 'Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favour with God and man'. With these words, the Gospels summarise the life of Jesus between the ages of 12 and 30 years. In the public ministry of Jesus, it is clear that both followers and critics alike would consider Jesus a wise leader. Even when his opponents asked him tricky questions, they expected that he would have a surprising answer. His wisdom enhanced his juridical role. As a knowledgeable leader, Jesus was able to draw interesting and relevant illustrations from contemporary life and from history in order to support his teaching. The parables are a case in point. Note also his knowledge of Hebrew Scriptures and Hebrew history (Mt 12:1-8). The Christological focus in African Christianity includes the idea that Jesus is the source of all knowledge and wisdom. Fanatical Christian students have been reported to stop preparing for examinations and devote their time to prayer in the hope that Jesus would miraculously perform the examinations on their behalf. Such fanaticism has led to tragic results, but it illustrates that the epistemological paradigm is taken seriously in African Christianity. In pastoral care, African Christians of all ages need to be reminded that God requires that human beings think for themselves and discover the truth and that is why they are endowed with reasoning ability (Dewart 1970).

## ■ Counselling paradigms

Jesus emerges in the Gospels as an excellent counsellor to who people approached for help or advice. Some of them, like

Nicodemus, go to him at night because they do not want to be seen visiting him during the day (Jn 3). Young women, such as Martha and Mary, also seek counselling from Jesus, and he advises them accordingly (Jn 11). The counselling role of the Church can draw very instructive lessons from the counselling paradigm in the ministry of Jesus. There is no incident when Jesus turns away those who come to him for help and advice. Even when they happen to be his critics, Jesus welcomes them and listens to their problems. In most cases, Jesus helps them seek their own solutions to their problems. This approach generates much constructive energy – which helps those who are depressed to overcome their depression and start living normally again. As a counsellor, Jesus gives African Christianity an exemplary model for others to follow: to avoid being judgmental, refrain from condemnation, listen attentively before responding and give advice that is applicable and specific to the case at hand (Kasper 1976, 1977).

## ■ Normative paradigms

For many African Christians, Jesus is the author of norms. They would like to imitate Jesus in every respect. Unfortunately, the life in Palestine 2000 years ago is not identical with that in Africa today. Jesus did not prescribe norms for others to imitate. Rather, he established principles on the basis of which all norms can be judged. These principles are summarised in the famous maxim about love: Love God with your whole being and your neighbour as yourself (Kung 1976). Every norm is to be judged on the basis of these complementary principles. Those Christians who consider Jesus as the direct author of norms are faced with the challenge of identifying specific scriptural texts to defend their morals. This method becomes problematic when it is discovered that many practices in contemporary society have no scriptural reference. What would Jesus say about drugs, abortion, contraception, nuclear technology, environmental pollution, biotechnology, the energy crisis, the debt crisis and so on? If we seek direct instructions for norms on such issues, we shall find none in the scriptures.

Nevertheless, the twofold commandment shows us clearly how we should decide to act in these controversial matters today and in future. African Christian theologians need to discern the most appropriate normative action on specific issues, based on the ethic of love (Morrison 1958).

## ■ Ecclesiological paradigms

Jesus inaugurated the Christian 'Way' of Life; without him, there would be no Church. Pauline theology emphasises that the Church should model itself around the metaphor of the body where all members are equally welcome. In view of Christ's sacrificial love, it should express love and care to the vulnerable and weak (Healy 1956). In its outlook, it should be characterised by hospitality, love and care. At the same time, it is a missionary community, charged with the responsibility to proclaim the Good News of God's reign. A wide variety of ecclesiastical forms evolved during the last 20 centuries of the Christian era. The most prominent are the following:

- Episcopal (authority vested in the bishop).
- Presbyterian (authority vested in presbyters – elders).
- Congregational (authority vested with the congregation).
- Charismatic (authority emanates from a charismatic leader).

Each of these ecclesiastical forms has strengths and weaknesses, although they all have scriptural basis. In African Christianity, all these forms are represented. There is great need for mutual appreciation and recognition between adherents and advocates of these forms as a starting point in the enhancement of Christian unity in Africa (Jn 14-17) (Mugambi 1989b).

## ■ Pneumatological paradigms

Before the crucifixion, Jesus promises to send a comforter, the spirit of truth, to counsel his disciples. After the crucifixion, the disciples are visited several times by Jesus, and 40 days later,

Pentecost launches the Church as an institution. The doctrine of the trinity was formulated to establish a logical link between God the Creator, Jesus the Son of God and the Spirit of God as the animator of the world. In African Christianity, the blending of these three notions is not clearly articulated. Such articulation is a major challenge for African Christian theologians. Thus, there is lack of clarity between Pentecostal and Charismatic ecclesial identity. When Jesus sends the Holy Spirit, is Jesus himself operative? Does the Spirit have independent operation separate from Jesus? How exactly should African Christians explain the pneumatological formula? For African Christianity, the doctrine of the trinity as articulated in the Councils of Nicaea and Chalcedon requires further review and elaboration. In the meantime, we have to acknowledge and appreciate that many African Christians identify Jesus with the Holy Spirit and make no distinction between God, Jesus and the third 'Person' of the Trinity (Brunner 1927:201).

## ■ Dialectical paradigms

For some African Christians, Jesus is accepted and followed as the Great Controversialist. They recognise that just as Jesus brought confrontation between his followers and critics in Palestine 2000 years ago, so has the establishment of the Church everywhere in the world led to such conflict. The Church always brings conflict, because it distinguishes between those within and those outside it. At the same time, within the Church, there are always conflicts between the nominal followers and those who consider themselves serious followers. Pharisaic mentality is thus an old problem, pre-dating Christianity but continuing within it. In contemporary Africa, dialectical tensions within the Church have exploded into ideological conflicts. During the colonial period, new churches were locally founded in criticism against the imported denominations, which had openly or indirectly identified themselves with colonial regimes. Colonial authorities banned the independent churches on the advice of the 'established' missionary-led denominations. At independence, the ban was lifted, but full reconciliation has yet to be realised.



In South Africa, apartheid was built on 'Christian' principles despite the teaching of Paul that in Christ, there should be no discrimination or segregation.

On what grounds can one racial or cultural group impose itself upon others? Neither the teaching of Jesus nor that of Paul has any support for racist ideology. In criticism against the 'theology' of apartheid, African Christian theologians have articulated the conviction that God cannot condone racial or cultural domination of one group by another. The call for a non-racial democracy has become the clarion call of the Christian struggle against apartheid. Thus, there are two theologies, one for liberation and the other for perpetuation of oppression. Jesus would identify with the struggle against apartheid because, after all, he struggled against it in Palestine two millennia ago! At the same time, it can be expected that his identification with the oppressed would generate conflict, and every Christian must decide on the option to choose irrespective of race, class, gender or status. In post-colonial Africa, similar choices must also be made in view of the challenges in each nation and community (Fanon 1967). It is quite clear, then, that the role of Jesus as a controversialist is quite relevant in African Christianity. The challenge all Christians must face is not to become pretentious and yet also to identify themselves with the core principles of the Gospel (Evans 1983:24).

## ■ Festive paradigms

In the Last Supper, Jesus established communion between his closest disciples and those who were apparently less committed, including Judas who was to betray him. This Last Supper was to become ritualised into the central feast of the Christian faith. According to Christian doctrine, the enactment of the Last Supper is always a commemoration of the communion of Jesus with his disciples and, by extension, with the whole Universal Church. Thus, Jesus becomes the chief celebrant in the feast that unites all Christians. The Last Supper, as a reconciliatory feast, counterbalances the role of Jesus as the controversialist.

In the Eucharist, Jesus invites all people to be reconciled to him. Unfortunately, the ritual has tended to become the exclusive monopoly of those who belong to church membership. Institutionally, this may be inevitable, but theologically, the rules of inclusion and exclusion could be found too alienating by those whom the institution excommunicates. As the celebrant of the central ritual, Jesus occupies a central place in African Christianity. However, an authentic African Christian theology of the Eucharist has yet to be articulated (Amoah & Oduyoye 1988).

## ■ Historic paradigms

From a historical perspective, Jesus has indeed altered history. The whole world now operates on the Christian calendar, although for religious purposes other ritual calendars are used. The Christian calendar is calculated from the date of birth of Jesus, whose accuracy is not absolutely certain. Theologically, it might be argued that such accuracy is not essential and that the recognition of the public ministry of Jesus is more important. Such an argument might further lead to the suggestion that his baptism, crucifixion and resurrection are more important than his birth. In African Christianity, it is noticeable that the annual ecclesiastical calendar is not as ostensibly followed as in North Atlantic Christianity. Perhaps African Christian theologians could re-examine the significance of Jesus in African history and formulate an annual ecclesiastical calendar to reflect the new insights arising from such formulation (Cassirer 1946:62).

## ■ Edifying objective

In this section, various possibilities have been explored and expounded as sources of insight for the development of an African Christology. There are unlimited perspectives that African Christian theologians can explore and cultivate. Hopefully, readers will find the section stimulating and motivating enough to select a theme and build a Christology worthy of edifying the Church in Africa.



# Greco-Roman healing tradition of Asclepius vis-à-vis Jesus as the *Messianic Healer* in the Gospels tradition: Implications for healing ministrations in contemporary African churches

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## ■ Abstract<sup>8</sup>

During the first century of the Common Era, especially in Asia Minor, now modern Turkey, sickness was so rampant that there arose great concern to preserve and to restore life in the ancient Greco-Roman society. In that case, it is worthy of note to enquire into the significance of healing recorded by some of the peasant followers of Jesus in the early Christian movement. Beginning from his hometown, Nazareth in Galilee, the ministry of Jesus was dotted with narratives on the healing activities of Jesus to the extent that he began to be seen by many of his opponents and admirers as perhaps a *messianic therapist*. The verb *therapeuō* and its cognates and the verbal forms of *θεραπεύων* are generally used in the sense of healing throughout the Gospels to express Jesus' Messianic work. Words that relate to sickness like *μαλακία* or *νόσος* appear quite often in the gospel narratives. Even though contemporary Christians faithful in Africa accept the fact that sickness should be followed up with western medications, they, however, strongly believe in the efficacy of religious interventions in relation to sickness as a *must*. Given the limited secular medical facilities to Africans who more often than not live in remote villages, prayer offerings and the expectation of miraculous cures for various illnesses even be the diseases thought as hopeless by western-trained medical practitioners, prayers for divine interventions and breakthroughs *in Jesus' name* are preferred and sought after. Here, the Pentecostal and Charismatic churches in Africa egregiously reinvent Jesus as the *Super Power* who, through heaven-ward prayers and dry fasting, provides deliverance and healing to teeming devotees that patronise their holy grounds.

**Keywords:** Healing; Nazareth; African Pentecostalism; Charismatic; Deliverance.

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## ■ Methodology

The *Tradition-Historical Approach* is deemed relevant to this chapter. It is considered relevant because with it I wish to give critical attention to the texts that have originally passed through the historical process of transmission themselves. With the approach effort will be made to trace the development of the ideas on the Greco-Roman healing traditions of Asclepius and those of Jesus as the *Messianic Healer* in the Gospels tradition.

## ■ Greco-Roman healing tradition: Asclepius the healer

The most representative of the healing profession of medical arts in Greek antiquity was Asclepius, son of Apollo, and his wife, Coronis. He was born in a miraculous way but later became popularly known as the *Paeon*, the Healer. He was a celebrated hero and god of medicine in ancient Greek Religion and mythology. Edelstein informs us that the most famous Temple of Asclepius was built in the 4th century BC at Epidaurus, a small city on the Argos Peninsula on the Saronic Gulf in northern Peloponnese (Edelstein & Edelstein 1998:10). Much later, two other Asclepian temples – healing temples – were built at the Island of Kos where Hippocrates, the father of medicine, started his career and at Cortys in Arcadia. There flourished a fourth temple at Pergamum in the Roman Province of Asia.

From around the 5th century BC, the cult of Asclepius had become very prominent. Wickkiser informs us that crowds of supplicants trooped down to his temples (Asklepieiai) to seek cures for various types of ailments (Wickkiser 2006:25). Asclepian priests officiated at the temples were known to perform ritual purifications on demand of offerings or sacrifices to the god as much as the sick or the relatives could afford. Patients who had the ugliest cases were directed to spend the night in the *abaton* or *adyton*, the holiest chambers of the sanctuary. The sick were given some concoctions to drink that induced them to dream

dreams and to see visions about their health status. They were directed to report on the dreams or visions they had on their conditions to a priest of the temple who, through a process of interpretation of the dreams or visions, would prescribe the 'correct' therapy. Sacred dogs were active part of the temple agents (Wickkiser 2006:10). In the *abaton*, they would lick the wounds and sores of petitioners. Besides, there lived in the temple dormitories where the sick and injured slept in same room with non-venomous snakes, *the Asclepian Snakes* that crawled around freely on the floor. They could roll over some sleeping patients and that action signalled effective healing. Some of them wriggled their tails over some sick persons in the temple and as they did so instant recovery was granted to anyone who got the cold touch. Some ageing snakes ranged themselves in a special corner of the dormitories where they shed their scales. Those sick persons whose cases proved difficult to heal were aided by the priests to go nearer the semi-swooned snakes as the sight of any of them effected rapid and complete healing (a process of Palingenesis - regeneration).

The scales of these benevolent reptiles were collected and tossed on the many petitioners in the other angles of the dormitories to perfect the healing rituals. A few giant black cats with owlish eyes constantly mewed inside the temples. These were mediums that called down the curative spirit of Asclepius on the patients. The conjurers, namely the aides or the priests, invoked and placated the spirits to vivify the temple. Incense was egregiously burnt. The aroma was nose-tangling as the mystification was more than ordinary.

In the Jewish-Hellenistic world, there roamed magicians and priests, philosophers and poets like Hesiod, some well-known generals and lawgivers, kings and rulers who were held by the public as the embodiments of divine power. Here, my account elsewhere is quite *ad rem*. I freely quote myself (Manus & Markhalemele 2018):

The extant Epidaurian inscriptions indicate that there were ancient doctors, psychiatrics as well as patients and patronisers. In the case of

the Epidaurian Healing Centre, its Abaton Hall was world famous where real sufferers of paralysis, blindness, deafness, dumbness, growths, wounds and ulcers were healed over night by Asclepius. (p. 220)

Such persons were held to join at death, the spirits and the gods in the spirit world; hence, they were revered as occult heroes in established cults and honoured as benefactors and saviours. Such were the *theioi andres* [divine men] who combined in their prestigious personality the revelations of divine power. Such were the class of miracle workers, alias 'men of god', as was Apollonius of Tyana and Alexander of Abonneuticus whose miraculous cures and other prodigious acts were praised and inscribed on the temple walls at Epiclaurus in Rome (Manus 1989:658). The fame of the temples of Asklepius spread far and wide. Much later, some religious charlatans and their groups sought affiliation to him; for example, a known second century controversial miracle worker, Alexander, asserted that his deity, *Glycon* - a snake with the head of a linen - was Asklepios *redivivus*.

In the Greco-Roman antiquity, the fame of Asclepius and his awesome sanctuaries was widespread as the above can show. Both the city, *urbani*, and rural dwellers, the *pagani*, held the view, like most Africans would, that religion and medicine were inseparable; hence, they patronised the temples. Physicians who had taken medical oaths to ensure the indispensability of medical ethics in their praxes undertook to become devotees of Asclepius and held him as their patron deity. They enjoined their clients to pray to and invoke the deity for rapid healing. Most of them believed that their successful cures were granted by the deity. Almost all of them patronised the religious shrines of Asclepius so widespread in the Greco-Roman regions. Even local healers, sorcerers, root-cutters, bone-casters, palm-readers, exorcists and other self-proclaimed medicine men availed themselves of the Asclepian religious approaches for the treatment of sick persons. Regular news of successful supernatural healings were widely disseminated so much so that the number of those who could doubt the religious effects



on healing became quite negligible. At that period where various sorts of diseases were known, everybody who was sick as well as their affected relatives sought every available opportunity to contact healthcare providers who restored and promoted good health. Numerous deities were credited with healing powers as there were many places around at that time where there seem to exist privately erected Asclepian temples where the local population attended regular prayers, made their supplications and spent the nights to ask for medical advice or wait for miraculous cures from the deities. In Hellenistic-Jewish Palestine, local deities like *Beelzebul* and the deities at the Pool at Bethesda plus some foreign ones from Egypt like *Imhotep* were cultivated and sought after for health and healing (Pinch 2004:1).

Regional centres that included Palestine of Jesus' time had Asclepian sanctuaries for those who distrusted the practices of fake local temple physicians (remember that Jesus said to his objectors in Luke's Gospel, '[s]urely you will quote me this proverb, Physician, cure yourself', and say, '[d]o here in your native place the things that we heard were done in Capernaum' [Lk 4:23] or in Luke 11:15 where Jesus was accused of driving out demon from someone 'mute person' by the power of Beelzebul, 'the prince of demons'). To spend medical leave abroad was known among the rich as in most African countries today. Hierapolis and its hot springs or the prestigious religio-medical cures provided at the Asclepian sanctuaries at Pergamon and Epidaurus served many people of those days as Indian and South African medical institutions and their outfits do to many Africans today. Sanctuaries that could not offer such services to clients were disrupted, while those that provided healing sessions stood tall in the appreciation of worshippers all over the Greco-Roman world. In the light of the above-described medical practices of the period, let us examine how Jesus' followers would not relent in seeing him as a *healing messiah* which seemingly is the case in the Gospels accounts.

## ■ Jesus as the Messianic Healer in the Gospels tradition

What exactly is *messianic* about Jesus and his miracles of healing? In *Abrahamic Religions*, the *messiah* was a *Saviour* or a *Redeemer*. The *Jesus People* saw themselves as a community living in the Messianic Age, a time during which Jesus was ushering in a *reign* of universal peace and brotherhood where evil had no place, demons were silenced, demolished and eventually a fraternity with zero-tolerance for disabilities and maladies of all kinds. This belief, indeed a post-Easter Christian propaganda tool, explains why the followers saw Jesus' ministry of deliverances and cures as *messianic* (Novakovic 2003:11). For them, as a *venerable* person, the *Christos*, he was a *Messianic Healer* par excellence. There are many accounts in the Gospels that show that Jesus practised healing as *dunamis*, deeds of power in the Synoptics, and *semeia*, signs in John; especially from the outstanding character of the Gospel of Matthew, the concept of the healing messiah was developed and became widespread (Novakovic 2003:11).

As an itinerant peasant preacher wherever he went he ministered healing to the sick and the impotent; persons who were unable to help themselves gain access to health giving centres or spots. Matthew has to his credit 41 instances of physical and mental cures accounted for in the four Gospels; there were other countless instances of healings that happened during his three and a half-year ministry. He healed large crowds of people as there were multitudes who followed him and several multitudes got healed by him as is attested in Matthew 12:15, '[m]any followed him and he cured them all' and Matthew 19:2 in the district of Judea, '[g]reat crowds followed him, and he cured them there'. The fourth evangelist (John) who it could be said took seriously the circulating oral tradition on Jesus' healing ministry has in John 20 declared:

Many other signs therefore, Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been

written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in his name. (vv. 30–31)

Gospel scholars are unanimous in accepting that about one fifth of the gospel narratives is allocated to Jesus' healing activities, the circumstances in which they were performed and the methods as well as the consequences on the healed persons and the crowds that witnessed what happened. In sum, there are 3779 verses altogether in the four Gospels, a prodigious 727 verses are devoted to the narration of Jesus' healing of physical and mental diseases and the resurrection of dead persons. For his earliest followers, he was a *Messianic Healer* par excellence (cf. Cauchi 2018). Jesus' baptism and anointing by the Holy Spirit inaugurated his healing sessions.<sup>9</sup> He performed deliverance ministries<sup>10</sup>. According to Matthew, he delivered people from demonic possessions and other allied disabilities.<sup>11</sup> The fourth evangelist notes that he raised a person who was dead.<sup>12</sup>

## ■ Occasions of healing by Jesus

Instances (41) of healing activities done by Jesus in the four Gospels are listed in Table 3.1.

## ■ Kinds of healing Jesus performed

When we begin with Mark, the Gospel generally accepted by mainline Synoptic scholars as the first written gospel, it is interesting to note that the evangelist tells us that Jesus' first healing encounter was with the demoniac, a person possessed by the demon in Mark 1:29. In Mark 1:32–34, the sick and the demoniacs stood tall among those healed by Jesus. As narrated

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9. Luke 3:21–22, 4:1–19.

10. Mark 7:31–37.

11. Matthew 17:14–21.

12. John 11:43–44.

**TABLE 3.1:** Instances of healing activities done by Jesus in the four Gospels.

<b>Healing narratives</b>	<b>Matthew</b>	<b>Mark</b>	<b>Luke</b>	<b>John</b>
The Man with Unclean Spirit		1:23	4:33	
Peter's Mother-in-Law	8:14	1:30	4:38	
Multitudes	8:16	1:32	4:40	
Many Demons		1:34		
The Leper	8:2	1:40-45	5:12	
The Man with Palsy	9:2	2:3	5:18	
The Man with Withered Hand	12:10	3:1	6:6	
Multitudes	12:15	3:10		
The Gadarene Demoniacs	8:28-34	5:1	8:26	
Jairus' Daughter	9:18	5:22	8:41	
The Woman with the Issue of Blood		9:20	5:25	8:43
A Few Sick People	13:58	6:5		
Multitudes	14:34	6:55		
The Syro-Phoenician's Daughter		15:22	7:24	
The Deaf and Dumb Man		7:32		
The Blind Man		8:22		
The Child Possessed by Evil Spirit	17:14	9:14	9:38	
The Blind Batimaeus	20:30	10:46	18:35	
The Centurion's Servant	8:5	7:2		
The Two Blind Men	9:27			
The Dumb Demoniac	9:32			
The Blind and Dumb Demoniac	12:22	11:14		
The Multitudes	4:23	6:17		
The Multitudes	11:7	7:21		
The Multitudes	14:14	9:11	6:2	
Great Multitudes	15:30			
Great Multitudes	19:2			
The Blind and the Lame in the Temple Area	21:14-17			
The Widow's Son			7:11-17	
Mary Magdalene and Others	8:2			
The Woman Bound by a Spirit for 18 Years			13:10-17	
The Man with the Dropsy	14:1			
The Lepers	17:11			
Malchus' Ear	22:50			
The Multitudes	5:15			
Assorted Persons	13:32			
The Royal Official's Son				4:46-54
The Healing of the 38-Year-Old Man				5:2-18
The Man Born Blind				9:1-12
The Healing of Lazarus				11:1-44

in Mark 5:1-20, the demoniac-held persons manifested antisocial behaviours. Other times, the demoniacs displayed symptoms of sickness, dumbness like in Matthew 9:32 and blindness as in Matthew 12:22 in the person(s) they have taken possession of. And so is the case of the woman who, in Luke 13:10-17, had severe spinal problem for 18 'good' years as well as the Healing of a Man's Son with a Mute Spirit, just like modern-day epilepsy in Mark 9:17-27.

He healed *skin diseases*, otherwise known as leprosy by that time. Such healings are accounted for in Mark 1:4-5, Matthew 8:2-4 and Luke 17:12-15. Jesus healed *lameness and paralysis* and many other crippling disabilities narrated in Mark 2:3-4, Matthew 9:2-7 and Luke 5:18-19. He cured *fever*. The cure of Peter's mother-in-law is a typical case who had to get up to serve Jesus and his entourage (Mk 1:30-31; Mt 8:14-15; Lk 4:38-39). And in John 4:47-53, we find the cure of the fever of the Nobleman's son. Blindness was a very widespread ailment in the ancient world. Jesus battled blindness. The accounts of the man born blind in John 9, the restoration of sight to Bartimaeus in Mark 10:46-52 and Luke 18:35-42, and the man brought to Jesus at Bethsaida in Mark 8:22-25. Matthew gives account of the cure of two blind men (Mt 9:27-30) and another two recorded in Matthew 20:30-34. Besides these, there are some other 19 occasions when Jesus healed several other people whose infirmities were not mentioned.

## ■ Jesus' motivation for healing people

*Compassion*: From the start of ministry, Mark informs his readers that Jesus healed people out of compassion (Mk 1:4). His miracles were not performed to focus attention on himself as 'super power' or even as a *superman*. They were performed to show his compassion for the disabled, their needs and their state in life. Further on in the Gospels' tradition, the evangelist, Matthew tells us that Jesus had compassion for the crowds (Mt 9:36, 14:14) and he also showed pity on two blind beggars (Mt 20:34).

*Faith*: This was a quality Jesus expected from the disabled persons he healed. Even in his very home town, Nazareth, faith

was a necessary requirement to heal. This is evidenced in Luke 4:23-28. Both Mark and Luke indicate that while in Nazareth Jesus healed persons who showed unflinching faith in what he could do for them (Mk 6:1-6; Lk 4:23-28). In the case of the Centurion's son, Jesus noticed the 'great faith' of the military officer and as such did not hesitate to heal his boy. Jesus was moved by the faith of the four friends of the paralytic who carried and lowered him on the stretcher into the room where Jesus was preaching (Mk 2:3-12). There are other instances where faith determined the healing of the invalids, namely:

1. The Blind Man (Mt 9:27-31).
2. The Non-stop Menstruating Woman (Mk 5:25-34) (Manus 2013:194).
3. The Father of the Demon-Possessed Boy (Mk 9:14-29).

Also, the following came to him with faith:

1. The Leper (Mt 8:1-4).
2. The Centurion's Servant (Mt 8:5-13).
3. The Syro-Phoenician Woman's Daughter (Mk 7:24-30).

## ■ The healing approaches adopted by Jesus

Jesus adopted many ways to heal people. The Gospels indicate that he healed people with some methods such as:

1. *Touch*: Jesus touched the sick person, for example, Peter's mother-in-law whose hand he touched (Mt 8:15) and the leper in Mark 40-45. Sometimes, the persons touched him as did the 'many' in Matthew 14:34-36 and the Non-stop Menstruating Woman (Lk 8:42-48).
2. *Order*: On some Jesus ordered the healing seeker. 'Go' such as in the case of the Centurion in Matthew 8:5-12. 'Rise' to the paralytic in Luke 5:17-26. 'Stretch out' as in the case of the man with the withered hand in Luke 6:6-10 and '[a]rise' to the dead son of the widow at Nain (Lk 7:11-17). In the case of the leper in Luke 5:12-16, he used both *touch* and *order* to effect his healing.

3. *Use of Spittle*: Jesus sometimes spat or applied the moisture, the thick liquid in a person's mouth which is also known as saliva (*Asu*, among the Igbo of eastern Nigeria) on the infirm to get him or her healed. Spittle, in the first century Palestine, like in many African traditions, was believed to possess healing, blessing or contemptuous qualities. The cases of the Deaf and Dumb in Mark 7:31–37, the Blind Man at Bethsaida in Mark 8:22–26 and the Man Born Blind in John 9:6–7 were all beneficiaries of Jesus' miraculous healing with the saliva.
4. *Command to the Healed to Give Testimony*: Jesus ordered some persons he healed to give testimony as acts of faith. To the man with the withered hand, he ordered '[s]tretch out your hand' in Luke 6:6–10; to the Blind Man in John 9:7, he ordered '[g]o wash...'; and to the 10 Lepers in Luke 17:11–17, he directed to '[g]o, show yourself to the priest'.
5. *Prayer*: In some cases, Jesus 'prayed prayer' on the sick or the dead person to get him or her well. In John 11:41–42, he 'poured' prayer over Lazarus to get him raised from death.
6. *Questioning*: Jesus often put some questions that evoked faith on some persons he ministered to. For example, we have: to the Blind Man in Mark 8:22–26, he asked, '[d]o you see anything?'; to the Gerasene Demoniac in Mark 5:1–13, he asked, '[w]hat is your name?'; to the father of the Demoniac boy in Mark 9:14–29, he asked, '[h]ow long has he had this?' (Manus 1992:146–152); and to Bartimaeus, the Blind Man in Mark 10:46–52, he asked, '[w]hat do you want me to do for you?'.

## ■ Contrasts between Asclepius and Jesus' healings

This study compels us to draw attention to some contrasting elements in the healing activities of Asclepius, his priests, and Jesus of Nazareth and his disciples. Both saw the nagging health challenges of people in their ages. In the Greco-Roman worldview, many people believed that demons caused physical disabilities and mental illnesses. The healing tradition represented by

Asclepius and his later cohorts employed magic and wizardry to effect healings. Temples and sanctuaries that looked quite occult and esoteric were built for them in some cities. Their healings took place mostly overnight in the interior of those temples, sanctuaries and shrines where cult entities played diverse magical roles. Their priests prescribed rituals consequent upon induced dreams and visions.

Jesus healed people in open places among crowds and wherever the disabled could accost him. There was only one isolated case in the Gospel of Matthew 21:14–17 where Jesus healed in the temple area and not inside the temple. He did ‘wondrous things’ with power and words of command that surprised the religious leaders of his age. He rebuked, questioned and exorcised the possessed. His healings were signs of wonder. I strongly share the view that he healed to prepare people for the dawn of the reign of God where there should not be any disabilities that impair humans from living their lives in full and well (Jn 10:10).

## ■ Some observations

In light of the above, it is reasonable to argue that Jesus was a true *Messianic Healer* who had come in the *Messianic Age* to overcome the humanly impossible problems and make them become divinely possible through his ‘deeds of power’, *dunameis* in the Synoptic Gospels, and ‘signs’, *semeia* in the Gospel of John. He even acknowledged the importance of medical proof as stipulated in the decrees of Leviticus 13:49, 14:2–32. In obedience to this legal stipulation, Jesus directed the leper accounted for in Matthew 8:1–4 and the 10 Lepers in Luke 17:11–19 to show proof of their healing to the priests of the day. He was not unaware of the work of the many ‘physicians’ that roamed the region. In Mark 2:17, he drew the attention of his supplicants to the need of a physician. The case of the Blind Man at Bethsaida in Mark 8:22–26 remains a good example of where Jesus had to ‘rain’ prayers to get the invalid out of the hook of his disability. On the difficult case of the Gerasene Demoniac, Jesus continued to ceaselessly



expend words of prayer. Jesus performed both *deliverance* and *healing* miracles on many people at the same time. He delivered the *demonised* and *healed* them of related sicknesses. He adopted varying methods. In Mark 5:1-13, he behest the demon to give him its name, and when it said, *legion*, Jesus sent them frustrated in the bottomless pit. In Luke 4:31-37 and verses 40-41, he imposed silence on the demons. In Luke 4:35-36, he cast the demons out with virulent words of rebuke. In view of the fake healing practices available in his time, he warned those who would regard his healings as demonic that they would be blaspheming the Holy Spirit<sup>13</sup> that had empowered him to do works worthy of the dawn of the reign of God.

Both Peter, the Jerusalem community and the Antioch Christians recognised Jesus as a healing *Messiah*, a fact which, no doubt, Peter passed on to Mark, his interpreter, and amanuensis. Luke acknowledges the healing and miraculous activities of Jesus in his two-volume Luke-Acts where supernatural cures *ni oruko* Jesu (*en to onomati Jesou*) are narrated. In his gospel, Luke does not fail to depict Jesus as a supernatural healer, exorcist and wonder-worker to discourage members of his community from attending the Asklepiian sanctuaries but to redirect them to the supernatural powers of both the Jesus tradition and those of his later Christian communities. All four evangelists ascribe to Jesus the doing of 'signs and wonders' and 'works of power' as regular events during his ministry and preaching tours. Here, I concur with Adolf von Harnack that the early Christian movement was indeed *ein Religion der Heilung*, a religion of healing (Von Harnack 1912:114). Surely the third evangelist endeavoured to present Jesus as a healing *Messiah* to the God-fearers who were potential converts to the Jesus Movement and to educate them on how they should approach Jesus whenever they were besieged by any sickness. In spite of the vagaries of orality, it can be argued that the evangelists might

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13. See Mark 3:20-30: The Pharisees blaspheme the Holy Spirit.

have used the supernatural healing narratives as evangelistic propaganda to quickly win converts to the *J-Movement* as the miracle taught the neophytes the need and importance of faith. Above all, the miracles of Jesus introduce the advent of a new age: the reign of God.

## ■ Implications for healing ministrations in contemporary African churches

In African traditions, a person lives as a corporate constituted of the visible and invisible elements. Good health involves the maintenance of the relationships with fellow humans, the spirits and God (Uzukwu 1997:26). Thus, African indigenous worldview and religious culture are quite replete with beliefs in the existence of spiritual entities both good and bad, evil spirits, that can do good to people or that can be employed by persons with ‘the evil eyes’ against others to do harm and to afflict people. Illnesses can enter persons through the sorcerers, witches and evil spirits (Manus 2010:497). In spite of this, health and wellness remain cardinal values in traditional African societies which African Christianity has energetically taken over to promote. Jesus’ healing tradition has immensely influenced several African churches, especially the AICs, the Pentecostals, the charismatic groups ministries, priest-healers of mainline churches operate healings ministries to help dismantle the burdens of many persons possessed and oppressed by what the new generation churches have branded ‘territorial and generational demons’ (Manus 2010:497). They believe that they have been challenged by Jesus in the Gospels to conduct battles against demonic forces like he did. In his *Great Commission* charge to the Eleven (into the world), Jesus bid them to (Mk 16):

Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature. Whoever believes and is baptised will be saved; whoever does not believe will be condemned. These signs will accompany those who

believe, in my name they will drive out demons,<sup>14</sup> they will speak new languages. They will pick up serpents (with their hands), and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not harm them. They will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover. (vv. 15-18)

And in the Upper Room before his death, according to the Johannine tradition, Jesus made a similar but a very powerful promise to his disciples (Jn 14):

I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it. (vv. 12-14)

In many African churches today, Jesus' words are taken seriously. He remains a model for Christian faith healers who take his promise albeit literally. And their 'over-interpretation' has been transferred to the societies as these churches have really become so ubiquitous. The Hellenistic-Jewish religious terrain where many demons and spirits were believed to have roamed about shares much in common with the African belief system. Belief in demons and spiritual forces, *Umu Agbara*, and ancestral spirits are rife in African life. The African continent is one where both Christians and traditionalists live in regular fear of these powerful forces and pernicious demons. If Jesus had lived in Africa, much of his ministry would have been taken up in exorcisms and healings. The continent stinks with myriads of prayer houses, redemption camps and crusade grounds in the cities and on the highways. The likes of Prophet Shepherd Bushiri of *The Prophetic Ministry*, Pretoria, South Africa; Apostle David Poonyane of the *Road Map Ministries*, Shannon Lynnfield, Bloemfontein, South Africa; an acolyte of and partner with Prophet T.B. Joshua of *Synagogue Church Of All Nations* (SCOAN), Lagos, Nigeria; Rev.

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14. The Greek text: *en to onomati mou daimonia ekbalousin*, ... (Jn 14:17b) = in my name they will cast out demons as well as John 14:13 *en to onomati mou* and John 14:14 *ean ti aitesete en to onomati mou* are the scriptural canons that provide the refrain that equip these *Men of God* to perform deeds of power in the African churches.

Father Emmanuel Ede, with his *Holy Ghost Prayer Ministry* at Elele in Rivers State, Nigeria; Rev. Father Ejike Mbaka of the Roman Catholic Diocese, Emene, Enugu, Nigeria; and in Eastern Bishop; Margaret Wanjiru of the *Jesus Is Alive Ministries*, Nairobi, Kenya; and others too numerous to mention here strongly believe that they preach, deliver, pray and prophesy to provide physical wholeness to teeming disabled Africans ‘in the name of Jesus’ in the *name of Jesus*.

But should that be all the role of Christianity and faith in Jesus Christ in Africa? I doubt. If we take the advancement in Modern Educational Psychology seriously with its emphasis on ‘deep teaching’ in our learning environments and realising that we, even as Christians who still wish to spread the Good News of Jesus live and have our being in the context of the 21st century with its rapid economic and social changes, we need as educators of theological institutions to prepare our Church-goers and future pastors for ministries that have not yet been created and healings of diseases that we do not yet know about talk about their diagnosis. The call to mainstream Educational Psychology in Theological and Religious Studies with its stress on how learners will be helped to better come to know what they would do as preachers of Jesus, the Christ of faith, when to minister his works of signs and wonders and why pastors must preach and work deliverances for the disabled have to be anchored as preachment for Lifelong Theological Education that will be fit for the 21st century African Christianity (Ilongo 2017:14).

In light of the above insights, I want to believe that the interpretation of Jesus as the ‘Super Healer’, the ‘Rival Wonder-Worker’ and the ‘Power-Filled Dynamite’ or those who take pride in preaching him as source and giver of ‘wealth and prosperity’ or the makers of holy noises, ‘the hallelujah praises and the thunderous shouts that rend the quiet of African neighbourhoods’ really obscure our understanding of the life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, the *Christ of Faith* as the Living Son of God (Manus 2017:426). This will encourage us no longer to proclaim Jesus only as the one who heals our sick, raises our dead and

feeds our hungry and famished people, prospers our businesses and performs mighty acts of wonder in our midst. Truly, Jesus is all these and many more. But our education curricula cannot afford to miss the point to make theological students come to learn that the biblical *Christ of faith* is still the living God, the Teacher par excellence, the Bread of Life, the Living Water, the Good Shepherd, the True Vine, the I AM, the True Light, the Saviour of the World and God in flesh. These Christological titles from still must have to be preached to Africans to draw out the implications of his life and work for the 21st African churches. Our courses may have to uphold the fact that Jesus was a great advocate of the inclusion of the non-Jews into the kingdom of God; a provision in which Africans are not excluded. Jesus Christ does not only cure and heal the sick Africans but also saves Africans from ineluctable sins by performing miracles. He has compassion for the Africans, both for their spiritual and socio-political needs. He is aware of Africa's situations as he was of those of the Jews when he ministered in Palestine. Faith in Jesus and in God, the father, should be the central theme of our training and formation of pastors in our various theological institutions. To focus primarily on his miracles or on what Christ can do for us is to miss the point of Jesus' life and teaching on miracles.

# Jesus as a healer in the Greco-Roman context: Implications for healing and wellness in Africa

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## ■ Abstract

This chapter investigates Jesus, the healer, within the broader societal and religious lens of Greco-Roman cultural meanings of infirmity, illness and disease, as well as their manifestations and social interactions. I do so by establishing (1) how healers and healing narratives functioned in the Greco-Roman context, (2) the New Testament's portrayal of Jesus as a healer as well as

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healing and wellness in New Testament times, (3) popular healing methods used in the Greco-Roman context and (4) implications for healing and wellness in Africa. The findings herein demonstrate that the Greeks and the Romans alike received and appropriated Jesus Christ as a healer of all kinds of infirmities, illnesses and diseases. The Greco-Roman cultural context was replete with healing deities who superintended over the health and wellness of the society. In their context, demon possession, lameness and blindness were regarded as sicknesses that required a healer. African cosmology is equally replete with healing deities and healers who deal with infirmities, illnesses and disease. As a result, Africans are proactive in making choices that reduce the threat to life and protect them from infirmity, illness and disease. For this reason, Africans are open to receiving and appropriating Jesus as the healer who surpasses the existing healers who are limited human agents attempting to reduce threats to life. Jesus through his healing miracles frees, re-socialises and reinstates back to the society thus obliterating the most dreaded threat in Africa, the threat of isolation or participation restriction, resulting from disability, disease or infirmity. This is not just a personal threat but a threat to life of the community. Africans thrive in community and individuals within the community will do all that is humanly possible to avert any threat to life even if it means receiving Jesus momentarily as a life insurance. Jesus as a healing deity and saviour becomes a means to living a healthy and fulfilling life. This acceptance of Jesus as a healer of all infirmities, illnesses and diseases assures them of the promise of getting life and life in abundance. It is this fact that makes Africans relationship with Jesus a dynamic process of change and growth that leads to a state of shalom – ‘a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity’ (World Health Organization 1946:n.p.).

**Keywords:** Infirmity; Disease; Greco-Roman world; Demon possession; Deities.

## ■ Introduction

Understanding Jesus as a healer in the Greco-Roman world largely depends on how well we understand the concept of disease, disability and infirmity, and demon possession in their social, cultural and religious connotations as well as societal consequences. Once we are able to situate the healing narratives within the wider scope of healing and wellness in the Greco-Roman context, understanding Jesus as a healer and how he functioned within the Greco-Roman socio-cultural context becomes tenable. In fact, this ‘provides a synthesis of the possible approaches’ (Krötzi, Mustakallio & Kuuliala 2016:5) to healing and wellness in the Greco-Roman world.

In antiquity, there were some shared cognitive categories related to health or strength, illness or weakness and what their social and communal dimensions were (Krötzi et al. 2016:5). Failure to comprehend the shared cognitive categories and their communal dimensions leads Géza Vermes to view Jesus as a ‘powerful healer of the physically and mentally sick ... he was ... unconditionally given to rescue, not of communities but of persons in need’ (Vermes 1993:206). What such an observation does not recognise is the interconnectedness between the individual being healed and community within which he or she lives and is socialised. Healing is not just an individual affair. It is communal. An individual’s health was tied to the health of the family and its members as well as the tribe and the entire community.

Re-thinking Jesus as a healer behooves us to look at the healing narratives in the New Testament as expressing a valid Greco-Roman worldview, the dominant worldview at the time, and investigate the ‘question of infirmity through its broader societal and religious meanings’ (Krötzi et al. 2016:4–5). By doing so, we will be able to not only evaluate the portrayals of Jesus as a healer in the Gospels but also investigate how Jesus and the



first Christians understood healing and wellness in New Testament times. Interestingly, the World Health Organization (WHO), a modern-day organisation, defines disability in tandem with the conceptualisation of health, disability and infirmity in antiquity. The WHO (1946) defines disability as:

[A]n umbrella term, covering impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions. An impairment is a problem in bodily function or structure; an activity limitation is a difficulty encountered by an individual in executing a task or action; while a participation restriction is a problem experienced by an individual in involvement in life situations. Disability is thus not just a health problem. It is a complex phenomenon, reflecting the features of a person's body and features of the society in which he or she lives. Overcoming the difficulties faced by people with disabilities requires interventions to remove environmental and social barriers. (n.p.)

In a cursory manner, this chapter looks into (1) how healers and healing narratives functioned in the Greco-Roman context, (2) the New Testament's portrayal of Jesus as a healer as well as healing and wellness in New Testament times, (3) popular healing methods used in the Greco-Roman context and (4) implications for healing and wellness in Africa. Therefore, the aim of the contribution is to investigate Jesus as a healer within the broader societal and religious lens of Greco-Roman cultural meanings of infirmity, illness and disease, their manifestations and social interactions.

Further, we will seek to establish ways in which African conceptualisation of health and wellness has been impacted by situating Jesus as a healer in the Greco-Roman context. The way in which Jesus lived as a healer in the Greco-Roman world is the subject of the following section.

## ■ Healers and healing narratives in the Greco-Roman context

In the Greco-Roman world, there were social, environmental and spiritual barriers associated with disease, infirmity or disability,

and demon possession. People in antiquity were acutely aware that the intervention by a holy man or deity whose life was an embodiment of power flowing through him or her was necessary to avert or overcome the subversive power of the dark world whose primary agents were the demons, magicians and sorcerers. Antisocial and subversive powers of 'magical beliefs that were imparted by the Persians were the emphasis of magic as a defence against evil, terror of the devil, and demonology' (Hull 1974:29).

The heritage of Greece, therefore, was essentially secular (Ferguson 2003):

Yet it was a religious secularism, for one cannot draw a line between the sacred and profane in ancient Greece as sharply as moderns do. There were few public buildings and events in Athens that were not religious. Yet, in keeping with the emphasis on man, the ideals of life were health, beauty (the Greeks had an uncommonly high regard for the male physique), respectable wealth, and enjoyment of youth with friends. (p. 8)

The socio-religious world of the Greeks in antiquity struggled with infirmities and disability. Sickness and demonic possession were believed to be one and the same during the first and second centuries (Kee 1988:21). The (social) histories of bodily infirmity, mental infirmities and disabilities in the pre-modern world have received attention largely as subtitles in the history of medicine, charity hagiography or poverty (Ferguson 2003:8). Disability is a strictly cultural phenomenon, defined in different ways in different societies - it has also received criticism among historians as too constructivist or because it often omits the fact that 'impairment' is culturally defined too (Krötzel et al. 2016:2-3). Conceptualisation of impairment or even disability should not be entirely modern.

In antiquity, both terms were used to describe bodily and mental anomalies. Thus, participation restrictions, impairment and disability were regarded in the 1st century Greco-Roman context as illness. In ancient Greek texts, the words used to describe physical anomalies include 'maimed' (*peros*), 'much-maimed' (*anaperos*), ugliness (*aischos*), weakness (*astheneia*) and incompleteness (*ateleia*) (Rose 2003:11-14).

Suetonius records an instance where multiple interventions were required to heal various infirmities and disabilities in graphic words (Suetonius 1927):

A man of the people, who was blind, and another who was lame, together came to [*Vespasian*] as he sat on the tribunal, begging for help from their disorders which Serapis had promised in a dream; for the god declared that Vespasian would restore the eyes, if he would spit upon them, and give strength to the leg, if he would deign to touch with his heel. Though he had hardly any faith that this could possibly succeed, and therefore shrank even from making the attempt, he was at last prevailed upon by his friends and tried both things in public before a large crowd; and with success. (pp. 2-3)

In this account, blindness and lameness were regarded as sickness that required a healer. The friends of Vespasian prevail of him to heal them publicly giving an indication that this was of communal benefit. Blindness and lameness restricted the members from participating effectively as members of the community, and therefore, their healing was beneficial not only to them but also to the community.

Josephus, the Jewish historian in the first century AD, also records an eyewitness account on how he 'saw a Jew, Eleazar, casting out a demon before the Emperor Vespasian (*Antiquities* 8:45-49)' (Dunn & Twelftree 1980:210). In the 'Genesis Apocryphon, one of the Dead Sea Scrolls, Abraham exorcises Pharaoh through prayer and the laying on of hands (IQGA 20)' (Dunn & Twelftree 1980:210). The above three accounts demonstrate that ordinary citizens and those belonging to nobility all searched for healers and that their healing was of paramount communal benefit. Let us examine, albeit briefly, a number of authoritative documents that signal the lengths people went to looking for healers. The first document to look at is the *Iliad*.

## ■ *Iliad*

In Homer's epic *Iliad*, the opening lines of Book two mention some of the extant description of Greek healing methods and

give a clear sign that in the Greco-Roman context, ‘disease has divine causation and a divine cure’ (Galluzzo 2013:2, l. 1 passim). He refers to Apollo and his sister who were healers among the Greeks and refers to instances where they healed by their divine presence (Galluzzo 2013:2, ll. 5.445–5.448).

Thus, central to the epic is the ‘role that the divine plays in human health, as in all aspects of human existence’ (Wickkiser 2008:17). The *Iliad*, Wickkiser (2008) notes:

[P]aints a very vivid picture of war, replete with pitched battles, countless bloody wounds, and, in some cases, even extended descriptions of the treatment of those wounds. When Eurypylos suffers a thigh wound, ‘sweat flowed in streams from his head and shoulders, and dark blood poured from his gruesome wound’, and he beseeches Patroklos, ‘Save me, lead me back to my black ship, and cut the arrow from my thigh and wash the black blood from it with warm water, and spread on its gentle herbs’. Patroklos, taught by Achilles to heal, helps Eurypylos: ‘Patroklos stretched him out and cut with a knife the sharp arrow from his thigh, and washed with warm water the dark blood, and having crushed a bitter, pain-slaying root in his hands, applied it to the wound. The root stopped all his pains; the wound dried and the blood stopped flowing’ (ll. 11.804–848). (pp. 17–18)

Thus, Wickkiser notes that ‘the human healers in the *Iliad* who treat mortals’ wounds ... are called *iatroi* and include the warriors Machaon and Podaleirios’ (Wickkiser 2008:19).<sup>15</sup> By definition, ‘[a]n *iatros* is a man worth many other men when it comes to cutting out arrows and sprinkling on soothing herbs’ (Wickkiser 2008:19). The second document worth mentioning in this section is the *Odyssey*.

## ■ **Odyssey**

Wickkiser (2008:19) observes that ‘*Odyssey* likewise attests to the elevated status of and demand for *iatroi*... they are said to be

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15. Machaon, Podaleirios and their father Asklepios are the only *iatroi* mentioned by name in the *Iliad*.

called upon across the boundless earth (Od. 17.383-386)'. Wickkiser (2008):<sup>16</sup>

[E]umaïos in the *Odyssey*, speaks of the *iatros* as a craftsman (Od. 17.383-385). The evidence of the *Iliad* complements the *Odyssey*: the centaur Cheiron is said to have given Asklepios, blameless *iatros*, and father of the *iatroi* Machaon and Podaleirios, drugs (Il. 4.217-219), just as he also taught (Il. 11.830-832) natural healing to the hero Achilles. As with any other craft, the skills of natural healing had to be learned. (pp. 19-20)

He (Wickkiser 2008) further notes that:

[T]he father-son relationship between Asklepios and Machaon and Podaleirios demonstrates that natural healing was a craft often handed down within a family, as was typical of most crafts in antiquity. (p. 20)

The third document that illustrates healing in the Greco-Roman world is Beyond Homer.

## ■ Beyond Homer (6th century BC to 5th century BC)

By the early 6th century BC, respect for the *iatros* and his distinction from other healers is attested in Solon. In his prayer to the Muses, Solon lists *iatroi* among various occupations of men (Wickkiser 2008):

[O]thers are *iatroi* and have the task of Pieon of the many drugs. For these men there is no end of labors, since often a small discomfort becomes a great suffering. Nor could anyone alleviate it even by administering gentle drugs. But it is also the case that an *iatros* might quickly heal with his hands one overcome by wretched, painful illnesses. (pp. 57-62)

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16. Wickkiser (2008:19) quoting Od. 17.383-386, 'The great demand for *iatroi* across the earth alludes to their itinerant lifestyle. Many such healers were portrayed with walking sticks as symbols of this itinerant way of life. A 6th century BC relief now in Basel, one of the earliest surviving images of a Greek natural healer who is distinguished as such by cupping instruments, portrays the healer as holding a walking stick. It is also the walking stick, or caduceus, that becomes the distinctive symbol of Asklepios, on the Basel relief and on the walking stick.'

It is obvious that figures of the 6th century BC like the anonymous healer on the Basel relief, the ‘best of *iatroi*’ Aineos and their more fully-documented peer Democedes of Croton demonstrate that the prominence of some *iatroi* within society was at least as high as it had been in Homer.<sup>17</sup> In addition, the demand for skilled *iatroi* was so high that certain cities like Aegina had begun paying for such healers to serve the city (Wickkiser 2008:26).

My attention now turns to *iatroi* in literature.

## ■ *Iatroi* in literature

Alfageme is one among many authors of Greek comedy who has observed that ‘notable presence of ... healers’ is attested also in literature. The *iatros* makes his or her way into some of the earliest surviving comedy of Aristophanes. In the *Acharnians* of 425 BC, a man approaches Dikaiopolis for some balm to soothe his sore eyes, and Dikaiopolis barks, ‘[g]o away, scoundrel. I am not the public *iatros*’ (*Ach.* 1030) (Wickkiser 2008:19).

In Aristophanes’ *Ploutos*, produced in 388 BC, *iatroi* are striking for their unusual absence. The protagonists want to have the god *Ploutos* healed of his blindness so that his distribution of wealth will be more just. They think first to take him to an *iatros*, but as *Chremylos* cries rhetorically, ‘[i]s there an *iatros* in all the city? No, for there is no pay, and therefore no *techne*’ (*Pl.* 407–408). The fact that an *iatros* was the first and most obvious resort, however, indicates a general expectation both of the presence of and accessibility to *iatroi* (Wickkiser 2008:19).

‘Plato’s *Gorgias* includes a discussion of the office of public *iatros* not as something new, but as an office with which Socrates’ immediate audience was familiar without explanation’ (Wickkiser 2008:19). The author of *On the Sacred Disease*, often thought to

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17. Note that as Pleket (1995) has cautioned, many *iatroi* never attained high social status. The examples discussed here, however, demonstrate that some clearly could and did attain a comfortable level of status and wealth.

be the same author who wrote *Airs, Waters, Places*, wishes to prove the efficacy of natural healers as opposed to magicians, purifiers, charlatans and quacks. These latter, he argues, say that the divine, rather than the body itself, is the cause of disease (Wickkiser 2008):

It seems to me that it was people like today's magoi, purifiers, charlatans, and quacks who first made this disease [*of epilepsy*] a 'holy' one. It's just those sorts of people who claim to be especially holy and to know a lot. At a loss and having nothing to offer in the way of help, they alleged that the divine was the true cause of this disease and, so as not to appear completely ignorant, called it sacred ... But the cause of this illness is the brain, just as with the other major illnesses (Morb. Sacr. 1.22-28, 3.1-2; L. 6.354, 366). (p. 19)

The author of *Prognostic I* asserts that it is impossible to restore every patient to health (*II*. 1.8-1.9; *II*. 2.110).<sup>18</sup> He asserts (see Wickkiser 2008:35) that 'certain diseases are deemed beyond the capabilities of the *techne*, as are diseases that, although otherwise curable, had progressed too far'. Wickkiser (2008) continues:

The author of *On the Sacred Disease*, one of the earliest treatises of the corpus, alludes to such limits when he claims that epilepsy, or the 'sacred disease', is no less curable than any other disease, unless so much time has elapsed and the illness has become so entrenched that it is already stronger than the remedies applied (Morb. Sacr. 2.1-7; L. 6.364). In other words, 'once an illness has progressed beyond a certain point, the procedures of an *iatros* are insufficient to conquer it'. (p. 35)

In his evaluation, Wickkiser observes that 'this meant that the good *iatros* should refuse to undertake cases that were inherently incurable, or that were brought to the *iatros*' attention too late' (Wickkiser 2008:35). In his work, Wickkiser (2008) quoted *Prorrhetic II*:

[A]lso considered an early treatise by some, states bluntly that certain cases of gout are 'all incurable by human *techne*', at least as far as he knows (Prorrh. 2.8.1-4; L. 9.26). (p. 35)<sup>19</sup>

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18. Ancient critics attribute this to Hippocrates meaning it may belong to the second half of the 5th century BC.

19. The cases of gout that he considers incurable are those contracted by old people, or those who have concretions at their joints or those who do not exercise and suffer from constipation.

One treatise in particular, *On Art*, is quite specific and emphatic about these limits. Addressing the charge that *iatroi* refuse to undertake dire cases, the author responds that such cases are beyond the power of *iatrike*. For if a man deems possible either from a *techne* what does not belong to that *techne*, or from nature what does not grow up by nature, his ignorance is closer to madness than to lack of knowledge. For in cases where we have control due to our *techne* or to nature, there we can be craftsmen, but not otherwise (*de Arte* 8.8-12; L. 6.12-14). (p. 36)

*On Art* expressly notes the polemical reactions of the people when an *iatros* under pressure ignores conventional wisdom (Wickkiser 2008):

When people urge *iatroi* to take on incurable cases, they are admired by those who are so-called *iatroi*, but are laughed at by those who are truly *iatroi*. For those experienced in this craft [*of iatrike*] have no need of being blamed or praised so foolishly, but need praise only from those who have taken into account where the work of craftsmen has reached its limits and where it falls short (*de Arte* 8.24-30; L. 6.14). (p. 36)

Wickkiser (2008:38) correctly notes that ‘what makes the statements from the Greek world of the 5th century BC different is their constant reinforcement of the idea that the *techne*, not the practitioner, is limited’. Wickkiser (2008) further adds that:

[T]he Greeks, as mentioned above, conceived of *iatrike* as having limits, but at the same time as capable of expansion and improvement. Thus, in Greek culture, *iatrike* was delimited by its capabilities as well as its methods. The good *iatros* chose to abide by those limits. (p. 39)

The next section examines Asklepios, who was a popular healing deity.

## ■ Asklepios, a healer

Asklepios was one of the most popular healing deities in the Greco-Roman world (see Deborah Kamen 2012:186). Many patients sought divine healing from him. Wickkiser (2008) rightly notes:

[I]n the mythological tradition, Asklepios, son of Apollo and a mortal woman, was trained as a healer by the centaur Cheiron, and became



famous for his healing skills ... [and] throughout antiquity remained Asklepios' skill as a healer, both while mortal and later when deified. (p. 1)

He highlights the popularity of the cult by asserting that '[t]he cult of the Greek healing god Asklepios was one of the most popular cults in all of antiquity' (Wickkiser 2008:vi). The healing power of Asklepios has not gone without mention because he was to the adherents 'as a trained physician' (Wickkiser 2008:vii), and his worship:

[W]as one of the most popular cults in all of antiquity. Beginning in the 5th century BC, visitors flocked to the sanctuaries of this healing god in the hope of meeting him in a dream wherein he would perform a medical procedure or prescribe a regimen for cure. (p. 1)

Although the Asklepios-cult was as old as Homer, it got more following around 5th century BC probably because of its appeal 'ascribed to its personal appeal, especially among societies ravaged by war and plague' (Wickkiser 2008:34). In the Greek (Wickkiser 2008):

[T]he mythology of Asklepios from Homer through the 5th c. BC demonstrates a number of affinities between Asklepios and *iatroi*. First, in Homer, Asklepios is himself an *iatros* (Il. 4.193-194), as are his sons Machaon and Podalirios (Il. 2.731-732; 11.833). (p. 80)

Cheiron trains and guides Asklepios to heal his patients (Il. 4.218-4.219), just as the custom of handing a profession down from father to son leads us to believe that Asklepios in turn trained his own sons (Wickkiser 2008:80). So far, this section has looked into healing narratives in the Greco-Roman world. The following section looks at the healing methods within the same, aforementioned, context.

## ■ Healing methods in the Greco-Roman context

The first method to be discussed in this section is the healing by spittle.

## ■ Healing by spittle

Among the Greeks, spitting was seen as a means to ward off evil spirits or appease the gods. It was a superstitious practice. It could help in the ‘healing of certain diseases because the gods could be won over by this action’ (Yates 2015:n.p.). The act of spitting to bring good luck could involve spitting into one’s ‘bosom’ (Pliny 2012:35–36). Spittle was considered having healing qualities for epilepsy, neck pain and numbness of limbs. However, in application it was not supposed to be used directly on the affected area. In the case of neck pain, the spittle should be applied to the knees. For a numb limb, it should be spit into the bosom or placed on the eyelid. Also, spitting on the ground can increase the potency of any healing remedy (Pliny 2012:35–38).

Within the context of shamanism, spittle is also associated with healing cures. Within the context of shamanism, spittle is also associated with healing cures and a way for a master to transfer magical knowledge and power to the novice (Eliade & Trask 1964:6). Eliade describes a scenario where a shaman, trying to educate a novice about sickness that attacks various parts of the body, spits into the novice’s mouth (Eliade & Trask 1964):

Each time that he names a part of the body, he spits in the disciple’s mouth, and the disciple must swallow the spittle so that he may know the roads of the evils of Hell. (p. 6)

It goes without saying that spittle was believed to contain strong sympathetic connections back to the source from which it originated. Also, spittle was a common means of protection in the ancient world against evil spirits (Craffert 2008:293). Other shamanic uses of spittle included spitting on one’s hand to increase the power of a blow, application to sores, spitting on epileptics during seizure and spittle on a finger behind the ear was believed to calm mental anxiety (Craffert 2008:293; Dunn & Twelftree 1980:212). Other than using spittle to heal, the other common method was the use of power words.

## ■ Power words ‘come out of him’ Mark 9:25 and Philostratus, *Life* 4:20; Lucian, *Lies* 11, 16; PGM IV:3013

James D.G. Dunn and Graham H. Twelftree (1980) observe that:

[T]he phrase ‘I command you’ is familiar in magical incantations seeking to control demons and gods (e.g. PGM I:253,324; II:43-55; IV:3080; VII:331; XII:171), and the phrase ‘Never enter him again’ can be paralleled in Josephus, *Antiquities* 8:47 and Philostratus, *Life* 4:20. (p. 212)

Closely associated with power words was the practice of exorcism.

## ■ Exorcism

In case of illnesses that were caused by occupation by a foreign spiritual entity such as a demon, there was belief that relief would be attained through exorcism. For example, Tobit 6-8 narrates an episode relating to exorcism of a demon out of Tobias bride. There is sufficient documentation to show that dislodging a demon from a person also involved passing the demon over to another object. The Gospel of Mark 5:10-13 provides an incidence the demons left a man, a proof of cure effected-as in Josephus where the cure is proved by the demon disturbing a bowl of water (*Antiquities* 8:48) or in Philostratus when a statue is knocked over (*Life* 4:20). ‘But more likely it would be seen in the light of the ancient idea that in exorcism it was necessary to make the spirit pass from the person into some object (a pebble, a piece of wood) which could then be thrown away’ (Dunn & Twelftree 1980:212). Healing was also possible by use of a name of someone who was powerful.

## ■ Use of someone’s name

Jesus’ name was used and also Paul’s name. Demons recognised authority when some involved a figure known to them. Examples

of a use of powerful names are mentioned in Mark 9:38 and also the use by an unnamed man invoking the name of Jesus in Acts 19:13–16, which is a story about the sons of Sceva. Dunn and Twelftree rightly note that invocation of Jesus' name to perform healing miracles has a lasting influence. Invocation of Jesus' healing name is 'attested by the occurrences of his name in the incantations preserved in the magical papyri (PGM IV:1233, 3020)' (Dunn & Twelftree 1980:213).

It is therefore not misleading to conclude that the 'power attributed to Jesus' name ... reflects the considerable success of Jesus' own ministry' (Dunn & Twelftree 1980:213) of healing in the society. Thus, besides his other roles, Jesus was recognised and appropriated as a healer in both the Jewish and the Greco-Roman contexts. The use of a powerful name was very typical in exorcism. Other than the use of a powerful name, healers in the Greco-Roman world also used physical aids to ensure that healing took place.

## ■ Use of physical aid

Among the common practices in the Greco-Roman context was the use of physical aids during healing ceremonies. Tobit, for example, uses 'burning of the heart and the liver of a fish'; Josephus used the smell of a root, while the magical papyri report the use of amulets as physical aids used during healing ceremonies in Greco-Roman context (*Berakhoth* 34b). Although Jesus conducts healing, he does not use physical aid during his healing miracles save in Mark when he uses mud to heal the blind Bartimaeus.

The earlier 'Introduction' and 'Healers and healing narratives in the Greco-Roman context' sections looked at the healing narratives and healing methods in the Greco-Roman world, respectively. The next section now focuses on the New Testament's portrayal of Jesus as a healer.

## ■ New Testament's portrayal of Jesus as a healer

There exists a complex correlation between healing and socio-cultural wellness in both Greco-Roman and Jewish contexts with various dynamic interrelations between healer(s) and contemplators. W. Carter (n.d.) notes that some have seen:

[C]onnections between Jesus' actions, such as his working of miracles, and the broader culture, which included other miracle workers. He adds that there were certainly Jewish miracle workers, both in older biblical Jewish traditions (Elijah and Elisha) and in first-century Jewish traditions (Honi the circle drawer and Hanina ben Dosa).<sup>20</sup> (n.p.)

It is plausible, therefore, that Jesus and his disciples were well aware of the Greco-Roman culture as well as Jewish culture on how to deal with disease, disability, infirmity and demon possession. This is accessible because as we have seen above, there were numerous miracle workers in the Greco-Roman world.

Actually, Craig Keener (2009:40) rightly notes that 'most scholars today accept the claim that Jesus was a healer and exorcist, as his contemporaries would have understood such categories'. Crossan J. Dominic 'regards Jesus as a magician and miracle worker' (Crossan 2012:311). Howard Clark Kee helpfully alerts us of the fundamental differences that exist between the categories of magic, miracle and medicine. Magic, he claims, is the assumption of mysterious forces that the initiated magician can exploit for personal benefit (Kee 1988:127). According to Kee, miracle differs from magic on the basis that miracle works because of the will of the gods or God, as opposed to the will of an individual; magic assumes the magician can command God to act, whereas miracles are in accordance to God's divine plan (Kee 1988:127). For Kee, medicine is separate from both magic and miracle because medicine is the direct observation and understanding of nature and its natural order for the intention of healing (Kee 1988:126).

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20. See <http://www.bibleodyssey.org/people/related-articles/greco-roman-jesus.aspx>.

'Healing miracles' find prominent expression in the evangelists' portraits of 'Jesus' ministry' (Cadenhead 2008). In Mark's Gospel, they are especially prominent when the ratio of miracle stories to the length of the gospel is taken into account (Mk 1:21-28, 29-31, 32-34, 40-45, 2:1-12, 3:1-6, 7-12, 4:35-41, 5:1-20, 21-43, 6:35-44, 47-52, 53-56, 7:24-30, 31-37, 8:1-10, 22-26, 9:14-29, 10:46-52). Jesus' use of spittle to heal the blind (Mk 8:22-26; Jn 9:1-12) and the deaf-mute (Mk 7:31-37) parallels Vespasian's use of spittle to heal the blind man (Suetonius 1927:2-3) (Rhodes 1996):

It is important to note that two of the activities central to the ministry of Jesus-healing and exorcism-afford no real parallels with ancient Cynicism. Cynicism was an urban phenomenon that, paradoxically, encouraged both an unyielding antisocial individualism and yet, at the same time, begging for sustenance. (p. 462)

Notably, there is virtually unanimous agreement within Jesus research today that Jesus functioned as a healer or exorcist (Crossan 2012:332). 'Jesus' functioned as a 'communal healer, defender of spiritual purity, and novel teachings' and healings and exorcisms 'encapsulates his communal role' which 'within the Hellenistic world-view... was the central mechanism believed to gain power over both spiritual and physical realities' (Bostock & Riley 2012:2).

Jesus, viewed by people in the Greco-Roman world, as a 'healer and shamanic figure he certainly may have used any cultural techniques believed to work, including magical techniques' (Craffert 2008:294). In the New Testament times and in Greco-Roman context, some illnesses were attributed to demon possession, while other 'maladies such as fever, leprosy and paralysis' were not necessarily attributed to directly either to Satan or to the demon (Mk 1:29-31, 40-44, 2:1-12). There were conditions that could be attributed to Satan, either because the cause was inexplicable or because of a particular manifestation of Satan's rule over this age (Lk 13:16; Ac 10:38; cf. Mk 4:15; Mt 13:39). But the idea of demon possession was reserved for conditions where the individual seemed to be totally in the grip of an evil power (using his vocal chords, Mk 1:24, 5:7, 9; Ac 16:16;

convulsing him, Mk 1:26, 9:20–22,26; superhuman strength, Mk 5:3–4; Ac 19:16) (Dunn & Twelftree 1980:217).

Jesus, unlike other healers in the Greco-Roman world, ‘drove spirits from those who were demon possessed and healed a variety of illnesses ... his reputation within the Galilean region grew’ (Craffert 2008:296).<sup>21</sup> Jesus’ reputation as a healer aided in his healings and instilled a sense of faith in people despite having never met him (Mk 5:28–29; Mt 8:5–13).<sup>22</sup> Healings and stories about healing of a particular person are interconnected with the healer’s image and reputation within the ancient world. In the Greco-Roman world more than anything else, reputation was the way a healer was identified.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, as the reputation of the individual grew so did the faith and belief of those who came to be healed. Faith is a powerful tool to be employed during shamanic healings (Harré & Parrott 1996:128).

Strong beliefs in the abilities of those who heal have been central for shamans, healers and miracle workers. Pieter Craffert describes the role that faith has in the healing process for both Jesus and shamans (Bostock & Riley 2012):

Belief in the healer or in the healing instruments is a powerful means of symbolic and meaning transfer. Belief in the ability of the healer to heal has been one of the hallmarks of the healing practitioners over the centuries. Therefore, it is perfectly possible that if Jesus was a Galilean shamanic figure, he could indeed heal some of the people who trusted his ability and power to heal. (p. 290)

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21. ‘In other words, his healings and exorcisms are to be seen as closely connected to who and what he was; a shamanic figure who could heal because he had close interactions with the divine world, had often experienced various altered states of consciousness, was spirit possessed, and was acknowledged by his followers and the crowds as a Galilean shamanic figure’ (Craffert 2008:296).

22. ‘Jesus’ social personage includes not only his self-understanding as a shamanic figure who has direct interaction with the divine world, but also the dynamic and force of healing stories that brought about a public sense of faith and the actual belief of people in the healer’ (Craffert 2008:296).

23. ‘[I]n the Greco-Roman world in general, reputation, more than anything else, was the key to identifying a healer’ (Craffert 2008:296).

Morton Smith (1978) remarkably notes similarities between Apollonius of Tyana and Jesus of Nazareth:

Both were itinerant miracle workers and preachers, rejected at first by their towns' people and brothers, though the latter eventually became more favorable. An inner circle of devoted disciples accompanied each. Both were credited with prophesies, exorcisms, cures, and an occasional raising of the dead ... both affected epigrammatic utterances and oracular style. At the end of their lives, Apollonius escaped miraculously from his trial; Jesus, executed, rose miraculously from the dead ... both were believed by their followers to be sons of gods, beings of supernatural power, and both were accused by their enemies for being magicians. (p. 85)

## ■ Jesus healing by spittle

Carson opines that when used by Jesus, spittle was a source of blessings and not curse. This is similar to the gesture of Jesus touching the leper which resulted in healing and not contamination (Carlson 1991:364). In Mark 8:22-26, we find an instance where Jesus uses his spittle to heal a blind man – probably in the Greco-Roman world, he would be said to possess shamanic powers. The context for this healing being that he had arrived in Bethsaida, and some people come up to Jesus and beg him to lay hands on a blind man. Agreeing, Jesus takes the blind man by the hand and leads him out of the village. Jesus then spits on the man's eyes and lays his hands upon him asking, '[d]o you see anything?' The blind man opens his eyes and responds, 'I see men; but they look like trees, walking'. Jesus again lays his hands upon the blind man's eyes and is then completely restored (Meyer 2002:23).

Biblical cases of spittle being used to heal are rare outside of the Gospels; therefore, non-biblical sources must be used to find its healing significance.<sup>24</sup> Spittle within many ancient cultures was believed to have great magical importance; in fact, the power

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24. 'Even the solitary case of this type of belief in Leviticus 15:8 is not healing spittle but defiling spittle. We must therefore seek to understand the significance of healing spittle from non-biblical contexts' (Hull 1974:76).



of a man was believed to be in his saliva and can be used to perform all sorts of wonders (Hull 1974:76). The Pyramid Texts of Egypt are a prime source for instances of spittle being used to heal as well as harm. Isis is claimed to have kneaded earth with spittle from Ra's drool to form a powerful sacred serpent used to then attack Ra. Describing another battle between Horus and Set, the Pyramid texts explain that Horus lost an eye during a fight with his father's evil brother. It wasn't until Set was defeated that Thoth – the Egyptian deity of language and magic – spits on Horus' eye and is healed (Hull 1974:76). We also find in the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* a creation myth in which Jesus animates sparrows with only clay and spittle (Frayer-Griggs 2013).<sup>25</sup>

Jesus' healing power was recognised by his distractors (Mk 3:220), the demons (Mk 5:7), ordinary people (Mt 9:35) and the Roman authorities (Lk 7:3); the wonder that was associated with Jesus' healing power and a testimony that the scribes among others attempted to discredit Jesus healing power by claiming that his healing abilities were aided by Beelzebub. The scribes, in a bid to turn people away from meeting Jesus with requests for healing, argued that '[h]e is possessed by Beelzebub, and by the ruler of demons, he casts out demons' (Mk 3:22). This is evidence that there were those who tried to downplay his healing power. Jesus' healing 'prowess must therefore have been securely grounded in historical reminiscence and be of unquestionable authenticity' (Dunn & Twelftree 1980:213).

Jesus performed his healing miracles in the synagogues, in people's homes, along the streets, during meals, by speaking a healing word for someone far away. He did not have a designated place for healing every disease and affliction.

Dunn and Twelftree (1980) rightly conclude that:

[J]esus was remembered as one who cast out demons with authority during his ministry – a memory preserved both within and without

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25. The use of clay by Jesus is symbolic of the creation-related myth in Genesis of God as a potter creating Adam out of dust (see Harry n.d.:21).

Christian tradition. Indeed, his reputation was such that his name was frequently evoked by would-be exorcists both after and even during his ministry. (p. 215)

From this I think we can infer that one very important aspect of the Gospel evangelist's portrait of Jesus is show Jesus as a healer in ways radically different from healers in the Roman emperor cult. For the Greco-Roman context, it is clear that he just acted within the socio-cultural context but he transcended the existing historical circumstances in which he found himself. His healing miracles were counter cultural. This explains why many abandoned the existing healer and went to Jesus for healing. What then is the implication of Jesus as a healer in the African context? The next section has all the details.

## ■ Implications for healing and wellness in Africa

Christian scholarship has been nervous about making too much of the miracles attributed to Jesus and obsessed with the historicity of miracle accounts largely informed by their unsupernatural and sceptical Western philosophical approach to God and how he breaks through to humanity to perform mighty acts.

Craig Keener quoting Roschke, 'healing' emphasises that Africa culture has better foundations for understanding healings and exorcisms than western cultures does (Keener 2011:15). Jenkins 'Reading' 72 notes that 'African and Asian readers can identify strongly' with biblical perspectives on healing, apocalyptic and spiritual realities, which feel more relevant in their contexts than to typical westerners (Keener 2011:15).

In African conceptualisation of reality, which is notoriously religious, claims of supernatural intervention and messengers of a deity performing miracles do not affirm to our philosophical conceptualisation of reality but propagate belief in God and his benevolent messengers. In a similar vein, African philosophical

tradition is acutely aware of an antisocial malevolent being with a host of messengers whose main interest is to disrupt shalom in society and cause physical harm to members of society and possession, some making them antisocial and unproductive in members of the community. This disability caused by evil spiritual beings on members of the community restricts their participation in the life of society. Thus, there is need for divine intervention through any of the main mediums of deity. With the coming of Jesus as a healer, many Africans accept him mainly because of his ability to heal and secondly for the salvation he brings. Thus, 'from this standpoint, of the Gospels, the mighty deeds of Jesus, healings and exorcisms alike were the products of the power which flowed through him as a holy man' (Borg 1991:67). For this reason, Jesus as a healer has the ability to disconnect an individual(s) from an inherited tradition of infestation by malevolent spirits. As consequence, a family that isn't aware of a direct attack by malevolent spirits accepts Jesus as a healer, as a preventive mechanism and as life insurance. This conscious choice is informed by the stories of those suffering as individuals and families because of what is known as generational curses.

Secondly, accepting Jesus as a healer-saviour rescues those already trapped and gives immunity thus preventing further attacks. In this regard, Jesus' healings and exorcism are taken as an intrinsic part of his proclamation of the kingdom (rule) of God (Keener 2011).

Africa had multiplicity of healers, medicine men. The healing specialist protected life and individuals from disability, infirmity and participation restriction within the society, which was aided by demonic interference or attached by malevolent spirits. In this case, the idea of healers, medicine and medicine men existed; therefore, receiving Jesus as a healer once directly associated to the deity is a romanticised idea.

Jesus is understood to protect life. Ill health threatens life and progeny. In the African conceptualisation of life, it is tied to continuation of life. A healer is one who through divine intervention

or otherwise reduces the threat to continuity. In this regard, the value of life is in raising children. A family that has children has a big name, status in society. At the core of the interpretation of life is health. The body houses the spirit, and so, if the body is sick, the spirit is also sick.

Africans perceive Jesus Christ not just as a saviour but as a healer whom we choose as a means to living a healthy and fulfilling life. We do not just accept Jesus just to be free from disease or because of the promise that accepting him gives life and life in abundance. For Africans, our relationship with Jesus is a (WHO 1946):

[D]ynamic process of change and growth that leads to a state of shalom – a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. (n.p.)

Africans are very proactive in making choices that reduce threat to life and protect from disease or infirmity. We are open to receive Jesus as a healer who surpasses the existing healers who are limited to identify human agents as threats to life.

Jesus through his healing miracles frees, re-socialises and reinstates back to the society. One threat in Africa is that of isolation as a result of disability, participation restriction, disease or infirmity. This becomes a threat to life of the community, not just the individual. We thrive in community, and individuals within the community will do all that is humanly possible to avert threat even if it means receiving Jesus momentarily as a life insurance.

In Africa, healing was largely confined to individuals tied to spaces using herbs and amulets. The relationship between the healer and the healed was one of awe and fear. The relationship between Jesus and those healed was one of freedom and faith.

Furthermore, Jesus' method of healing the sick is well placed within the African social-religious environment of blessing and cursing.

## ■ Jesus' use of spittle in Mark 3

Africans use spittle for blessing (blessing in this context is attached to health and wellbeing) and cursing (direct curtailment of health and wellbeing). Among the Ameru, spittle is used by an elder to bless a younger person when one merits. If one said something that would compromise their health or wellbeing, it would be advised to 'spit that saliva'.

## ■ Speaking words that have restorative power (*dunamis*)

Not everyone in the African culture can speak words that are considered powerful or restorative. There are at least two categories of people whose words are valued and revered. Firstly, the elders. Because of their age and based on the fact that they have experienced life for many years, they are respected and their words are heeded. Secondly, anyone who has extraordinary wisdom that is seen to be of divine origin or a blessing from the ancestors. This person, irrespective of age, is respected and the words that come from such a person are paid attention to.

Because Jesus was a young man by the African standards, the power of his words is based on the second category. His wisdom was of divine origin, and he is the one the Old Testament prophets spoke of. In fact, he commands more authority than the communal sages whose knowledge is pegged to the longevity on earth and not divine connection.

## ■ Illness and disease that threaten life

What makes life valuable is the continuity of life. Jesus' restoration to life of the only daughter of the widow of Nain; resurrection of the Lazarus, the boy child in the family of Martha and Mary; and healing the lady with the issue of blood are more than miracles. These were healers' acts of mercy. There is no life without the

descendants. The life promised by Christ in John 10:10 is for progenies.

## ■ Illness and disease threaten order

The tangible effect of conflict with disability, disease or infirmity is experienced at three levels: The first of these is intrapersonal. This is often manifested as torment through physical illness limited to a person's mind and body. The second conflict is interpersonal, which is manifested through broken relationships, social ostracism – among the Ameru (*Ni arumi*). The third form is transpersonal conflict. This refers to conflict between the humans and the spirit world, often symbolised by sudden disaster resulting in death or grave injury (Rutere 2012). Fadiman (1979:6) noted much earlier that 'the ancestors were quick to anger and could punish the living for their transgressions by sending them misfortune, illness, and even death'. This interconnectedness of the view of sickness and spiritual world seems to follow ancient orientations. This, therefore, is the supposition of the matter.

## ■ Supposition

This section has investigated Jesus as a healer within the broader societal and religious lens of Greco-Roman cultural meanings of infirmity, illness and disease, their manifestations and social interactions. It has established ways in which the African conceptualisation of health and wellness has been impacted by situating Jesus as a healer in the Greco-Roman context. The discussions contained herein have demonstrated that Africans receive Jesus Christ not just as a saviour but as a healer whom they choose as a means to living a healthy and fulfilling life. They not only accept Jesus to be healed from diseases but also because of the promise that accepting him gives life in abundance. The relationship with Jesus as saviour, protector and healer remains a dynamic process of change and growth that leads to a

state of shalom – a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. Ingrained in their nature, Africans are very proactive in making choices that reduce threat to life and protect from disease or infirmity. It is this reason that makes the reception of Jesus as a healer who surpasses the existing healers who are limited as human agents fashionable because he is able to vanquish threats to life without any need for intermediaries.

## Section 2

# Contextual paradigms





# A feminist perspective to the discourses of Jesus' healings in contemporary Africa

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## ■ Abstract

The life, ministry, death, resurrection and the person of Jesus Christ remain the central tenets of the Christian mystery. This contribution seeks to examine from a feminist perspective, Jesus' healing in the African continent in contemporary times. Many African Christian women in the continent are familiar with the healing deeds of Jesus in the gospel narratives. A good number go to church with the aim of obtaining prayers for healing from the clergy. These women talk about Jesus, believe

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in Jesus and relate closely to Jesus, testifying of what Jesus has done for them (Oduyoye 2001:51). Using two cases of rural Christian human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) infected widows in Kenya, this chapter analyses their experiences and discourses of Jesus' healing capabilities in their lives. Analysis of these cases is made by adopting a criteria for feminist Christology with focus on its liberative approach with an intention to investigate how one's understanding of the life of Jesus can help alter present circumstances (Isherwood 2001:11) and embracing experience as a source and norm (Young 1990:60-62) by starting from the lived realities of women. A further evaluation of the discourses of Jesus' healing is made by way of Christological models (Nasimiya 2005) and the metaphor Jesus Christ is medicine (Maseno-Ouma 2014), both of which originate from the African continent. This contribution shows the contradictions these widows living with HIV and AIDS encounter in their lives with Jesus' healings which remain open-ended, ever emerging and is one of the numerous attributes of Jesus Christ.

**Keywords:** Feministic; Liberation; Metaphor; Medicine; HIV/AIDS.

## ■ Feminist perspectives

Feminist perspectives place gender at the centre of inquiry and aim at identifying the structures and conditions that uphold a social order that privileges men over women. These perspectives raise awareness of the existence and functioning of these structures with the aim of offering solutions to mitigate the problem. Feminist theories endeavour to explain which structures facilitate women's oppression and, from its inception, have been pluralistic in nature. According to Rosemary Tong, the feminist theory is a conglomeration of various perspectives that attempt to explain women oppression and to proffer solutions for women's liberation (Maseno-Ouma & Kilonzo 2011:46; Tong 1989:1). For example, the liberal feminist uses perspectives inspired by the Marxists theory to explain how an

economic variable is the main cause for women's oppression. On the other hand, radical feminists focus on culture and how patriarchy is a system characterised by dominance hierarchy, competition and power. A 'psychoanalytic feminist finds the root of women's oppression embedded deep in her psyche, as a result of socialization and the internalization of asymmetrical power structures' (see Tong 1989:2-9, cited in Maseno-Ouma & Kilonzo 2011:46).

The socialist feminist which is the perspective that I shall follow employs various social categories and uses multiple social lenses to explain the complexity of women oppression (Maseno-Ouma & Kilonzo 2011:46). To the existentialist feminist, a woman is oppressed by virtue of 'otherness'. This implies that a woman is regarded as 'other' because she is not a man. Unlike all the other feminist thoughts that attempt to find integration and agreement to represent how women see the world, the post-modernist feminist refuses to centre and cement separate thoughts by overemphasising difference (Tong 1989:2-9). In this section, feminist perspectives include criteria that encompass the following pertinent aspects.

## ■ At the level of knowledge production

Traditional approaches to knowledge production held that what was researched and written was unproblematic and value free and generally reflected the truth. A feminist perspective shows that there are a number of influences on the conduct of research, and they offer a critique of traditional knowledge production.

According to Lovheim, a feminist perspective on epistemology, that is, questions about the nature and production of knowledge, is alive to the fact that knowledge is not neutral but situated and produced by individuals within a personal, historical and social context who are in positions or situations to act and make themselves heard. In sum, knowledge is deeply connected to identity, social relations, power and agency (Lovheim 2013:15).

## ■ Knowledge is situated

In this case, one is interested in the knowledge that reflects the particular perspectives of the fieldwork participants. Consequently, noting your respondent's specificity, location, partiality and finitude, one also chooses to recognise that the participants are the experts and authorities on their own experiences.

From a feminist perspective, the researcher is not value free but espouses values that intrude into one's research at different points in the process of research such as the formulation of research questions in the analysis of data. Indeed, as researchers cannot be value free, they ought to be self-reflective about the role played by values.

In sum, no research is value free and that researchers ought to be self-reflective about the role played by values. Further, there are multiple perspectives and differing claims to truth, and thus, researchers continuously make choices within the process of research and its analysis to negotiate the meaning of the final outcome.

There have been challenges to knowledge production emanating from a gender perspective. Feminist and gender researchers question the absence of women and of marginalised groups whose accounts are missing from the taken-for-granted stories.

## ■ Feminist perspectives at the level of methodology (the assumptions that guide how particular research is to be undertaken)

The methodology for feminist or gender inquiries (assumptions that guide how research is to proceed or to be conducted) is provided in Clark and Chiou (2013:35). At the heart of these assumptions is the politics of transformation. These include:

1. Methodologies that foreground embodiment and personal experiences.
2. Concern regarding context.
3. Power's reproduction through everyday life.
4. Foregrounding subjects previously overlooked, the other whose bodies of images have been invisible and the way they are inscribed in relation to systems of power.
5. Participatory approaches that recognise the agency of the participants.
6. Taking women's self-understanding seriously and giving voice to women's experiences within society.

## ■ Feminist perspectives at the level of method (means of gathering evidence)

The methods we use to obtain data are not neutral, while at the same time they are not totally laden with intellectual inclinations (Bryman 2004:4). Rather, there is a relative autonomy that holds when one employs various research methods to my study.

## ■ Subject or object nature of the research

Engage with the people and not remain simply as respondents to research instruments. It grants them voice to be heard and appreciated as bearers of important knowledge or experiences that only they have. Various methods can be used to gather materials from those whose accounts are missing from the taken-for-granted stories. Rosemary Radford Ruether contends that the use of women's experiences makes feminist perspectives unique (Ruether 1993:10). Specifically, the innovations from the broader influences of feminism perspectives include pointing to the following:

1. How power relations are maintained and sustained and to whose benefit.
2. Self-reflexivity in knowledge production.

## ■ Feminist perspectives to the discourses of Jesus' healing in Africa

In this section, the term 'feminist Christology' encompasses theological reflection on the person and deeds of Jesus Christ. As shall be demonstrated, feminist Christology is compactly intertwined with women's social, political, cultural and contemporary lived realities and also serves to empower them.

For the purpose of advancing, we adopt the criterion for a feminist Christology as expounded by Lisa Isherwood. She contends that feminist Christology takes a liberative approach in redescribing the lives of women through the life of Jesus (Isherwood 2001:11).

Two case studies demonstrate how feminist Christology is important for these widows and how their understanding of Jesus is of help to them during difficult moments of life. These widows living with HIV and AIDS are well aware that their immune systems are not on optimum function and that their dependence on retroviral drugs brings with it additional side effects. In this condition of ill health, it is possible to reveal how they are empowered to press on.

I set out to explore a theological question on Christology among Christian widows. The two cases included in this chapter emanate from a period of ethnographic fieldwork. By living with and engaging with Christian widows in a rural community in Western Kenya, I gathered new knowledge from these widows and tried to make sense of it using tools of scholarship in theology, gender studies and anthropology.

A closer look at the full ethnography is available in Maseno-Ouma's (2014:65-219) book, *How Abanyole African Widows Understand Christ: Explaining Redemption Through the Propagation of Lineage*. The ethnography was PhD research in 2006. The two given names used for the widows (Anita and Angela) are second level pseudonyms. First level pseudonyms

used are found in the above book already published, in the public domain and to be referenced as such.

## ■ Case 1: Anita

Anita was married in 1968, and together with her husband, she had 10 children, 9 of whom are alive, with ages ranging between 34 years and 15 years. Her eldest child is a son, and he is polygamous with three wives. Her husband passed away in 2003. He had been ill for a few months prior to his death. According to Anita:

‘On that fateful night, I was indoors the entire time, sitting next to him. At about 1 am, his eyes changed, he lost speech and was unable to eat. In that night he was so sweaty, so I just started singing songs. His body was feverish and his breath ended and that is how he passed away at 2 am. In the house were some other women and together we washed him up and dressed him, ready for the funeral. It was only after that that I started screaming, right after he was dressed. He was placed on a mattress and put in the living room’. (Anita, female, date unknown)

Anita has been a widow for many years. We proceeded into Anita’s home, a semi-permanent house that was roofed with iron sheets. After a word of prayer by Anita, we sat down and she introduced seven of her family members who were present.

Anita is HIV positive, and these are some of her prayers on different occasions:

‘Thank you, God, who is able, with us, as our shepherd and our keeper. Lord, you have given us wellness this day that we can meet. Lord, we have met and may all that we have planned and contributed and learnt be acceptable to you. Lord, give us health so that next time, our visitor finds us all present. We ask all these in the name of Jesus Christ’. (Anita, female, date unknown)

Anita said that as a widow, it is very difficult when she is ill, as treatment requires money. She feels miserable about this and keeps asking, ‘what was it?’. She often begs for wholeness from



the Lord. But where does Anita draw strength from and what gives her the motivation to keep on living? With whose power or enablement does she carry on day by day?

Here, I reduplicate her story which I have mentioned elsewhere. In another meeting, Anita mentioned that as she goes to bed to sleep, she prays:

'Lord, it is you who will thoroughly examine me, touch me and keep me today. I have no one else who can do this for me'. (Anita, female, date unknown)

Anita then added:

'After that prayer, I think that I may not wake up the next day and the next day, I just find that I have woken up and have some strength. The Lord has strengthened me and breathed in me'. (Anita, female, date unknown)

Anita is often sickly and has been on and off medication for a long time. She missed some meetings and explained to the group of other widows how she was unwell.

Anita expresses her daily experience, that of near death, that her daily retiring to bed may be her final action in this life. Her prayer tells us that she is conscious, that she could be a breath away to another state and that lingering in her mind is the possibility of not awaking again. But just how does Anita live this way? Whom or what does she rely on to cope with the reality of her daily existence?

It is inevitable that from her prayers, we get a glimpse of her ideas about divinity. Indeed, when asked who Jesus Christ is to her, she states:

'There are times I can be weak and my children take me to hospital and after that I get some strength to walk. Jesus is my guardian because after I cry, if I die, how shall this home be like? Jesus treats me and passes through the doctors and I get some health. I then try to do the work that I was doing. Jesus has to be everything to me, to enable me in all things since I now have become both a father and mother to my children, bearing responsibilities for both parents at once'. (Anita, female, date unknown)

Anita names Jesus as a guardian whom she cries to when thoughts of death emerge. She is convinced that Jesus treats her and grants her wellness and wholeness. Anita exhibits her dependence on Jesus, who sustains her by breathing in her and granting her daily life. This sustenance is a daily breath of life, and Anita is convinced that she arises each morning having some strength owing to daily breathing of the divine into her, granting her inner strength together with wellness. As such, Anita relates to Jesus as one whom she cries to, as one who is so close. Jesus is close enough to hear her cry, treat her and be everything to her (Maseno-Ouma 2015:6).

## ■ Case 2: Angela

Angela was born in 1964. She was widowed in 2004. She has four children. She has secretarial training. Angela and her husband lived together in an urban town away from the rural area. While there, she also tried to work by selling some items door to door in order to add onto the household income. When the children were older, this being nine years later, she decided to leave the urban area for the rural area.

Upon the death of her husband, she was in shock once the reality struck her. She began to run around wailing. She was worried about how she was going to take care of her children single handed, because they needed school fees, and her health, and at the same time, her permanent house under construction was nearing completion.

Being HIV positive, she gave advice to fellow women saying that women should take mentorship from senior women in the village and read the Bible, especially Proverbs and Psalms. In this way, they can keep busy and avoid idling at home. Angela pointed out that, even if you had thousands of friends, during times of poverty, ill health and loneliness you remain with Jesus alone.

For Angela, Jesus is her healer because when she had material affluence, she frequented the hospital with her children, who fell sick. However, after the death of her husband, and reduced finances, the children are no longer as sickly as they used to be.

For Angela, it was as a result of praying for healing and that illness may not come to her or her children. This is her emic explanation of happenings in her home as regards health.

## ■ Analysis of case 1 and case 2

The central concern from a feminist perspective is how Anita's and Angela's view of Jesus' own life experiences can help alter their own life situations. This case demonstrates the use of their experiences as a source and norm by foregrounding their lived realities. It is in their individual lived reality and existential struggles that they figure out who Jesus is to them. Their understanding of Jesus Christ is in this case useful in helping them cope through their daily situations as a widow, a mother and a person living with HIV and AIDS. Their desire to see their children grow to adulthood prompts them to pray for healing, to be touched and strengthened. Angela sees that time spent with Jesus in prayer and in reading the word keeps widows away from depressing thoughts. The theologian Teresia Hinga (1992) outlines that a relevant Christology for African women is one which presents Christ as is on the side of the poor and oppressed. Christ also needs to be on the side of the hopeless, thereby giving them power and agency.

In addition, the theologian Nasimiyu Wasike has aptly shown that Christology is a place where we envision the redemption from all sin and evil. To her, it is a symbol that encompasses our vision of authentic humanity and the fulfilled hopes of all humans (Nasimiyu 1989:129). A further evaluation of the discourses of Jesus' healing is made by way of Christological models (Nasimiyu 2005). For Nasimiyu, in the cosmological model, Christ is the cosmological restorer. In her extensive studies, she has proceeded to show how Jesus initiated the restoration of individuals and societies to wholeness. Christ's healing of people is nearer to the African reality and speaks especially to the women, who nurture the sick back to health (Nasimiyu 1989:131). In his life, Jesus

endeavoured to restore individuals and the societies to wholeness (Nasimiyu 1989:133).<sup>26</sup>

Anita's case elicits additional analysis of the discourses of Jesus' healing in the use of metaphors. A metaphor can be defined as that figure of speech whereby we speak of one thing in terms that are suggestive of another. Metaphors 'always has the character of "is" and "is not": an assertion is made but as a likely account rather than a definition' (McFague 1987:33).

According to Sallie McFague, metaphorical theology suggests that for doing theology, it is necessary to be conscious of the constructive character of all human activities, including our religions, and that religious and theological language is metaphorical (McFague 1987:21-22). Thus, metaphorical theology can be understood basically as an intermediary theology that relies on a variety of literary forms such as parables, autobiographies, poems, confessions and stories as a way from religious experience to theology. As an intermediary theology, it is not closed and finished, rather it is of many sorts, open, hesitant and unfinished (McFague 1975).

The metaphor Jesus Christ is medicine (Maseno-Ouma 2014) is drawn from the declaration of a widow, saying Jesus Christ is true medicine. In the Swahili translation, *Yesu ndiye dawa* implies more than medicine. In its context, it includes that Jesus heals and is also the solution. The two widows noted that it is possible when a spouse dies of another illness, people may insist that the death was occasioned by HIV- and AIDS-related illness. This leaves a widow very anxious.

The two widows said that Jesus Christ was their healer and the present healer of their bodies. As one of the widows was

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26. The theologian Diane Stinton attempts to suggest plausible models for contemporary African Christology. When she tries to address the aspect of Jesus as healer and protector, she uses the model of Jesus as a life-giver within which she includes all those aspects of Jesus being creator, preserver, provider, planner, architect, healer and protector (Stinton 2004:55-108).

advanced in age, this left her susceptible to diseases that set in, during old age. For her, Jesus was the one healing her body.

But again, as a metaphor, Jesus as a medicine remains open and unfinished. Indeed, this metaphor could be problematic, in that not all medicines function as expected. There are suggestions, for example, that the introduced anti-retroviral medications (ARVs) are poisonous and should not be administered because they come with adverse contraindications.

## ■ Wellness

It could be understood that these widows living with HIV and AIDS are often susceptible to opportune infections and desire protection from these infections, besides other forms of protection and keeping. When protected, they may be safe from disease and ill health. When kept, they would be able to take up the tasks they ordinarily should accomplish.

In making a choice for the Christological image, Jesus Christ is medicine, these widows are responding to their existential need of wellness, which is generally expensive and not affordable by many. By saying that Jesus passes through doctors and treats them, they acknowledge the healing power of Jesus to them. In this way, these widows indicate their dependence on Jesus for healing and protection.

Medicine is ingested or applied onto a person. In Christian circles, it is said that Jesus lives inside those who receive him in their hearts. This indwelling, like a metaphor, resonates with the intake of medicine which works from within to secure healing.

But, if Jesus Christ is their medicine, why were they not cured of HIV and AIDS? Although some were still infected, they declared Jesus Christ a healer. This may seem a contradiction, because they keep on speaking of medicine that has not yet cured them in totality? In the Christian settings in which these widows find themselves, the reference to Jesus as the wounded healer indeed

seems paradoxical. According to the theologian Henri Nouwen, Jesus' bearing of pain and suffering serves as an example to ministers in service to their church and community. To him, ministers are just as human as the believer and by recognising their shared woundedness, they can ultimately use this as a source of strength and healing (Nouwen 1979:16). On the other hand, for these widows, we can say that this is a stretch of belief or of faith. These widows infected or affected by HIV and AIDS choose to speak beyond what they feel at present, and in so doing, they keep hope alive.

At the same time, I suggest that though their HIV and/or AIDS status has not yet changed, they experience Jesus' healing from re-occurring infections, such as coughs, allergies, skin infections, fever and headaches, to mention but a few, and as such Jesus Christ is indeed their medicine, healing them over and over again. Feminist perspectives make explicit the contradictions widows living with HIV and AIDS encounter in their lives with Jesus' healings which remain open-ended and are ever emerging.



# Orality and memory – Jesus’ *healing* of the leper in Mark 1:40–45: An example of the *re-enactment* of Jesus’ healing ministry in contemporary African Churches

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## ■ Abstract<sup>27</sup>

This chapter discusses the roles of orality and memory in the New Testament narratives on Jesus' ministry. Orality is exhaustively searched for and defined. The views of some scholars are acknowledged, especially that of Ong (2002:5). His analysis exposes basic characteristics found quite *ad rem* for the examination of the *words* of Jesus which later came to be encoded in memory before they were put down as literary communication by the evangelists. Memory came to be seen as a capability of the mind that facilitated the storage of information such as those given by Jesus himself. From the memory, treasured information was retrieved, recalled and remembered by the earliest *Jesus People* as they *remembered* Jesus' words even after a long period of time when he was no more with them.

Findings from these two concepts were found useful and thus applied to explicate the story of the leper in Mark 1:40–45. The oral traits embedded in the structure of the narrative are x-rayed and outlined. The orally *recalled* gist of the story was isolated, and the *bare facts* laid bare. A brief analysis of Mark 1:40–45 in its synoptic tradition was presented and discussed. It was found that, apart from Matthew's and Luke's emendations of and additions to the Markan original, the story is an authentic account of Jesus' compassionate show of mercy to the leprous man at a time when the presence of the leper was a dreaded one that got him disconnected from his society.

The essay is *re-read* to expose the narrative as one of those gospel accounts that enhances and promotes the *re-enactment* of Jesus' healing tradition by many a contemporary African healer-prophets, priests and *Men of God*. In light of the *Reader-Response Method* that I have adopted to process this contribution, it was discovered that the meaning of the healing of the leper is

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27. Second paper read at the Department of Theology and Religions, Faculty of Theology, University of Pretoria, South Africa, on the theme *Jesus the Messianic Healer: An African Perspective*, 05–08 July, 2018.

being re-created, re-shaped, re-furbished and re-formulated by the African 'Men of God' as are manifested in their exploits of power, signs and wonders in the *name of Jesus* that are now commonplace in the African churches today. Examples and instances of modern-day healing ministrations are provided from Prophet T.B. Joshua's *Prayer, Deliverance and Healing Ministrations* regularly aired on *Emmanuel TV, Live* of the SCOAN, Lagos, Nigeria. The chapter concludes, *inter alia*, with Jesus' caveat provided in Luke 11:17b–23, namely that his followers would drive out demons and heal the disabled by the *finger of God*.

**Keywords:** Orality; Memory; Leper; T.B. Joshua; African Pentecostalism.

## ■ Orality

Orality is the thinking and verbal expression of people in cultures that have not developed writing and print technologies. Orality is classically describable as the tendency to cultivate the spoken rather than the written form of language. Deciphering the contours of orality uncovers the nitty-gritty implicated in oral traditions. Deep investigation on orality reveals a lot about the oral peoples' socio-economic life-styles, their politics, their religious customs and institutions as well as their human cultural development. In a general way, orality describes 'the structures of consciousness found in cultures that do not employ, or employ minimally, the technologies of writing' (Wikipedia n.d.b). Scholars agree that majority of languages had, over the years, remained unwritten such that the fundamental oral nature of languages still remains permanent and noticeable in literary texts (Ong 2002:5). Scholars agree that this is because oral cultures remain living cultures in their own right. Some other exponents make a distinction between 'primary orality' and 'secondary orality', that is, a 'primarily oral culture' vis à vis a 'secondarily oral culture'. According to Ong (2002:11), 'primary orality' is the thought and its verbal expression in cultures that are 'totally untouched by any knowledge of writing or print'.

There is no doubt that this was the case of the 1st century Palestinians during which time Jesus *spoke* his words, performed miracles, exorcised demoniacs and raised the dead. Jesus' oral sound possessed super powers. Speech as essentially an oral event is the expression of sound. As sound, it wells up from living thought that is dwelling within someone's mind, the speaker's heart, this time around, Jesus himself as a living entity. His speeches, *ipsissima verba Jesu*, were not ignored by his hearers. As he *spoke*, his hearers paid rapt attention. There are embedded in Jesus' speech sustained thought that involved primary modes of communication and power-packed ideas artistically formulated in subtle memorable forms with the use of mnemonic patterns for easy recall (Bultmann 1934:49).<sup>28</sup> Therefore, understanding oral culture from which the Gospels emerged holds much in our understanding how the *historical Jesus* was *remembered* to the developing oral tradition about Jesus (Dunn 2003:9). Let us now examine the way both memory and orality had fared in Mark 1:40–45. The above insights indicate to me that we may to note the following stages:

1. Jesus was the *Speaker* of the words of the events as *oral communication* in *Aramaic*, the dialect of his day.
2. After death, his words were kept alive in the memory later.
3. His words, *okwu ya*, were *remembered*, that is *recalled* from the memory thereafter (Dunn 2003).
4. His words circulated as *orality* for upward of 70 AD.
5. Later on, Jesus' *remembered and recalled words* became committed to writing as Gospel.

These five stages can help us perceive how *orality* and *memory* played significant roles in the non-literary modes of communication in the development and transmission of the gospel stories as can

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28. However, Bultmann (1934) has noted that 'the oral sources are liable to have been transmitted as fragmentary sources and as such the picture of what had happened we have is that pieced together from incomplete surviving memories that do help the mind *recall* authentic reminiscences of Jesus'.

be seen that storage of information is dependent on collective recall (Yorke 2017:2).

Certain characteristics have been identified by Ong (2002:5):

- the presence of *mnemonic patterns* shaped for easy oral remembrance
- the presence of great rhythmic and balanced patterns
- the presence of repetitions or antithesis
- the presence of alliterations or assonances
- the presence of epithetic and other formulary expressions
- the presence of *additive patterns often italicised* in some Bible translations
- the presence of *pithy and short phrases* or attractive qualifiers (these are marks of oral structures and expressions as the product of generations of the evolution of oral culture)
- the presence of brief dialogues between Jesus and the sick person or relatives or friends
- the presence of speech that repeats earlier thoughts or thought pictures. According to Ong, this pattern helps to keep both the *speaker* and the *audience* focused on the topic and makes it easier for the audience to later recall the key points.

Orality encourages fluency within the level of memorisation in the culture of oral societies. Hellenistic-Jewish Palestinian oral culture of the time when Jesus *spoke* his words seemed to have assumed a practical approach to information storage, especially as information must have concerned issues of serious existential concern to every person in the community like the case of a person afflicted with leprosy. In an oral culture, the best and ideal method for learning is to share a close empathetic communal narrative with the members of the larger community (Ong 2002:5).

There is a strong belief that it is a cardinal ‘principle of orality that truth emerges best from communal processes of consensus agreement’ (Wikipedia n.d.b). People of oral culture were quite fond of real objects they were familiar with to refer and to

describe types of disabilities known in their environments. In short, *orality concerns itself with history, than with what really happened, that is, the bare facts*. This may explain why the restoration of the leper to wellness was dear to Mark that it stood out as the first of Jesus' *Messianic* intervention worthy of *remembrance* in the Christian community of his day. People of oral cultures made their narratives captivating by keeping their characters anonymous. According to Onuekwusi (2013:18, 22), '[s]tories make us feel. As we sympathise and empathise, lessons are etched on our minds. The story becomes a means of easy remembering' and this type is 'serious and touching the nexus of community and individual existence'.

Suppose we select two or three stories found in more than one gospel, to compare different accounts of the same episode; it will be noticed that most times, the same stories are found in different locations in the different Gospels. The question is: why might one evangelist have changed the order? Are there differences in Jesus' words in each account? If there are, what exactly are they? How can an exegete account for the differences? I want to believe that these critical questions can help us trace out what seemed to have been the *oral* form of the story from Jesus, the *Speaker* before *interpretations* are made on the *bare facts* against interpretations and reflections on the significance of Jesus' words on or from Mark's Gospel believed to be the earliest surviving source. Surely, the evangelists differ in the manner they narrate Jesus' words. In the Synoptics as in the case of the Markan healing of the leper, Jesus speaks mainly in short pithy sayings.

## ■ Memory

'Memory is the faculty of the mind by which information is encoded, stored and retrieved' (Wikipedia n.d.a). I wish to agree that it is necessary for experiences as 'it is the retention of information over time for the purpose of influencing future action' (Onuekwusi 2013). The remembrance of events that occurred in the past

contributes towards the development of language, relationships and personal identity (Yates 1992:27). Ilongo argues that memory is an informational processing system with both an explicit and implicit functioning system that comprises a sensory processor recognisable in two forms: short-term or working memory and long-term memory (Ilongo 2017:26–30). Memory played a significant role in the minds of the earliest *Jesus People*. Long-term memory helped the followers of Jesus to store data about his life and ministry through various categorical means such as narration. With regard to traditions concerned with the life of Jesus, the faith community in their regular assembly when they broke bread and drank the wine, they *remembered* the passion of Jesus from their *declarative memory*, the conscious storage and recollection of the events of the Lord's 30-year life. In short, they *remembered* and re-enacted the Last Supper with the Lord Jesus (1 Cor 11:23–26) and the command he gave them to *remember* the event itself. In Mark 8:19 parallel Matthew 16:9, Jesus, as the *Speaker*, reminded his followers to keep certain events in mind such as the feeding of the 5000 recorded in Mark 16:34–44. Of course, Jesus spoke in *Aramaic*, the language and dialect of the first century Palestinian people. Most of the time, the disciples *remembered* some of his words and events as he directed them to *remember*, which is attested to in Luke 24:6–8 and John 15:20, 16:4 and in Matthew 26:75. This is purely *semantic* memory, namely, the memory that recalls events encoded with some specific meanings (Havelock 1986:112). The *recollections* became so highly treasured mainly not to keep the past alive for future disciples but essentially and theologically to assure themselves of the abiding presence of the Risen and Living Lord in their midst.

According to Klijn (1980:8), '[t]he memories do not proclaim a dead hero but the transfigured Christ, present in the church'. Then, orality that conveyed the spoken word and the *recall* memory that entails bringing from memory information that has previously been remembered played its part.<sup>29</sup> What was *memorised* reverberates to the time of Jesus. He travelled about

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29. See <http://orvillejenkins.com/orality/orallitbible.html>.

the Galilean towns and preached and taught crowds. On occasions, he came down to Judea and ministered in Jerusalem. He did not write any word. No disciple was known to have taken records or minutes of his activities. What were heard were in the form of preachment. The encoded and stored words were *recalled* from the *long-term memory* information that had been remembered (Ilongo 2017:26–30).

And on historical account and traditionally relying on the testimony of Irenaeus of Lyons c. 130–200 AD, that Mark was the interpreter of Peter who preached in Rome as well as the writer of his preaching into a gospel, little wonder why the story of the leper would not be seen as Peter's oral story that Mark had put down in the Greek language as it was the language of the educated elites of the first Christian century to depict Jesus in his humanity as a *Messianic Healer*. For me, the story of the leper and many others was developed during the oral transmission of Jesus' words. For the earliest followers of the Jesus Movement, there was this strong belief that (Boxall 2007):

Israel's God acted decisively in Jesus both during his lifetime and after his death such that language traditionally reserved for that God could now be applied also to this human being. (p. 24)

Jesus, as he was then, preached orally and performed his healing acts as a roving Galilean peasant 'Man of God'. The Apocryphal *Gospel of Thomas* with its catena of Jesus' sayings generally accepted as independent of the Canonical Gospels draws attention to the vagaries of the oral materials attributable to the historical Jesus. From the written Gospels, we may not deduce historical facts about Jesus but the early chapters of Mark relate some of Jesus' actions, namely healings and exorcisms among which was the *Cleansing of the Leper* in 1:40–45 (Manus 1992:146–152). In this episode, Jesus represents the Galilean Jewish peasants whose values ran counter with those of the Jerusalem priestly elites who were the protagonists of the purity ideology; in other words, he stood for a challenge of official religion's practices. The crisp nature of the narrative betrays the oral characteristics of the narrative for standing for the peasants;

he spoke consistently in the known dialect. We note, however, that the manner in which information is encoded, stored, retrieved and transmitted can possibly be corrupted (Barbara 2003).

Let us see how oral characteristics fit the *recollected oral plot* in the story of Jesus' encounter with the leper in Mark 1:40–45 alias *The Cleansing of a Leper*. The text (Mk 1) reads:

40. A leper came to him and (kneeling down) begged him and said, 'If you wish, you can make me clean'. 41. Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand, touched him, and said to him, 'I do will it. Be made clean'. 42. The leprosy left him immediately, and he was made clean. 43. Then, warning him sternly, he dismissed him at once. 44. Then he said to him, 'See that you tell no one anything, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses prescribed; that will be proof for them'. 45. The man went away and began to publicise the whole matter. He spread the report abroad so that it was impossible for Jesus to enter a town openly. He remained outside in deserted places, and people kept coming to him from everywhere. (vv. 40–45)

In the Markan story, we find the following orally *recalled* traits (Mk 1):

- in v. 40a – the leper is anonymous<sup>30</sup>
- in v. 40c – here is a request of life because of faith
- in v. 41 – the presence of repetitions in mnemonic patterns for easy remembrance
- in v. 42 – repetition speech in rhythmic patterns
- in v. 43 – epithetic expressions
- in v. 44a – imposition of silence typical of Mark (*Das Messiasgeheimnis* ...)
- in v. 44b – order to go on mission to the priests
- in v. 44c and v. 44d – repetitions of earlier thought pictures
- in v. 45 – the Unnamed Leper's testimony and its consequences for Jesus.

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30. This serves to keep the story captivating while at the same time it tells the real condition the audience was familiar with as leprosy was an issue of serious practical concern to all in the Jewish society.



When these characteristics of orality are isolated from the story, what appears oral in the account remains. I wish to sum up the possible oral form of the story as an Igbo African person in this way: A man with a skin disease, *okiri upoto*, accosted Jesus. He pleaded him to heal him. Jesus had compassion on him. He touched him. He told him 'I am willing to help you'. 'Be cleansed'. There and then his skin infection dried up. Jesus sent him away with a proviso: keep what has happened to you secret. But go to the priests. Show yourself to them to certify that you have become well. Fulfil the requirements of the law of Moses.

At the oral stage of this story, Peter puts it through Mark that Jesus exhibits human emotions. He is moved with 'pity' (Mk 1:41).<sup>31</sup> He (Peter) plots his story to let Jesus show his special holiness and power because he is so close to God so much so that his mere touch cleanses even the worst impurity such as this one which separated the afflicted from his community. What Jesus grants to the man is real salvation – salvation from physical disabilities, from social segregation and from the faith community; and to others is salvation from endemic corruption and all sorts of ill treatments and injustices prevalent in our contemporary societies. As Peter made the *Cleansing of the Leper* a preaching profile in the Church in Rome, he conveyed to his audience that all evil is destroyed by Jesus.

## ■ **Brief analysis of the text in its synoptic tradition**

### ■ **The context**

Mark just narrates the ministry of Jesus on the Sabbath day in Capernaum, and on the immediate morning, he accounts in Mark

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31. The reality of the human emotions of Jesus is a special literary characteristic of Mark's Gospel.

1:21-29 Jesus' teaching with authority, casting out demons, healing the sick and spending time alone in prayer. Unto all these episodes, he adds the *Cleansing of the Leper* before the next large section on conflict narratives documented in Mark 2:1-3:6. The Synoptic authors all give account of the healing of this individual leper. The story is paralleled in Matthew 8:1-4 and Luke 5:12-16, thus making it look historical even though the leper's name was concealed in all three passages that make the event remain a *crux interpretum*.

Out of about 424 verses in the first 10 chapters of Mark, 201 verses, that is, about 50%, are accounted for Jesus' miracles. The evangelist Mark knew that people, even members of his community, saw leprosy quite different from other diseases and sicknesses. They know that leprosy caused the death of the flesh of the sufferer's body. It was contagious and so the sufferer had to be isolated from other people as he was made to cry 'unclean, unclean' when he moved around as prescribed in Leviticus 13:45-4. In the light of this prohibition, the leper needed not only to be healed but to be cleansed and thereafter pronounced clean by the right authorities (the Priests) 'for certification that he had been cleansed and could re-enter normal society' (Boring & Craddock 2009:111).

Among Jewish Rabbis, the cleansing of a leper was viewed as being as difficult as raising the dead. This contemporary belief indicates the importance of Mark's narrative of the miracle. In the event, the attitude of Jesus was different from the attitude of his contemporaries to lepers. In the Palestinian society, few people if any cared for lepers; in fact, they wished that they did not exist as they would rather not think of them. But unlike others who kept them at a great distance from themselves and their people, Jesus moved with pity, because of both the physical and social conditions of the leper, *stretched out his hand* and *touched* him. He acted in power and healed the man outright. According to a commentator, he 'takes the leper's impurity on himself, crossing the boundary that separates clean from unclean persons' (Carey 2009:46). In the

parallel structure, Mark's story is crisp and succinct as it preserves the earlier oral form of the story in which Jesus was portrayed as 'a magician-like figure who healed by esoteric techniques' (Carey 2009:46).

Matthew depends so much on Mark's. In his own account, it is not Jesus who initiates the encounter rather the leper kneels down before him apparently obstructing his passage through those narrow paths. The obstruction draws Jesus' attention. The leper must have heard of the exploits Jesus had been performing. He believed in the power of Jesus to cure him. He had no doubts in Jesus' willingness. And so he said to Jesus '[i]f you will, you can make me clean' (Mt 8:2). He put forth his hand and touched the leper<sup>32</sup> and said 'I will, Be clean'. Immediately the leprosy left him and he was made clean. Both Matthew and Luke do not mention Jesus' motives. Both evangelists clean off Mark's obscure depictions of the miracle. Why? Interpreters agree that Mark prefers to present Jesus in his human emotions. He portrayed his feeling of anger against the demonic power that has robbed the man of good life and as well to show him as one who embodies and manifests the power and blessings of God's kingdom and not just a 'miracle worker'.

Mark 1:44b–d indicates that Jesus does not violate the Torah; rather, he fulfils it by ordering the leper to report himself to the priest to make a sacrificial offering in thanksgiving as prescribed in Leviticus 14:1–32. Jesus' order to keep silence on the miracle of healing was received with mixed feelings. For one like him whose life has undergone such a rapid change, he could not but broadcast his wellness and to expect others rejoice with him on what Jesus had done for him. That was his testimony.

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32. Mark 1:41 has a textual problem, making interpreters to choose between '[m]oved with pity...' and '[a]ngered, ...' that is transmitted in the Western text tradition, the preferable reading is that which presents Jesus as moved with compassion, stretched his hand and touched the leper.

## ■ ***Re-reading* the story as an example for the *re-enactment* of Jesus' healing tradition by some African Healing Prophets**

What exactly is the *Re-reading* method? Here, I wish to adopt the *Reader-Response Approach* to analyse data generated from Mark 1:40–45 as a sacred text. With this tool of investigation, I, as the interpreter, see the readers or audience's experience of the text in terms of their contexts, their values, attitudes and responses instead of focusing on 'the author and his intention about the text itself and the original audience' (Knight 2004:179). With this working tool, the source of the meaning will rest squarely on me as the reader in my context to help me highlight the temporal dimensions of reading as an essential factor in meaning production rather than the spatial form of the text. In other words, the task rests on the interpretation I as the reader give to the text from different perspectives, this time around, from African spirituality. As the approach helps me to share in the literary communication encoded in Mark's healing narrative, what do African contexts of the *Re-enactment* of jaw-breaking signs and wonders reveal to us that accords with the objectives and themes of this seminar?

Admittedly, physical and spiritual disabilities abound in the African religious landscape. And there are so many charismatic healers in almost all African countries who do battle against the evil forces. But some are rather more popular. In other words, the healing type documented in Mark's Gospel is severally being *re-enacted* by ebullient 'Men of God' in many African churches today (Manus 2014:169; Nwaoru 2007:7). In Nigeria, for example, there abound many revered 'Men of God' who are as powerful as they are influential. In this team there are well-known and powerful Roman Catholic Reverend Fathers whose integrity still remains impeccable despite the scandals and sacrileges in contemporary world Catholicism. These reverend gentlemen are still holy and keep to the expectations of their vocation 'leaving no room whatsoever for compromise or

deviation from all Catholic norms and doctrines' (Nairaland Forum 2018). Unlike most 'Men of God' who nowadays meddle in politics, making names and money for themselves in the process, these clerics are apolitical. Most of them own Prayer Ministries and even schools. They are renowned for accurate predictions, healing and life-changing counselling therapies, in spite of the parish work that each one of them does. The likes of these Priest-healers are Rev. Fr. Emmanuel Ede, the founder of the *Catholic Prayer Ministry of the Holy Spirit*. At his *Pilgrimage Centre*, Elele in Rivers State, Nigeria, he is known to break yokes and curses and perform healings for the sick through the intervention of the Holy Spirit. Next is Rev. Father Ejike Mbaka, a very popular firebrand preacher of the gospel and musician. Great *Signs and wonders* happen at his powerful ministrations. Fr. Mbaka performs at his *All-Night Adoration Crusade* at Emene, Enugu, Eastern Nigeria. There is also Rev. Father Paul Obayi, popularly known and addressed as *Okunaerere* [the blazing fire] in the South-east of Nigeria who keeps and maintains the *Okunaerere Catholic Adoration Ministry* in Nsukka Catholic Diocese of Nigeria where he explodes 'his spiritual power to destroy the works of the kingdom of darkness and to liberate souls under satanic bondage' (Nairaland Forum 2018). There are others too numerous to mention here and it suffices to cite these three.

From the perspectives of the *Reader-Response method*, I wish to show how the meaning of the healing of the leper is being re-shaped or re-created in the example of the exploits of power on *Emmanuel TV, Live*, of Prophet T.B. Joshua of the SCOAN, Lagos, Nigeria. I take recourse to his ministrations as points of reference to many others in Africa. And by that way, I wish to show how the *Men of God* are *re-enacting* Jesus' healing tradition in the African Christianity.

Watching *Emmanuel TV, The SCOAN Live Sunday Services* for some time now, especially on 29 April 2018 during an intensive *Prayer and Deliverance In Jesus' Name*, Prophet T.B. Joshua, the 'Man of God' as he is popularly addressed, *touched* a victim who was 'moaning in hard breathe'. Instantly, she fell down on the floor of the church, and when got up, began to shout 'thank you Jesus, I am free; thank you Jesus, thank you Jesus, thank you Jesus'. The second was

a victim of demonic attacks. These persons are mostly women. Why would women, the missing ribs of men, be so easily penetrated by demons? Perhaps, Satan is continuing to take revenge on humanity through the womenfolk because of God's punishment, when it was known that it was Satan, in the guise of the 'talking' serpent, that tempted humanity and robbed humans of their original bliss in paradise. Why are the phenomena of satanic acts so endemic in Africa? How can modern science explain this? The answer of the Man of God is that 'God is still saying something through Africa for all nations' (Man of God, Prophet, male). Another victim of satanic possession was *touched*, and she began to yell out, 'I have come here for salvation. I am healed in Jesus' name' (Anonymous, victim, female). 'As the Man of God touched me, I became light. I am healed in the name of Jesus' (Anonymous, victim, female).

Let us look at this dialogue between the Man of God and some victims in his church:

Victim: 'I have come. Loose me from this disease. Loose me from this infirmity'.

Man of God (in a loud voice): 'Release Yourself from every bondage. Be disconnected from the bond of Satan. Be healed, There is no hiding place for the evil spirit. In the Mighty name of Jesus, be delivered. Be loosed, Be loosed, Be loosed. Be delivered in the name of Jesus.'

The devotee began to vomit blood and poisonous substances from their system:

'Come all you that are sick', say 'loose me from all infirmity'. (Man of God, Prophet, male)

Man of God commands a rain of prayers: 'Pray. pray, pray ...'. (Man of God, Prophet, male)

Multitudes fall down, foaming, moaning and many vomiting poisonous substances from their system. Man of God says:

'The Spirit of God is flushing them out, Go on, pray, pray, pray; confess your freedom. In the name of Jesus, we pray, worship Him, commit your businesses, your business partners.' (Man of God, Prophet, male)

After a while, the tempo cools down. Later came other scenarios when there comes:

- A victim of multiple fibroids begins to shout after a *touch*, 'I am free. I am healed, I am delivered' (Anonymous, victim, gender unspecified).
- Another says, 'I am married in spirit, I have a spiritual husband' (Anonymous, victim, gender unspecified).
- A lady who has a 'Spirit of woman', that is, one who no longer has affection for men but always bathing with a 'spiritual husband'.
- A lady from South Africa, who has been battling with the rigours imposed by a spiritual husband that makes her push away her real husband when he comes near her.
- A lady with the 'Spirit of Snake' who sees a snake regularly in her dreams and eats with it.
- A lady whose affection for men is dead, but who has a woman friend with whom she regularly has affairs in her dreams.
- Another woman from South Africa who has no attraction for men. She abhors seeing her husband's nakedness. But every two months she sees a woman in her dream and both of them are physically attracted to each other and other women.
- A lady from Cameroon who has a cult-member husband. Her mind is dissipated. Every time the man returns to the house, the woman roars loud like a lion.
- A woman from Benue State, Nigeria, who bed wets while asleep, even with her children.

In the Congregation, the Man of God *ouched* all of these women and men individually in the *name of Jesus*. Some were calmed down, liberated from the bondage of the evil spirits, and *healed*. Many regained their senses and others were restored to their spouses. The *New Morning Water* was often the *miracle wand* that helped deliver these people in under various shades of diabolic derangement and bondage.

What of *Testimonies*? T.B. Joshua's ministrations allow time for persons who have received healing and wellness to loudly give testimonies (Reference to Mk 1:45).

On 27 May 2018, during SCOAN Live Sunday and Deliverance Service, Mrs. Annabela Almeida Pina, a Portuguese German (and her sister in support) who could not walk for eight years voiced a

testimony of an amazing miracle of healing with the *New Morning Water*. Annabela testified as follows:

'I can now urinate. No more diaper, No more wheel chair, No more orthopaedic shoes. I can now walk. Thank you Jesus. I am delivered. I am free. I can now walk. Thank you Jesus'.<sup>33</sup> (Annabela, victim, female)

On 03 June, 2018, during SCOAN Sunday Service, Prophet T.B. Joshua ministering *Prayer and Deliverance in Jesus' Name*, there came Engr Ejike and Family from Imo State, Nigeria, who requested, 'Man of God, please help me. My wife, for eight years, could not walk. Man of God, help me' (Engr Ejike, husband of victim, male).

The prophet *touched* the woman and *slapped off* her ailment. The woman started to shout, '[t]hank you Jesus, thank you Jesus, thank you Jesus. I am free. I am delivered. I can now walk. Thank you Jesus. Thank you Jesus' (Anonymous, victim, female).

## ■ Testimonies

I hold these accounts as wonderful testimonies from God's faithful children of *signs and wonders* being *re-enacted* in the *name of Jesus* in a contemporary African Christianity. T.B. Joshua is just a case example of such healing prowess associated with the aforementioned firebrand and charismatic pastors and *Men of God* who perform in the African churches to dismantle the 'spirit of darkness', demolish 'family demons', flush out 'fibroids' and vomit 'poisonous substances "Satan" has planted in the bodies that torment the lives of their devotees in "Jesus" Name' (Various, pastors and healers, genders unspecified). Even though I am aware of the growing weight of scientific explanations of reality offered in the contemporary world and social media that miracles are irreconcilable with modern scientific worldviews and the allied doubts in the incredibility of miracles as psychologically explainable (Boxall 2007), I find space in my mind to adjudge the burgeoning phenomena in the African

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33. There and then, Prophet T.B. Joshua donated 3000 \$ to her to help her rehabilitate herself and live normal life while back in Germany. What an investment?



religiosity as being real. Besides, the sermons of these *Men of God* broadcast to devotees at the sanctuaries and Radio and Television insist that 'God is still saying something' as Prophet T.B. Joshua would say; and I would not hesitate to add '*in the African churches*'. These events could not have been so orchestrated as others are wont to assert. How can so many people, white, black and coloured, from all over the world, Europe, Africa, Latin America and Asia come to agree to have themselves be used to delude the public? To my mind, what some other churches and their leaders have not been blessed with the charisma to perform, out of disbelief, envy and jealousy, they condemn and brand demonic.

Having, for so long, critically watched Prophet T.B. Joshua's preachment on *Emmanuel TV* and *SCOAN Live Sunday Services*, I wish to conclude through Jesus' caution transmitted in Luke 11 that:

17. Every kingdom divided against itself will be laid waste and house will fall against house. 18. And if Satan is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? For you say that it is by Beelzebul that I drive out demons. 19. If I, then, drive out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your own people drive them out? Therefore they will be your judges. 20. But if it is by the *finger of God* that I drive out demons, then the *kingdom of God*<sup>34</sup> has come upon you. 21. When a strong man fully guards his palace, his possessions are safe. 22. But when one stronger than he attacks and overcomes him, he takes away the armour on which he relied and distributes the spoils. 23. Whoever is not with me is against me and whoever does not gather with me scatters. (vv. 17b–23)

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34. Here, I wish to borrow the footnote commentary in *The African Bible*, p. 1752, n.5 on Luke 11:20 to further cement my position, '[t]he kingdom should be proclaimed as already being among the people of Africa. Whatever good there is in African culture and religion is already an expression of God's reign among us' (17:21–21; Mk 16:16–18; Ac 17:23–34). Nevertheless, this kingdom finds its visible expression in the church instituted by Jesus (Mk 16:16–18), the sheepfold into which Jesus, the good shepherd, gathers all the scattered people of God (Jn 10:1–21; ...). For me, the ministry of T.B. Joshua and other *bona fide* Pastors all over Africa, resonate in this credo. Pertinent to these remarks is also my analysis of v. 20 in Manus (2014:175–183).

# From other ways of bleeding to other ways of healing: Reading Mark 5:21–34 with the marginalised

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## ■ Abstract

Although the story narrated in Mark 5:24–34 is often titled ‘The Woman with the Issue of Blood’, I read the same story as ‘a story about the bleeding woman’, thus highlighting the visible and invisible woman’s pain and her role towards the restoration of her

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own health and wholeness by her act of breaking 'public transcripts'. A contextual reading of the text facilitated by the Tri-Polar Exegetical Model allows for the comparison of the bleeding woman's condition to that of women of our time, specifically those from the context of conflict and war in the Great Lakes Region. Wars impact disproportionately on women, their health and wellbeing as well as their safety. Hence, this sick woman becomes a mirror for this reader and for those women and others in the similar condition and serves as an inspiration to fight for their justice and wellbeing. The contribution calls on biblical interpreters, activists and preachers to challenge exploitative systems that disempower and dehumanise women, by providing liberative and empowering interpretations of biblical texts. Re-reading Jesus' response to the initiative of the woman in this context provides a resource for women to find wholeness and liberation in oppressive situations.

**Keywords:** African contextual feminist hermeneutics; Public transcript; Hidden transcript; Jesus and healing; Bleeding women and bleeding societies.

## ■ Introduction

Different scholars debate Mark 5:25–34. For example, Miller read the text alongside Mark 5:35–43 presenting Jesus' mercy for the healing of two women of different ages (Miller 2004:61). Others, such as Kinukiwa Hisako, read the story from the relational viewpoint of the interaction between the woman and Jesus and from the social context of the oppression that the woman suffers (Hisako 1994:32). On the other hand, Draper (2003:95) reads the text from the perspective of the traditional purity of Israel which begins with a purity story, *pneuma akatharton*. Branch (2013) in her works uses this text to compare the healing of the woman and that of Jairus' daughter. She also uses the text in a wider context to show how the combination of the literary and canonical insight sheds light on some concepts, such as faith and fear in Mark's Gospel. My contribution in adding to the discussion is reading the story from a

cultural criticism perspective, expressing the experience of alienation and violation ‘off stage in the hidden transcript’ of the oppressed and marginalised. The study discloses such a view by reading the story of the woman alongside socially challenging situations of women in the Great Lakes Region of East Africa, as a case study for women in situations of violence and domination.

The text is read from the view of the bleeding woman’s visible and invisible pain and emphasises the role she herself played towards the restoration of her own health and wholeness in her interaction with Jesus. The section challenges women who are oppressed and afflicted to fight for their own liberation and healing. It also creates awareness of exploitation by some ‘healers’<sup>35</sup> who are motivated by personal gain instead of the wellbeing of the sick person. This work provides a contextual reading utilising the Tri-Polar Exegetical Model as its framework.

The model facilitates a conversation between the reader (and her community), the situation of suffering women of our time and the bleeding woman in the narrative of Mark 5:21-3. Biblical interpreters, activists and preachers may have the best intentions when interpreting and using this text, but the predominance of males in academia and therefore in biblical commentaries has skewed perceptions of the bleeding woman and masked the cultural trends and systems that perpetuate oppression of women as the ‘other’. This contribution seeks to provide a message of hope to marginalised and bleeding women, whether their bleeding is broadly social and violent or more narrowly personal and interactional, which can enable them to approach their situation from a positive view as those who are not only loved and cared for by Jesus but also called to participate in their own healing.

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35. The term ‘healers’ in this chapter does not only refer to physicians but even to some church leaders, traditional leaders and community leaders who, instead of being the eye and advocate of those who are suffering, perpetuate their stigma and affliction through gender-biased interpretations of biblical texts that promote stigma and exclusion. They overlook their role of dressing the wounds of the oppressed and side with oppressive cultures and systems in the communities instead of challenging them.

The reading and analysis of the text is guided by the socio-scientific approach that is used hand in hand with Tri-Polar Exegetical Model. However, the nature and size of this work permits only a brief overview on the use of these approaches starting from the socio-scientific approach.

## ■ The socio-scientific approach and the Tri-Polar Exegetical Model

The social scientific approach aims to help in the understanding of the social system which produced the text as well as the social system in which the reading is located. In Mark 5:25-34, the narrative is located in a Jewish social setting in which purity is an over-riding concern. The social scientific approach then seeks to understand that particular social system in order to comprehend the reason behind their behaviour and acts. Situating the narrative in an understanding of the treatment of women in the first century in view of the Greco-Jewish society in Jesus' time, Steinberg (2001:45) clarifies the tradition and culture that produced the biblical text. Levine (2006) elaborates further:

(Jesus' acts) parables are products of first-century Jewish culture, not ours; the healings were assessed according to that worldview, not ours; the debates over how to follow the Torah took place within that set of legal parameters and forms of discourse, not ours. To understand Jesus' impact in his own setting - why some chose to follow him, others to dismiss him, and still others to seek his death - requires an understanding of that setting. (p. 20)

The same assertion is provided by Malina (2009) who asserts that:

[B]oth authors of [*the biblical*] documents and the people described there are all foreigners to our modern world. The social systems, cultural values and behaviours, and person types of Mediterranean are all alien to modern readers. (p. 158)

The above-mentioned approaches guide the reader in bridging the gaps in the information that the reader brings to the text.

## ■ The use of the Tri-Polar Exegetical Model

The Tri-Polar Exegetical Model<sup>36</sup> provides the framework; its three poles provide the shape to this work. The three pole or moments are identified as the Distantiation, Contextualisation and Appropriation, and the presentation of this work follows these main phases. During the process of the Distantiation, the text is read and analysed by means of *exegesis*; the literary meaning of the text is retrieved from the text. During this process, some literary tools, historical analysis and philology are used allowing the text to be read in its original language (Hebrew or Greek texts) (Draper 2015:8). The aim of that exercise is to help the reader minimise any risk of being influenced by his or her own pre-understanding of the text as Howard-Brook (1994:3) observes, 'each reader or community of readers comes to the Bible with a panoply of prejudices and commitments that necessarily play a powerful part in shaping how one hears the word of God speaking'. Hence, Draper (2002:12) advocates for a critical reading that serves as a counter-balance to possible domination of the process by the context of the reader over the context of the original voice of the text. In the present work, the Distantiation phase assists in the analysis of the text of Mark 5:21-34 so as to situate the text and interpret it against its own worldview and context.

The second phase, the Contextualisation, helps to understand the context that informs the reading of the text. The reader or interpreter interrogates the context from which the biblical text is being read and analysed. The contextual reading requires the readers not simply to be familiar with the worldview and context as *implicit* to their lives, but to analyse and identify the features of their context which affect their reading *explicitly* and enable a conversation with the text. The understanding of that context

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36. The model was initiated by Christina Grenholm and Patte (2000) and later on developed by Draper (2002).

involves especially the life-situation of people including both their religious and secular culture and all that pertains to their worldview. It is during this moment that the text is read 'with one's eyes'. The contextual process in this work helps understand the context of women in the Great Lakes Region which informs the reading of the text of Mark 5:21-34.

The last phase of the model, the Appropriation, assists the reader to 'own' the message that was pointed out during the Distantiation phase. It is this moment which is the praxis of the interpretation. West (2013) asserts:

The goal of interpretation is the actualization of the theological meaning of the text in today's context so as to forge integration between faith and life, and engender commitment to personal and societal transformation. (p. 299)

It is during this moment, in the present work, that the message from the text pertaining to the story of the bleeding woman is used by the reader to challenge the life of women in the Great Lakes Region (and elsewhere) with the goal for a social and spiritual transformation. The next section deals with the context of these women and describes their plight in their life-situation cultural.

## ■ The context that informs the reading of the text

The African Great Lakes Region is sometimes considered from its wide geographical location made up of many countries, but usually refers to five countries, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Rwanda, Uganda and Tanzania (Mpangala 2004). Even though it might be good studying this entire geographical area in details such as looking into its political situation, space constraint in this work allows only a brief summary of the region and its implication on the plight of women. The focus is on the plight and life condition of women more specifically from Burundi, the DRC and Rwanda (although many of their issues apply also to the broader region). These three countries

are renowned for their common Franco-phone colonial history and intertwined political aspect and for a common (though not, of course, identical) cultural trend which is patriarchal in nature.

## ■ The plight of women from Burundi, the DRC and Rwanda

The three countries, Burundi, the DRC and Rwanda, that are of focus in this work are marked by almost the same culture in their dealing with women. The term 'culture' is understood in different ways. The *Oxford Dictionary* defines culture as 'the customs and beliefs, art, way of life and social organization of a group' (Wehmeier 2005:357). This study adopts Njogu and Orchardson-Mazru's (2006) definition which puts it more specifically:

Culture may be viewed as the total sum of a people's way of life. It includes norms and values of a society: their religion, politics, economics, technology, food habits, medicine, rules of marriage, the performing arts, law and so on. (p. 1)

Culture is not simply a set of practices and values that bind a community, but is also a powerful source of control in the community, and most of the time, it is used by the powerful to subjugate the less powerful. In the three countries in which this study focuses, it is women and children who experience this control in a largely oppressive form. The cultural norms and customs are fundamentally patriarchal and use cultural gender roles to perpetuate the abuse and oppression of women, who have little voice in the public arena. In modern societies, those roles are farther shaped by education which maintains segregation by class-based, gendered categories, classifying individuals according to their education. In the Great Lakes Region, particularly in the countries cited above, such demarcation was reinforced by colonial masters and missionaries who favoured male education and overlooked that of females. Different scholars observe that while a number of schools aimed at training boys in terms of some leadership skills and other domains such an endeavour was absent for girls. In Rwanda, for instance, education



was exclusive as it was mainly reserved for the *sons* of chiefs. It is reported that in 1907, some schools were not necessarily gender exclusive but ethnic oriented; they were created 'to reach the sons of the chiefs Batutsi ... the born rulers of Rwanda' (Mamdani 2001:89). Young girls' training started towards the end of the colonial regime, when the missionaries opened schools in domestic duties including home management, cooking and childcare (Kalimba 2005:68). Such kind of training contributed to promote differences between the cultural gender roles in place. Thus, women were trained to be good wives, which does not only mean to stay indoors assuming household activities but also mean to remain silent as a way of expressing qualities of good women. Narayan (1997:1) correctly argued that silence is viewed as an embodiment of cultural and traditional values of being a good wife and mother. The colonial education then promoted the subjugation and inferiority of women and perpetuated the marginalisation of women (Scott 1990:4).

In other words, colonial education enhanced the biased patriarchal mentality of domination which has been kept as an 'official transcript', to use Scott (1990:4) words, which cannot be destabilised as it is a 'system that maintains the standard that suits the powerful' (Ginwala 2015:n.p.). Such a system perpetuated the unbalanced social economic aspect of societies by maintaining women as underprivileged economically. Men generally own and/or control most of economic resources. Sometimes women who even have access to employment are under full subjugation of their husbands as often even the income received by these women is controlled by their husbands (Kamaara 2009:22). Doyle rightly observes that the plight of women needs to be re-examined even in countries with 'public transcript' of women's rights. Speaking about the Rwandan society, Doyle (2012) asserts that despite progress, Rwanda remains a patriarchal society and most men believe that a woman's place is at home. Subtle resistance exists when one talks about gender equality (Doyle 2012).

One of the weapons that are used to maintain women's subjugation is based on sexual violence.

## ■ Misuse of sex: Sexuality and sexual harassment in the Great Lakes Region

The Great Lakes Region is dominated with a culture that views anything related to sex as a taboo. In such a culture of honour and shame, sex and sexual dialogue are condemned in families or any public place. While, for instance, any young girl is accepted as a normal woman after her menstruation, this issue of periodic blood is rarely spoken about in families. Traditionally, the girl who was about to start that stage in life was sent to her aunts for counselling in that domain; not everyone was allowed to carry such a discussion. If a woman is sexually abused, it is kept as a secret. Hence, sexual violence against women is one of the strong tools used to silence them in cultures of honour and shame. In such cultures, sexuality is considered as a taboo topic in the everyday discussions of people.

While many scholars, like Smedes (2001:73) and others, argued that sexuality is the cultural way of living out our bodily pleasures and that it should be enjoyed as a gift from God as communion, it is used as a weapon for the harassment of the weak and leaves them with lasting wounds in the form of psychological problems. Wamue and Getui (2007:56) concur with this lasting injury by asserting that survivors of sexual harassment live in constant fear of death with feelings of powerlessness, vulnerability, devaluation and fear of loss of ability to control the events in their lives.

The women that are the focus of this work come from the region renowned for its circle of social conflicts and tragedies of war. As it is widely known, in times of conflict, women and children become the main target of the fighting groups. During the Rwandan genocide, for instance, according to Koff's statistics, about 70 000 women were raped and 350 000 witnessed the murders of family members (Koff 2004:15). In the recent years with conflict in Burundi and the DRC, women are still undergoing the same fate as it is observed that, '[t]he deeply entrenched gender inequality has provided an enabling environment for high

levels of sexual violence. The civil war in Burundi exacerbated this violence, which continues today, with near total impunity' (Braud 2016:n.p.). However, among those injuries, survivors of sexual violence also often suffer from sexually transmitted diseases like HIV or AIDS, gonorrhoea and syphilis. In many cases, because of such problems, survivors are subjected to stigma based on their sexual injuries that result in vaginal discharges<sup>37</sup> which make them even more excluded and considered as outcasts in their communities.

## ■ Blood discharge, as a part of the system of control for women

There is a wide debate about blood in general, how it is viewed as 'life' which is the reason why it was forbidden for the nation of Israel. But the brief discussion here concentrates only on vaginal blood during menstruation or childbirth. Such blood is one of the issues that are used in the system of honour and shame to control women and make them inferior and silence them in their communities. In many African societies and in the Great Lake Region in particular, there are cultural taboos that surround sex and sexuality as already argued. Pamela Abbott et al. (2014:10) asserted that '[c]ultural taboos (that surround sex and sexuality) may make it difficult for young people to gain information and services, increasing their risk'. Young women are not prepared for puberty and so they are exposed to unwanted pregnancies and sexual diseases. In some parts of the African continent, the lack of such preparation and teachings causes the young girls to stay home from schools when they have their period because of shame, ignorance and lack of sanitary pads. This view may differ from African countries and communities but it applies to the majority of those youngsters who live in rural areas such the

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37. The vaginal discharge that will be discussed in this work is mainly the blood discharge which is similar to the problem of the woman in the text, who is the centre of discussion in this work. Such blood includes both blood as a result of sexual violence and menstruation.

above countries which are the focus of this study. For instance, it is declared about Rwanda, which is the tiniest country among them, that even though (Abbott et al. 2014):

[/]t is widely acknowledged as one of the world's success stories in post conflict reconstruction and development, Rwanda remains one of the poorest and most rural areas in the world with an estimate of 75% of the population living in rural areas. (n.p.)

If Rwanda has such a high percentage of the population living in the rural areas despite its size, one may have an idea of the population of the DRC who live in the rural areas.

And as majority of the population of a country live in the rural areas, much of them are also affected by the cultural trends that guide the population. But besides the three countries above, it is sometime surprising to hear that almost women from almost all over the globe are controlled by the same biased patriarchal system and face the same views related to blood discharge. Just to mention few among many, Hana Carter points out some myths that are used to exclude women who are exactly similar to those in my own context, the Great Lake Region. Carter speaks about some myths that surround menstruating blood that express the view of the systems that perpetuate the oppression of women in some countries such as Madagascar or among the British or Americans. She argues that over the centuries, there have been many ridiculous taboos and myths surrounding a natural bodily function that affects half the world's population.

Those taboos include women being told that they can't make mayonnaise while menstruating because it will curdle; they are not permitted to walk through the pumpkins and courgette crops, as the seeds will rot; they will not shower as the water will enter their bodies and cause more bleeding (Carter 2017).

Such myths were also prevalent in some other parts of Africa, specifically in Rwanda where the Rwandan menstruating women were banned from making the traditional beer which is in fact a disgrace for the woman. In addition, menstruating women could never visit a fellow woman who had given birth as the baby

would be attacked by serious sickness or *urwingire* – which could hardly be cured. Even though these taboos upon menstruating women were not as strong as in 19th century, in some developing countries such myths are still accepted as a fact, especially in rural areas. And their impacts on women are still somewhat strong as is demonstrated by some views of patriarchal mentalities that use such taboos as excuses against the ordination of women.

In her doctoral thesis, Phoebe Swart-Russel provides details about such taboos clarifying how impurity attributed to the blood of menstruation and childbirth is one of the reasons for the exclusion of women's ordination. Swart-Russel (1988) puts it:

The rigid purity laws of the priesthood regarded the defilement of a priest as punishable by death, and the emission of blood was a deep defilement to all women, as was childbirth. The belief in the 'uncleanness' of women took root in Christianity, and in 668 the Bishop of Canterbury, Theodore of Tarsus, laid down the rule that women during the time of their menstruation should neither enter a church nor communicate. This rule applied to both nuns and laity, and quickly extended to the Continent. Jerome and Augustine both upheld this rule, which obtained for many centuries. As late as 1684 women were being refused entry to any church during their monthly periods; they were told to remain at the door of the church. (p. 7)

Unfortunately, these views that may be discredited as old fashioned are still impacting women even in today's society. Hence, in those countries where the culture of honour and shame prevails, women are subject to different issues related to their internal bleedings. The physical and emotional wounds bleed further without help because of the condition caused by the fear of stigma. The blood that is shedding includes the bloodshed in civil and social violence. It is thus from this context of 'social' bleeding – because of war and violence and 'private' bleeding – because of cultural trends and taboos where a number of women suffer disease-related taboo; it is from this particular context that the story of the bleeding woman in Mark 5:21-34 is read and analysed.

## ■ Background and context of Mark 5:21–34 in the view of the plight of women

In the process of the reading and exegesis of the text, some major elements pertaining to the plight of women will be foregrounded. To begin with, there is a need to be familiar with the context of the text in terms of its view with women of its time. This undertaking is crucial as it assists in recovering the meanings hidden inside the text and facilitates the understanding of those meanings in their proper worldview of how women were treated. Later on, those meanings or messages displayed by the reading of the text are expected to be effectively appropriated (Draper 2002:13) by the readers of the text. The methodology adopted here will be the literary and socio-historical analysis of the text.

## ■ The literary reading of the text (Mark 5:21–34)

The literary reading helps to display the major elements that are pointed out in the structure of the plot of the narrative. During this process of the exegesis, some literary questions are used as a means to analyse the plot. Those that deal with the identification of the main characters in the narrative are introduced by ‘who?’; those pointing to the setting, geographical or the time are introduced by ‘where?’ and ‘when?’; ‘what?’ and ‘why?’ are used to provide the details of what is happening in the plot (Malbon 2000:17). These two elements, that is, the characters, Jesus and the sick woman, and their roles in the story are crucial to this work; they are the most important elements required to study the narrative. But the examination of the roles of these two important characters will be done after a look into the plight of women during the time of the text.

## ■ The plight of women in the Greco-Roman and Jewish contexts

The nature of this study and its objectives do not allow many details about the authorship and the place of writing of the

gospel according to Mark. However, it is clear that the gospel presents the influences of both Jewish and Greek traditions, and it is important to have a brief understanding of the plight of women in both societies. From the aspect of Hellenism,<sup>38</sup> Betsworth observes that ‘Greco- Roman society conceived itself primarily as a society of fathers and sons, particularly fathers and adult-sons; women were only important as bearers of male children’ (Betsworth 2010:27). Sons were valued as future heirs, while the daughters had to leave their families and associate with their husbands’ families. The same culture was observed in Jewish societies; social-historical sources suggest that the social location of daughters was not a place of high esteem. Daughters were subordinate members of the family and society in general (Betsworth 2010:27). Rakoczy supports Betsworth by providing a brief description of the Roman law in regard to women; she observes that according to the Roman law, women were under the complete control of the *paterfamilias*, the male head of the extended family unit. He had the power of life and death over the family, arranged marriages and appointed guardians. Women could not legally transact in business, make a contract or will or free a slave without his permission (Rakoczy 2004:33).

Treggiari concurred by pointing out that even though both young girls and young men were under the control of their fathers, the extent of the dominance over the children differed because of its time frame. Female children were under male (*paterfamilias*) authority for life, because the control of their fathers before marriage was legally replaced by the control of their husbands at the time of marriage (Treggiari 2002:132). It was also observed that, ‘[i]t was through men that women could exert any influence in the public sector, whether by council, enjoyment, manipulation or promise, a woman could only operate behind the scenes’ (Bauman 1992:2). Rakoczy (2004:33) agreed

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38. The details on the Jewish and Hellenistic views of women are not fully provided in this section because of the space and nature of the essay, only a short overview on the general condition of women during that time is given.

with such dependency on men by arguing that women were the legal property of men, indeed, first their fathers, then their husbands. She goes further clarifying that daughters were not even given individual names but the feminine form of their father's name. For instance, if the father's name was Paul, his first daughter and her sisters were designated as Paula 1, Paula 2, Paula 3, et cetera, respectively.

As it was in the Greco-Roman culture, women in Jewish tradition were also not so much valued as being at the same level with men. Even though it may be anachronistic to use rabbinic data to portray the first century Jewish society in this matter, such a portrayal may still be relevant as it provides some idea about women's treatment of the time. Ilan (1995:44) quoted the *tannaitic* tradition saying, '[a]nyone who does not have a son is as if he is dead'. The birth of a female child could be viewed as a disappointing event compared to that of a male; even though the female infant was also a child, her value was not at the same level as with the heir in the family. Of course, a female child was better than not having a child at all. Besides, the 'dowry' which was expected to be paid by the groom's family during the marriage of the girl could also mean something for the girl's family. The dowry could be assumed to replace the girl and cover the loss to her natal family to some extent, indicating that there was a mutual exchange between the families. This view may add some weight to Jairus' plea to Jesus; not only was he about to lose his child but even the expected dowry in the family would be lost. But surely, the value of an heir was much preferred to that of the dowry. The same law status of girls in that society is still emphasised by some cultural customs in some patriarchal systems even during Jesus' time. This explains some biased attitudes such as that of Josephus, who declared (Rakoczy 2004):

The woman, says the law, is in all things inferior to the man. Let her accordingly be submissive, not for her humiliation, but that she may be directed; for the authority has been given by God to the man Contra Apion 11, 210, quoted in Tetlow 1980:24. (p. 33)



To some extent, this description of women in those societies constitutes the context in which Christianity was born, and it is from this particular context that the sick woman in Mark 5:25–34 had her encounter with Jesus on his way to Jairus' home. The condition of this woman has been a debate among scholars who have different views on the implication of her sickness to her surrounding because of what is referred to as the cleanness and uncleanness conditioned by the Law of Purity in the Old Testament. A brief overview on that Law of Purity which is believed to have had some influence on the story of the woman is worth considering before engaging with the details of the story.

## ■ Purity Law in the book of Leviticus

Even though the size constraint of the work does not allow enough details to deal with the Purity Law,<sup>39</sup> it is necessary to spare some time for a brief look into that domain. In this regard, Gordon Wenham clarifies that it is not easy to claim that one may be able to give clear details on the concept of cleanness and uncleanness or purity and impurity in the Old Testament (Wenham 2002:380). However it is important to consider some important concepts that are centred on women's blood discharge. Philip (2006:2) points out that, '[t]he impurity of the blood from the womb is emphasised in the priestly wrings but there is no explanation in them as to the origin and reasons of impurity...'. Philip (2002) clarifies that menstruation and childbirth go together as:

[U]niversal female events that have several common characteristics ... Their impact is not only physiological, since both of them carry cultural and social meanings ... The fertility and the impurity of the blood from the womb are intertwined in the biblical concepts of menstruation and childbirth, too. (p. 2)

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39. The applicability of Purity Law of the OT is debatable among scholars as some believe that such Law was no longer applicable during Jesus' time. In any case, this work does not deal with the entire Law as described in the *Book of Leviticus*. It only looks into the purity or impurity connected to the vaginal discharge of women, blood discharge.

It means that both menstruating and child birth blood had the same effect in making the woman impure for a given period of time. Wenham concurs clarifying that, '[m]others are polluted by the puerperal discharge for 40 days after giving birth to a son, and for 80 days after bearing a daughter Lev 12 (Whenham 2002:380).

However, whereas these women's discharges are regarded with a negative eye, Kroeger and Evans point also to men's discharges. They argued (Kroeger & Evans 2002):

Scholars who view the regulations concerning menstrual impurity as oppressive, however, often neglect to mention that purification rites ... were also proscribed for seminal emissions and unusual penile discharges ... and in both cases the uncleanness is transferred to other people and objects to a similar degree. (p. 62)

But Kroeger and Evans believe that such impurity was rare. As menstruation does not occur during pregnancy and seldom occurs during breastfeeding, women menstruated very rarely. Second, within a patriarchal context, in which women were treated more like property than persons, these laws arguably had a positive impact on women and placed some limits on the male control of women's lives (Kroeger & Evans 2002:62). Ironically, Moyo (2005:48) concurred saying, 'by adhering to menstruation taboos, women can also find their decision-making powers to determine the when and how of their heterosexual sex'. But that view does not really have weight because during that period of impurity, the woman was confined to the house without a say in any matters related to males!

Concerning the bleeding woman who is the focus of this work, her bleeding was beyond the normal span of menstruation and childbirth. It was a constant situation of bleeding for the period of 12 years. This implies that the Law of Purity rendered this woman unclean and suffering for that period of time without any break provided by the pregnancy or breastfeeding. It is from this perspective that her story, which is included in the story of Jairus' daughter, arises in Mark 5:21-34. There is a need to have a look on the location of that text.

## ■ Literary location of the event in Mark 5:21–34

About a half of the narrative in Mark 1–8 consists of healing miracles, and the event in the text of Mark 5:21–34 is located in the block of healing miracles in Mark 4:36 to Mark 5:43. That healing is in line with other healings of women recorded in the Gospel of Mark. Peter's mother-in-law comes as the first woman to be healed by Jesus in Mark. Tolbert (1989) asserts:

The first woman in the Gospel of Mark becomes the second person Jesus heals as he begins his ministry in Galilee. She is identified by the name of a male kinship, a proper social convention for the period, and her domain is the house of the two of Jesus disciples, Simon and Andrew. (p. 354)

After the appointment of the disciples in Chapter 3, Jesus proceeded with different teachings, especially in Chapter 4. The chapter concludes with the event of calming the storm which revealed another aspect of Jesus' power; his power was not limited to healing but could also be observed in nature, even storms obeyed him. The healing of the woman with the flow of blood without Jesus' awareness confirmed his power even more. This healing occurred at the other side of the Sea of Galilee.

The introductory verses of Chapter 5 inform the reader about Jesus' movement and the geographical setting of the event, '[h]e and his disciples return to the other (west) side of the Sea of Galilee, probably to Capernaum' (Walvoord & Zuck 1985:124). Before Jesus crossed over to the other side, he healed a demon-possessed man at the region of Gerasenes (Mk 5:1, 2). Powery (2012; cf. Mk 5:1–20) commented, 'Jesus had just performed a successful exorcism of a non-Jewish person'.

In the present work, Jesus returns to the 'Jewish' side (or to the 'other side') to find a large crowd.

It is at that 'other side' of the lake that emerges the story of the healing of a woman with the issue of blood which happened when Jesus was on his way to the home of Jairus, the synagogue ruler

whose daughter was dying. This geographical setting of Capernaum is backed up by Van Iersel who argues that the ‘the only synagogue so far mentioned is that of Capernaum (Mk 1:23, 3:1), it is natural to situate the events in that now familiar town’ (Van Iersel 1998:204).

The story of the woman with the issue of blood is intercalated in Jairus’ daughter’s story, the young girl (Mk 5:22–23). The sick woman is anonymous according to the story which might be the reasons she is called by different names as Miller notices (Miller 2004:52). In this study, she is mainly referred to as the bleeding woman.<sup>40</sup> A close look into the text shows that her healing was occasioned by the sickness of Jairus’ daughter. These two women have some important characteristics in common: one of the prevailing characteristics is the duration of 12 years. One woman has been sick for the duration of 12 years and the other one is 12 years of age. In addition, according to the Law of Purity in the Old Testament – even though its observance might not have been as rigorous as it was during the time of Leviticus – these women share the status of uncleanness.<sup>41</sup> They also share the uncleanness characteristic; the story of the bleeding woman begins with her status of ‘uncleanness’ whereas Jairus’ daughter’s story traces her uncleanness when her sickness ended in death. But despite the importance of both stories, the focus of the present work is limited to the story of the woman with the flow of blood as already mentioned.

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40. The present chapter speaks openly about the sickness of the woman pointing to her as the ‘bleeding woman’ not as a way of labelling her after her situation but as a way of emphasis because of the nature and purpose of the work. The description of the pain caused by such a sickness is well applied to women in the context from which the story is being read in this text; those women are also ‘bleeding’ internally because of different problems as it is developed in the chapter.

41. Scholars have different views about the practicability of the Leviticus Law of Purity during Jesus’ time. As it is reflected in the work, some believe that during that time it was still in use while others believe that it was no longer practised. However, one may argue that even if it was no longer observed rigorously, some would still maintain it because of the influence of the Old Testament on their religious life. This was confirmed by some practices that were still observed, for instance, when Jesus healed the man with leprosy, Jesus told him to follow the customs set by Moses, ‘[b]ut go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing ...’ (Mk 1:44).

## ■ Jesus and the bleeding woman in Mark 5:21-34

At the beginning, the bleeding woman is not seen at the scene; the introductory verses announce the appearance of a man of a high social standing, the synagogue ruler, who came to plead for healing of his very sick daughter, '[m]y little daughter is dying' (Mk 5:22, 23). After that plea, Jesus decided to go with him into his house to heal her. Jairus' daughter is the second woman who is identified by the name of a male kin after Simon Peter's mother-in-law in Mark's Gospel. It is after Jairus' daughter's introduction that another woman who is only known after her physical condition appears on the scene. Tolbert (1989) argues:

The healing of Simon's mother-in-law begins in staunchly conventional tone, the next healing story involving a woman is nothing but conventional at its outset ... Unlike Simon's mother-in-law (and Jairus' daughter) this woman is not identified by a male kin, making her status uncertain. (p. 355)

As pointed out earlier, the story of this woman is located among many other stories of healing in the Gospel of Mark and in almost all the cases those needing healing are brought to Jesus by relatives, members of the community or the sick come to Jesus openly to plead for their healing. In this story, however, comes a woman who adopted a totally different strategy planning to acquire her healing clandestinely. Some scholars link her approach to the Law of Purity even though its rigours application might not have been as rigorous as in the Leviticus time (Levine 2006:88). Thus, Van Iersel believes that she acted in that manner because of the system of the time which was connected to the Law of Purity that banned her from mixing with others. Van Iersel (1988) puts it:

In a Jewish milieu haemorrhage, like menstruation, causes ritual uncleanness, as it is known to the reader familiar with the Leviticus, from which the story borrows a number of terms. (p. 205)

Guelich (1989:296) added, '[s]he was not only defiled, she defiled anything and anyone she touched. Her illness had left her personally,

socially and spiritually cut off'. Manus (2010) elaborated on this uncleanness farther demonstrating the impact of that bleeding:

This bleeding would have made the woman and everyone and everything she touched unclean (Lev 15:25-27). She was effectively isolated from society. Marriage was out of the question, and without the normal support of a husband and children, she must have been very needy. She was also burdened with the expense of seeking cures and the regular washing of all her belongings and clothes. Her desperation and need drove her to Jesus, but her fear of being rejected led her to approach him from behind (9:21). (n.p.)

Levine (2006), however, contests saying that:

No authority restricts her to her house or requires her to proclaim herself unclean. And finally, Jesus abrogates no Laws concerning any 'crippling cultural taboo' for there is not Law forbidding the woman to touch him or him to touch her. (p. 174)

But it is very much debatable to believe that during Jesus' time, the Law of Purity had fully disappeared. A clear example of the power of that law is portrayed by Jesus' confrontation with what Herzog (1994:46) refers to as the 'clash between the great tradition and the little tradition in Mark 2:15-17' which occurred when Jesus was eating with the 'sinners', in other words, 'unclean' people:

The clash between traditions is echoed in the conflict between Jesus and the scribes and the Pharisees ... Jesus provokes the hostile exchange by reclining at table with toll collectors and sinners ... uncleanness could be contracted through touch, so Jesus was rendering himself unclean just by reclining at table with sinners. (p. 46)

The other instance among is also observed when Jesus was challenging the tradition of cleanness and uncleanness caused by observing the tradition of washing hands when one comes from public places; Jesus challenged such traditions by telling the Pharisees that '[w]hat goes into a man's mouth does not make him "unclean"...' (Mt 15:1, 2, 10). The confrontation with the Pharisees and scribes then over Jesus' table companionship with those who are 'impure' and the breaking of traditions show that the Torah's purity codes and concern were still rampant in that society. And of course, even the woman with the issue of blood was concerned by such purity codes.

## ■ The impact of the ailment of bleeding on the woman's life

If that Law of Purity was still in use, then it cannot be denied that the sickness of that woman had serious complications on her entire life. She was affected physically and socially. Beside the social exclusion, any person, especially women, would understand the severity of her suffering and all the problems related to the flow of blood for the period of 12 years. The sickness affected her finance and perhaps the side effects of a lot of medication as insinuated by the author, 'she had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse' (Mk 5:27). The medications and the long duration of her sickness would have affected her physically, emotionally and physiologically. Ukachukwu would be right to assert that the continuous flow of blood<sup>42</sup> would have distorted her hormonal balance so that she could not have ovulation. She could not hold a ripened ovum in her womb to enable her to become pregnant. It means that if she did not have any child before the 12 years of her problem, she could not conceive during that period, indicating that she was barren (Manus 2013:196). Moreover, this woman was socially affected; her psychological and emotional feelings could have driven her away from people and make her isolated.

From this perspective, we may understand her unusual approach towards her healing. She was aware that her sickness was preventing her from mingling with others; perhaps she could only open up among the similar group who were also discriminated against by means of the Purity Law. With such a group, she could easily share with other members of the group their 'hidden transcripts' (Scott 1990:xii). In other words, they could 'say to each other and what they really think about their

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42. The text does not explicitly mention what kind of bleeding but the haemorrhage which was not open to everyone and the conditions in which the woman approached Jesus may point to the vaginal bleeding not any other chronic disease.

rulers or Purity Law but are too intimidated to express openly' (Horsley 2004:49). But her health condition pushed her to break the 'official transcript' by defying the purity code and touching the man Jesus before he could disappear in Jairus home (Mk 5:24). She overlooked all the obstacles including the huge crowd on her way and she achieved her purpose.

For some scholars, however, like Van Iersel (1998), the crowd was not an obstacle, but rather an opportunity:

The bustling crowd, which in other places is portrayed as troublesome and dangerous, works to her advantage as it allows her to do, without being noticed, what she had planned to do when she first heard about Jesus. (p. 205)

While the woman's conviction was that she could hide her healing, Van Iersel (1998:205) clarifies that, '[s]he has not reckoned with the possibility that the power curing her may also be felt by the one from whom it emanates'. If Van Iersel believes that nothing could go unperceived by Jesus, especially when it involved his power, but touching Jesus in secret way does not rule out the woman's act of breaking the Law of Purity. Indeed, the woman used the crowd to hide her act which she could not dare do openly. Indeed when the woman felt healing in her body, Jesus also felt the change in his power. The act of the woman seems to be in line with the understanding of the transmitted healing power through 'touching' that some scholars attribute to the 'Hellenist' view, associating 'touch' and 'power' in Mark to a distinctive early Christian Christology that presented Jesus as *theios anēr* – [the divine man] who in this instance can be referred to as the Son of God (Guelich 1987:298).

The sick woman kept her wish and desire for healing in a surreptitious way but she knew in her body that she was healed. Gould (1975:98) noted that the changed condition, like the disease itself, would make itself known physically. In other words, when Jesus' healing power was released to the woman, both the woman and Jesus instantaneously felt the change within themselves. But it is important to look into Jesus' reaction when he felt that someone had touched him; the matter of secrecy was dismissed!



## ■ The woman's public confession and Jesus' response: A breach of official transcripts

While the woman was still rejoicing from inside about her secret achievement, a loud question echoed, '[w]ho touched my clothes?' (Mk 5:30). Those around Jesus had not noticed the woman's act; the disciples who could not understand what Jesus felt commented, '[y]ou see people crowding against you and yet you can ask, "who touched me?"' (Mk 5:31). But Jesus overlooked the disciples' comments and continued with the hidden question. The woman was no longer able to hide herself and she suddenly appeared as a surprise, ascertaining Jesus' reaction to be valid, 'the woman came and fell at his [Jesus'] feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth' (Mk 5:33). To the woman's act of confession Jesus' reaction was special and not what was expected by the crowd! Being aware of the discriminatory system based on the Torah's purity codes, he challenged that system openly! Instead of shouting at her and rebuking her, his words express a different attitude of care and love. He publicly declared, '[d]aughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be free from your suffering!' (Mk 5:34). This particular act of Jesus to the woman is similar to those before where he shared food with sinners and tax-collectors (Mk 2:15-17). Herzog (2004:47) sees that act as representing 'the ritual of reversal in which those invited to the table are those who are normally rejected as table guests'.

From this perspective, Jesus and the woman breached the 'official transcript' in the public arena in full view of everyone. In addition, by her confession, the woman spoke in details about the hidden transcript on the public stage, clarifying that she did what could not be done – mingling with people while she was bleeding and worse than that, touching the *holy* man Jesus! At the same time, Jesus also did the same in front of everyone; like the woman, he also defiled the purity code, pronouncing her a 'daughter' in the household of God. In other words, Jesus pronounced her clean; in fact, the act of the woman will never be forgotten. Many other

women in the same situation may be referring to that act ‘in the memory of her’ as the one who challenged the *status quo* of the official transcript established by the dominant.

Jesus not only declared the woman to be healed officially after her public confession but he also used that opportunity to demonstrate his inclusive compassion which goes even to the oppressed.<sup>43</sup> In addition, according to Ukachukwu, all these situations point to the ploy in the author’s technique to express the fact that the miracle done receives wide publicity (Manus 2013:194). After the public declaration of both the woman and Jesus, the sick woman was now a ‘daughter’ not an oppressed woman anymore. Amazingly, from that moment, the bleeding woman who had come to Jesus desolate, lonely, obscure, fearful and sick, in the bondage of suffering, went back home, a free, peaceful, healed ‘daughter’ of Jesus (Mk 5:34)!

By that event, Jesus demonstrated to the crowd that he brought freedom and love to everyone even those who feel abandoned, stigmatised and oppressed. The condition of this woman which had been worsened by the ‘cultural’ constructs of her system (according to the Law of Purity) and the failure of physicians were reversed by Jesus. In short, Jesus publically used the initiative and strategies adopted by the bleeding woman herself to bring about change in her entire life condition. After declaring the woman whole and free from her affliction, the author turns to the story of the synagogue ruler, Jairus and his daughter! Newsom and Ringe believed that the placement of the story of the bleeding woman in the midst of the story of Jairus’ daughter may be significant in the light of the conclusion of the bleeding woman’s episode. Newsom and Ringe (1998) asserted:

Jairus comes to Jesus as a concerned father of high social standing in the Jewish community to intercede in behalf of his ‘little *daughter*’...

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43. This woman might not have been oppressed by her society as it was discussed above by scholars, but her sickness was a great oppressor of her life. Oppression can be perpetuated by people, social systems, various types of illness, et cetera. Any power that takes one’s freedom may be referred to as oppressive no matter its provenance.

Jairus is an excellent example of the responsibility of dominant males to protect and care for the women of their household, in this case a 'daughter', in the public realm outside the home. Jesus' address to the woman as 'daughter' after she is healed invokes the same cultural convention of a new 'father', Jesus, who has the power to heal her and to intercede for her in the public realm. (p. 355)

From Newsom and Ringe's perspective, Jesus' address to the woman as 'Daughter' reveals the concept of care and ownership. He sees this woman as one of those who belong to him because of their faith. This goes in line with the prophetic words in 2 Corinthians 2:18, 'I will be a "father" to you and you will be my sons and daughters'. From this view, Jesus officially proclaims the ownership of this woman instead of rebuking her act.

## ■ The healed woman, an inspiration for other suffering women

The bleeding woman in this story is an inspiration for other women in some of today's societies who endure almost similar problems with the woman in the text. One of the common problems in the interpretation of Mark 5:21-34 is the deprivation of her identity. Throughout the narrative, this woman is never identified by her name but by her physical condition. This unfortunate habit of identifying individuals after their ill conditions is common in different (African) societies, at least in my own context that I know better. Normally, in my society particularly - Rwandan and Burundian communities - women are identified as individuals and not belonging to males. That is the reason why they are not even obliged to take their husbands' names when they get married. The deprivation of identity is common to female survivors of sexual violence who are the case study in this work. They are often nicknamed and referred to after what happened to them and not called by their real names.

Traditionally or culturally, any woman who is sexually harassed in the above cited countries from the Great Lakes Region (and elsewhere) is also called after such an event. For instance,

a young girl who is pregnant when she is not married and any child born outside of marriage are given names describing their conditions and even considered as a curse to the family and extended family. Both the mother and the child are unclean and the names that are given to them are according to their curse and uncleanness such as *abatera mwaku*, meaning those who 'bring tragedies and bad luck' to their families. The child is nicknamed *ikinyendaro*; even when the community knows the real names they are called by those pejorative names. This leads them to be silent about their situation. Draper (2009:97) observed the same with the cases of HIV or AIDS where he argued, 'these fears are not without foundation since the public acknowledgement... can lead not only to ostracism but also to personal violence'. Definitely, if one is referred to as one that causes tragedy to the community and family he or she can be attacked by anyone in the community at any time, and hence, they choose to be silent.

Hence, these women suffer hidden pain as they are obliged not to be open about their violation for fear of being objects of stigma and discrimination in their families and communities. Sometimes, they are socially excluded because of diseases resulting from sexual violence such as HIV and AIDS which are often referred to as 'God's punishment' (Haddad 2008:49). Hence, they keep their ill conditions a secret. But for some of them, their secrets are disclosed by unwanted pregnancies, and then, their unwanted children become a reflection of their condition. They therefore suffer socially and physically and shed blood internally, sometimes also physically as a result of violence. But as the story of the bleeding woman's progresses towards her healing, it is a mirror for other women's healing.

## ■ The woman's strategies as a mirror for the self-healing way of process

The interaction with the story of the woman revealed different important and positive steps towards her liberation which can be adopted by women in the above-described context of violence.

It was pointed out that the bleeding woman was able to challenge the official transcripts of the purity codes that had imposed silence on her. It was also observed that women in the Great Lakes Region also have been subjugated to a culture of silence because of the stigma attached to their life condition. But the courage and boldness of the bleeding woman are awakening tools for these women to reverse such cultural trends that have been enslaving them as well. Hence, as West observes that ‘the poor and marginalized create their own language’ to defend themselves, the bleeding woman also created her own language that she used to breach the official transcript of her dominant society. This important development sheds light in the obscurity created by patriarchal and cultural ‘transcripts’ that have created a *status quo* of inferiority and subjugation of women survivors of sexual violence in the countries of Burundi, the DRC and Rwanda. From the view of this woman’s language – a language of breaking cultural norms – women from these mentioned countries can also learn a language that is appropriate to their situation to secure their own liberation. In other words, they are exposed to the courage of the bleeding woman and they can challenge what West (2013:167) has observed that, ‘[w]hen oppressed people live in silence, they use the words of their oppressors to describe their experience of oppression’. The bleeding woman refused to use the words of the oppressing system which expressed the view that she should stay away from people and adopted liberative words to go secure her healing.

Hence, as noted above for menstruating women in the above countries, instead of speaking the same oppressive words repeating to young generation about what menstruating women are not allowed to do, they should adopt other strategies that challenge the regressive cultural understanding. In addition, women survivors of sexual violence or any other oppressive systems are the ones to fight for their own liberation and healing as did the bleeding woman despite all the cost, whether material, emotional or psychological. But it is also the role of interpreters of biblical texts to help these women to change their understanding

and fight for their liberation. The interaction with the acts of both the bleeding woman and Jesus can then make a difference if it is adequately shared with these women. The bleeding woman did not fear marginalisation when she resolved to mingle with the crowd, especially when her discrete act was discovered. She spoke openly about her act to everyone instead of hiding and she was liberated.

Jesus admired the act of that woman and confirmed the view that '[a]ll human beings are endowed with equal dignity and the human nature has to be understood holistically as somatic experience' (Haspel 2004:490). Jesus' attitude serves as an inspiration to the Church and communities that honour him to be healers of sick in their church settings. Instead of contributing to the rejection of those who lost hope by reinforcing their stigma, they are called to emulate Jesus' act of care and love. Rakoczy (2006:187) summed it up in her words, '[s]ince we are all sisters and brothers of the one God who is love, not hatred, we are bound together in a shared humanity'. Such a bond dismisses any kind of social and religious boundaries that Draper describes as hindering the kingdom of God. He puts it as, '[w]here our local communal boundary rules dehumanise the others they hinder the kingdom of God ... where purity controls and excludes others to their harm, Jesus rejects them' (Draper 2003:97). Therefore, the bleeding woman's initiative to overcome her 12 years period of deep suffering because of any kind of limitation provides women in the same situation with a proper stimulus to fight for their own liberation and wellbeing.

## ■ Suggestions

Guided by the Tri-Polar Exegetical Model, this section has read the story about the bleeding woman in Mark 5:21–34 from the perspective of the marginalised, specifically the women survivors of sexual violence and menstruating women who live in constant fear and suffering. The contextual phase used the case study of the women from the Great Lakes Region, a region marred with conflict and war.

It was pointed out that the region is marked by the culture of honour and shame and anything related to sex and sexuality is a taboo. Hence, women suffer in different ways and shed blood both socially and through violence and emotional wise. The cultural taboos imposed upon menstruation blood and sexual violence also establish barriers for women in many aspects of their lives. Patriarchal and cultural trends are tools to perpetuate the silence of women and their confinement to homes. Women have been paralysed by the fear of stigma attached to their condition, and unfortunately, even some of those who were supposed to be their healers both spiritually and/or physically worsen their situation. By clarifying the negative role of some spiritual healers, Draper (2003) pointed out Berger and Luckmann's observation and argument that:

Religion ... legitimates the existing structures and guarantees the continuity of the values and thought patterns of a particular society's social universe. Thus religion has an inbuilt bias towards the maintenance of the *status quo*, in line with the interests of the ruling elite .... (p. 97)

In other words, religious leaders who side with the powerful fail to achieve their mission.

This study ends with some concluding suggestions that are especially directed to women who have adopted the path of silence as ways to comply their oppressors. This study believes that the emulation of the women's act of exposing her 'hidden transcripts' by her efforts and boldness and breaking the Law of Purity as a way to secure her healing is a crucial step towards their own liberation. Jesus' shared act with the woman in breaching the official transcripts in the view of everyone by declaring the 'unclean' a 'daughter' is also a stepping stone to encourage the rejected to stand up for their dignity. To the 'healers' of the oppressed and marginalised, Jesus' attitude of enhancing human dignity despite the tradition of excluding such people as seen in the code of the Torah serves not only as their mirror but especially as a means to help them change any official transcript of the dominant as well as to challenge the hidden transcripts of the oppressors: there is hope for those who have lost it!

# Reading the miracles of Jesus: Exorcisms – From an African context

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## ■ Abstract

By making a comparative analysis, I illustrate the ways in which miracles performed by or in the name of Jesus resonate with ideas about malevolent spirits and exorcisms in African spirituality. Using the case of present-day healers as an entry point, I examine how performances by Jesus as reported in the Gospels and Acts, the rebuking evil of spirits (Mt 7:18); spitting (Mk 7:31–37); talking to and bargaining with the evil spirit (Lk 4:41; Mt 8:31); looking intently in the eyes (Ac 3:4); and asking the name of the demon (Mk 5:9; Mt 8:30; Lk 8:30) and exorcisms by,

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for example, a command (Mt 8:16,32; Lk 4:35; Mk 9:25), are all parallel to the African approaches to spiritual healing. On the bases of those parallels, I argue that the selected miracles of Jesus illuminate cross-cultural and religious ideas about the activities of evil spirits and how those ideas shape subsequent healing practices. I conclude by submitting that symbolic performances of African healers and of Jesus, as miracle workers, make techniques used spiritually meaningful in the lives of believing communities.

**Keywords:** Cross-cultural; Symbolic performances; Exorcisms; Sangoma; Bargaining.

## ■ Introduction

As an introduction to the chapter, I begin by giving an overview of the miracles performed by Jesus according to the gospel tradition. Importantly and later in the discussion, striking similarities exist between Jesus' miracles and those performed by the miracle workers in other religious traditions in and outside Africa. Like the modern healers in Africa, Jesus, in his social world, was received as a healer and exorcist (Kreener 2009:40). He, among other miracles, healed people of various diseases: physical disorders – lepers (Mk 1:40–45; Lk 17:11–19; Jn 5:1–18), the blind (Mk 8:22–26; Jn 9:1–41), the paralysed (Mk 2:1–12, 3:1–6), the haemorrhaging woman (Mk 5:25–34), venereal disease (Lk 14:1–6); unexplained or explained medical conditions – the healing of Peter's mother-in-law (Mk 1:29–31), the Roman official's son at Capernaum (Jn 4:43–54), Centurion's servant (Lk 7:2–10), Gennesaret healings (Mk 6:53–56), the Syro-phoenician woman's daughter (Mk 7:24–30) and so on. What these stories inform us is that, in the first century world in which knowledge of advanced medicine was limited, miracles were highly prized, and persons endowed with supernatural powers to heal bodily ailments were certainly revered as divine. This is also true in the present-day Africa; divine healers continue to play a significant role in responding to the health and wellbeing challenges of the

communities they serve. Like Jesus' time, supposedly, people would travel for long distances seeking for help from spiritual healers. What this tells us is that despite the availability of medicine (even in the time of Jesus), people would resort to spiritual healing as a lasting solution to certain life-threatening health conditions. This was partly heightened by levels in knowledge regarding medicines, which, in turn, coerce the sick to go for spiritual healing as an alternative, final and immutable remedy. This, in my observation, is true in the present-day Africa, especially in the cases of HIV, AIDS, demon attacks, et cetera, to only mention a few of many health challenges of our millennium in which Jesus is received as the only saviour and healer.<sup>44</sup>

There is not any other miracle that spiritual healers – past or present – cannot perform in the understanding of those in search of health and wellbeing. These people have been given ‘... authority over unclean and to heal every disease and every infirmity’ (Mt 10:1). They can perform miraculous acts such as the feeding of 4000 or 5000 people with five loaves of bread and two fishes (Mk 6:34-44, 8:1-9); raising the dead (Mk 5:35-43; Lk 7:11-17; Jn 11:1-44); walking on water (Mk 6:44-52); turning water into wine (Jn 2:1-11); miraculous catching of fishes (Lk 5:1-11); calming raging seas (Mk 4:35-41); and, above all, resurrecting the dead and/or ascending to the heavens by Jesus (Mk 1:21-27; Mt 8:14-15; Jn 4:43-54), Apollonius of Tyana (Freed 2001:203), the Buddha, et cetera. The dominance of these divine persons was also demonstrated by their ability to control other rival gods and spirits. This explains why Jesus was acclaimed as a great miracle worker in the Gospels who healed people from psychological disorders as well: the case of a possessed man at Capernaum (Mk 1:21-28), at Gerasene (Mk 5:1-20) and the demon-possessed mute (Mk 7:31-37, 9:14-29, 32-34). According to gospel writers, these miracles were an indisputable proof that Jesus was certainly the Son of God who fulfilled the messianic prophecies of Isaiah 53:4 by taking away ‘our infirmities and diseases’ (Mt 8:17).

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44. There are many churches and traditional healers in Africa today popular with people living with HIV, cancer patients, the so-called possessed individuals, the list is endless.

Stanton (1989:215) pointed out that the miracles revealed that ‘Jesus seemed to have been a healer with what we now call a “charismatic personality”’. This personality, like other miracle workers of his day, was embedded in his conviction that he had a special relationship with God, ‘I and the Father are one’ (Jn 10:30) and that ‘... I am in the father and the father in me?’. Because of this, he asserted ‘[t]he words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the father who dwells in me does his works’ (Jn 14:10). He performed what Ehrman (2008:241) calls ‘spectacular’ acts on grounds that he possessed supernatural authority reserved for God (Edwards 2005:81). He could, to the chagrin of his adversaries who accused him of blasphemy (‘[w]hy does this man speak thus? It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?’ [Mk 2:7]), declare to the sick that ‘[y]our sins are forgiven’ (Mt 9:5). The point Edwards (2005:81) made here is that Jesus, as a healer, could not perform those extraordinary deeds unless he was in a unique relationship with the divine other (cf. Ehrman 2008:241). The point raised is that, in Jesus’ time and even our own, there is the belief that some holy persons can perform miracles which an ordinary person cannot do. I shall briefly highlight a few selected cases in the Jewish and Greco-Roman world after giving a brief presentation on methods that were used to collect data relevant to the inquiry.

## ■ Data-collection methods

I conducted desktop research on miracles and miracle performances in the Jewish and Greco-Roman world. I then proceeded to give an overview of Jesus as a miracle worker in apocryphal Gospels and infancy narratives from selected works available in print and electronic formats. To be able to draw parallels between healing systems in the ancient Mediterranean and African communities today, I interviewed some informants in four communities in Southern Africa – Nyanja, Zulu, Shona and Ndebele – to generate primary data on the ideas about spirits and spiritual healings. The informants were identified through

referral sampling, were interviewed in person or through text messaging using WhatsApp and were given pseudo-names in the discussion. This material shall be complemented by my personal observations for the past years in Zimbabwe.

## ■ **Miracle workers in the ancient Mediterranean: The case of Jewish and Greco-Roman *theios aner***

Across the ancient Mediterranean world, there were many other miracle workers of great repute and Jesus was one of them. The intriguing question hinged on whether those persons performed miracles and, if they did, what is the source of their power to work out the 'spectacular' acts (Ehrman 2008:242). In other words, the most important question was: is the miracle worker empowered by magic or the gods? (Ehrman 2008:8). The case of the Beelzebul controversy argues this point, '[h]e cast out demons by Beelzebul, the prince of demons' (Lk 11:15 RSV). The serious accusations levelled against Jesus indicate that the onlookers did not dispute the fact that he had healed the man with demons. They queried the source of authority from which he derived the power to do so. Basing on their judgement (perhaps of the healing technique), the immediate conclusion was that Jesus used the prince of all demons – Beelzebul – to drive away lesser spirits and give way. The text does not give the details on how Jesus exorcised the demons except reporting that he drove out a dumb demon. The incident of the seven sons of Sceva (Ac 19:11-20) also indicates that there were gullible and itinerant exorcists who possibly earned a living by imitating certain personality cults and Paul in this case. The other point I make here is that not all miracle workers were considered as holy persons at all times. Miracles were taken case by case to determine, possibly using certain criteria, whether they were genuine or not and whether they were from God or Satan. The common belief was that some people could perform some

magical tricks to sway away people from true religion. This position is supported in the Sanhedrin b 43a which reports that Jesus was ‘led out for stoning, because he practised sorcery and led Israel astray and enticed them into apostasy’ (Stanton 1989:144). What this informs the reader is that not every person in Jesus’ world, and by extension our world, believes that all miraculous performances are because of the support of God. Celsus, a second century Greek Philosopher and a staunch critic of Christianity, maintained that Jesus ‘worked his miracles by sorcery’ (Van Voost 2011:2165), a view that has been rejected by the majority of scholars (Bloomberg 2007).

This dilemma explains why even the ancient world had to be very cautious about miracle workers. Why was it necessary? This is because there were fake miracle workers alongside those who were widely accepted as holy persons in Jewish and Greco-Roman writings. Asclepius, for example, the son of Apollo, was renowned in the Greco-Roman world as a great healer who Chiron taught (Nayernouri 2010):

[7]he secrets of all the herbal medicines and the art of healing, ... was able to resurrect the dead, including such outcasts as Hippolytes, Lycurgus, Capaneus and Glaukos the son of Minos. (p. 63)

It was believed that the Roman emperor – Vespasian – healed a blind man at Alexandria with his own saliva and restored a man’s foot by a simple touch following a vision from God Serapis (Howitt 2010:123). Apollonius of Tyana, among many other miracles, is said to have cast out a demon from a girl by whispering in her ear and casting ‘over the victim’s body a magical spell that included her name’ (Bloomberg 2007:119). Another renowned miracle worker at that time was Hanina ben Dosa, a mid-first century AD Galilean rabbi, who healed the sick child of Johanan ben Zakai, procured the rains by prayer and exorcised demons (Ehrman 2008:52). Honi, the Circle Drawer, is another notable Galilean rabbi who appeared nearly 100 years before the birth of Jesus. He was known for drawing a circle around him, pray for the rains and coming out of the circle when it rains (Ehrman 2008:52).

From the examples given above, it is evident why the adversaries of Jesus questioned the source of his authority to perform miracles and not the miracle per se. His world was a world of miracles with many other holy persons performing spectacular events. Miracles were also intelligible to a first century person because, most, if not all those, miracles performed by Jesus have striking affinities with those recorded in the Old Testament: changing of water into something else: wine (red?) is parallel to that incident in which Moses changed the waters of the Nile to become as red as blood (Ex 7:20-25); the raising of the dead in the Gospels mentioned above is parallel to the raising of the widow's son (1 Ki 17:17-24) and the Shunnamite woman's son (2 Ki 4:3-37) in the Elisha-Elisha cycle of stories. The multiplication of foodstuffs in the feeding of the crowds (Mk 6:34-44, 8:1-9) is reminiscent of the incident in which Elisha multiplied the widow's remaining oil (2 Ki 4:2-7) and the feeding of crowds (2 Ki 4:42-44). On the other hand, the healing of lepers mentioned above is associated with Elijah-Elisha miracle stories (2 Ki 5:10-14, 20-27). These few examples certainly explain why the miracles of Jesus would make sense to a first century person. As I have mentioned earlier on, the question in the case of Jesus was (Mk 6):

Where did this man get all this? What is the wisdom given to him? What mighty works are wrought by his hands! Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us? (vv. 2-3)

What is evident is that the miracles of Jesus had their antecedents in the 'Old' Testament and were of great theological significance!

## ■ Jesus as a healer and exorcist in Apocryphal Gospels and Infancy Narratives

When you look at the miracles performed by holy persons in Africa and the ancient Mediterranean, there is that tendency to

read these elements in the birth stories of such persons. I illustrate the truth in this view by exploring miracles associated with the childhood of Jesus. My primary focus is not on whether those stories are true or false but I take them as part of the tradition that was handed on from generation to generation. From these stories, it is evident that one of the defining characteristics of great people and miracle workers has to do with the miraculous: virginal conception, births, miraculous stars, being recognised as divine by animals and miraculous escape from attempted killings. Such stories are common for great figures such as Jesus (Mt 1:18; Mt 2:1-3, 7-12), Moses (Ex 2:1-10), Dionysus changing water into wine (Bloomberg 2007:115), Solomon was taken as an exorcist, Achilles and Aeneas were born of a divine father Thetis or Aphrodite and human mother Peleus or Anchises, respectively (*Iliad* II. 2.819-2.822, 5.247-248, 24.59) (Talbert 2006:79). In Greek mythology, Mithra is born from a rock (Bloomberg 2007:117), Alexander the Great was born of a virgin and became a god with his death (Bloomberg 2007:115) and, coming close to our time, miracle working religious figures in Africa such as T.B. Joshua claim to have been born 15 months after conception (August 2014). A closer look at these reports indicates that the stories possibly have 'grown' out of religious imagination, the need to read back those miraculous elements into the childhood of the miracle worker. Malina and Rohrbaugh (1992:286) posit '... accounts of childhood are quite securely inferred from adult behaviour of people'. This is because, '[g]reat personages were seen to have certain characteristics from the moment of birth, and these characteristics remain with them throughout life' (Malina & Rohrbaugh 1992:286). This is one way scholars make sense of childhood miraculous accounts of Jesus, 'they are "pre-reflections" of Jesus as the risen Messiah' (Malina & Rohrbaugh 1992:286). The point I am making here is that miracles of Jesus and other workers should be understood within the broader context of the life of the person, from birth until death!

To support this position, I now turn to healing miracles of Jesus in Apocryphal Gospels and Infancy Narratives. There is nowhere Jesus is said to have made it rain in the Canonical Gospels but there are many more miracles attributed to Jesus which are very important to mention in this section. The primary interest is not on the credibility of the stories but the reception of Jesus in communities that preserved those stories. Remember, in the introduction I summarised some of the miracles performed by Jesus as an adult, now I consider what we know of his childhood miracles in gospel that were rejected by the early church as a perversion of his life – the Apocryphal Gospels and Infancy Gospels. I will not look at every miracle, but rather only a selected few to make a case in this section.

According to the Infancy Gospel of Thomas B 2-3, Jesus moulded 12 sparrows on the Sabbath and when a rabbi remonstrated against him for breaking the law, he let them fly away and disappear in the skies (Elliot 2006:135). In another incident, he cursed to death a child who irritated him only to resuscitate him following the rebuke of Mary (Elliot 2006:135). He is said to have healed two injured men, gathered water from a broken pitcher using his garment and handkerchief (Elliot 2006:155), commanded the serpent that bit Simon Peter to suck the poison out of him and it obeyed (Elliot 2006:155). Similar to Daniel in the Old Testament, Jesus stayed and played with lions and cast out a demon out of Judas Iscariot which ‘fled like a dog’ (Elliot 2006:130). On the first family’s way out of Egypt, it was reported that, two women, at Mary’s advice, washed their dying sons with Jesus’ bath water and they recuperated (Elliot 2006:130). From the said stories, it is evident that Jesus was taken as a healer and exorcist, from childhood through adulthood! Having said this, I will move on to read the miracles of Jesus from an African context. Using specific cases of exorcisms, I draw what I consider as parallels between Jesus’ healing techniques and those methods used by contemporary healers in Africa.



## ■ **Reading exorcism miracles of Jesus from an African context: Insights from social scientific criticism and cultural studies**

In my reading of the exorcisms performed by Jesus from an Africa context, I draw insights from social scientific criticism and cultural studies to support my position. The idea is to demonstrate underlying beliefs about demons and exorcisms in the ancient Mediterranean and African contexts. To do this, I draw some insight from social scientific criticism and cultural studies in my interpretation of those miracles. Given that there are a number of passages in which Jesus did cast out evil spirits (Mk 7:26, 9:33; Mt 8:16,32, 9:34; Lk 4:35,41, 11:14, 13:32), I, for the purpose of discussion, pay close attention to selected narratives that detail symptoms of demon possession in the gospel tradition and how Jesus drove away the evil spirit: the story of Legion (Mk 5:1-20) and the healing of the demon-possessed boy (Mk 9:14-29). A reading of the selected miracles reveals that, in the ancient Mediterranean, demon possession was associated with deafness and/or dumbness (Mk 9:17, 7:31-35); convulsions (Mk 9:18, 20); foaming on the mouth and grinding of teeth (Mk 9:18); writhing, screaming and/or howling (Mk 9:20, 26, 5:5); living among the dead (Mk 5:2); and extraordinary bodily strength (Mk 5:3). These were some of the defining and telling signs of demon possession in the Mediterranean antiquity. The question that then arises is: Are these beliefs also true for the African people?

Before I respond to the raised question, I give an overview of African cosmology for the benefit of the reader. Most writers agree that Africans believe in the existence of good and bad spirits (Idowu 1973; Mbiti 1969:16). These spirits are located between God and humanity and are arranged in a hierarchical order, from higher to lesser spiritual beings. Some writers classify these spiritual beings into three distinct categories: divinities, spirits and ancestors (Mbiti 1969:75; Moscicke 2017:128); and the

essay focuses on the second category – the spirits! These are, in most African societies, understood as spirits of dead persons or animals (Mbiti 1969:79) and of people who were not given a decent burial (Magesa 1997:175; Moscicke 2017:129). The belief is that these spirits – benevolent or malevolent – roam all over places looking for a host (Mbiti 1969:80). Gelfand (1973), with reference to the Shona peoples writes:

[T]he spirit will, it is believed, enter the host at a moment no one can predict ... and when possessed the person is said to be dangerous to others even though she herself may not know what has happened to her. (p. 128)

The host could be an animate or inanimate object (Kalu 2008:117; Moscicke 2017:129) and could create havoc, in the case of evil spirits, in communities. In my ethnographic studies, I have observed that certain rituals are performed to placate the spirits; for example, the Nguni-Sotho people perform rituals at accident scenes to take home the spirit of the deceased least he or she causes horrific accidents on the very same place. This is also true in most African cultures; dangerous places are often associated with ghosts, the spirits of deceased peoples!

I now make a comparative analysis of spiritual beliefs in the ancient Mediterranean and selected peoples in the southern Africa. As in the ancient Mediterranean times, deviant and/or abnormal behaviour (Malina & Rohrbaugh 1992:208) is explained in terms of spiritual possession. As in the case of a possessed man at Capernaum (Mk 1:21-28) or Gerasene (?) (Mk 5:1-20) and the demon-possessed mute (Mk 7:31-37, 9:14-29, 32-34), the Shona people attribute mental disorders and violent behaviours to *mweya yatsvina/yemadzidza*.<sup>45</sup> Demon-possessed persons are considered a threat given a suppressed mental faculty and were usually taken out of their communities to live in the open (Malina & Rohrbaugh 1992:286). For this reason, they would roam

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45. These are evil spirits in general or a curse in the family. This is also true from the Nguni peoples of southern Africa.

aimlessly in the wilderness. I see this belief concerning madness as a common tenet among the African peoples as well. This is because, a person who roams (at times naked) about picking and/or eating rubbish from bins, stays out at night, exhibits suicidal tendencies, practices witchcraft, et cetera, is believed to be possessed by an evil spirit. These behaviours are attributed to possession by unclean spirits in the said communities. The belief is that there is no way a normal person can indulge in these abnormal behaviours unless he or she is possessed by a malignant spirit, *umoyo omubi*.<sup>46</sup> And, in my studies, I have gathered that those spirits are associated with certain places such as graves, rivers, mountains, et cetera, and animals like certain species of animals – hyena, baboons, snakes (Shona/Nguni), birds (Shona/Nguni) and plants (Nguni). This explains why the Nguni people use a certain tree branch to ‘take’ the spirit of the deceased home least it causes havoc in the community. To this end, I find strong affinities of ideas about possessions by evil spirits in the ancient Mediterranean times, especially when I consider the ‘customary test for madness: (1) spending the night in the tomb; (2) tearing one’s clothes; (3) walking around at night; and (4) destroying things received from others’ (Malina & Rohrbaugh 1992:208). The belief that evil spirits have control on the lives of the people takes us to another point that the divine healers are endowed with spiritual powers to drive away evil spirits. I will shortly look at how healers exorcise evil spirits in the ancient Mediterranean and African communities in order to illustrate the claims that I have made in the introduction.

## ■ Evil spirits, healing techniques and the making of spiritual meanings

I turn to the healing strategies that were employed in the ancient Mediterranean times to drive away evil spirits showing the

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46. An expression used by the Nguni peoples to mean that someone is possessed by an evil spirit.

extent to which they resonate with African forms of healing. I strictly pick those symbolic performances that are relevant to this discussion: rebuking evil spirits (Mt 7:18); spitting (Mk 7:31–37); talking to and, in some cases, bargaining with the evil spirit (Lk 4:41; Mt 8:31); looking intently in the eyes (Ac 3:4); asking the name of the demon (Mk 5:9; Mt 8:30; Lk 8:30); and commanding the demon to get out of the host (Mt 8:16, 32; Lk 4:35; Mk 9:25). One of the noticeable characteristics of exorcism is that gospel writers give a brief description of the condition of the possessed person, an encounter with Jesus and an acknowledgement of his authority by the evil spirit. This could be in action; the demons ‘bows down’ in prostration begging him not to ‘torment us before the right time’ (Mt 8:29). Jesus responds by commanding the demon to be silent, demanding the name and then exorcises the evil spirit. In my ethnographic studies, I have observed that such practices are very common in the driving away of evil spirits in the African communities. Like in the ancient Mediterranean in which it was a norm to ask for the name of the demons: the case of Jesus and Legion (Mk 5:9; Lk 8:30), Apollonius and the dead girl (*Life of Apollonius* 4:45; Freed 2001:2002), African healers demand the name of the spirit before effecting the actual healing: *Ndiudze, ndiwe ani? Uri kudei?*<sup>47</sup> This is a common practice in African traditional healing<sup>48</sup> and the Church in Africa,<sup>49</sup> especially the so-called Pentecostal Charismatics live streamed on DSTV channel 390, 281, et cetera. As in the ancient Mediterranean,

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47. More often, Shona divine healers would ask the name of the evil spirit and what is it that it wants from the person. This is also a common practice among Christian prophet healers.

48. In my ethnographic research, I established that this is a common practice in traditional healing. This practice is embedded in the belief that once a healer knows the name of the demon, it becomes possible to talk to the relevant spirits to release the victim. On the other hand, the shone peoples believe that witches, for examples, talk to the victim’s deceased family members to open the door for them at night and this is one of the reasons, my informants, revealed these people are unwilling to reveal their identities to strangers.

49. This is also a common practice in the healing ministry of AICs’ broadcast live on the following channels on DSTV channel 124.

the belief is that '[t]he power to use a name is the power to control. Jesus demands it and the demons obey' (Malina & Rohrbauch 1992:208). This is also pronounced in the healing spaces of the African church in which the sick are set free in the 'the name of Jesus'. The belief is that, the mentioning of the name itself and saying it correctly, *in the name of Jesus Christ; the son of the living God*, has an effect in the healing process. What this means is that mispronouncing the name – *Jesus Christ* – would weaken its effectiveness in healing!

The strong belief is that there is power in a name and that the power is only emitted or subdued when the name is mentioned correctly. Closely connected to this, I have established that healings in African religious thought are attributed to the ancestors who, on behalf of the living, talk to God. For a person to be healed, the practice is that an elderly person(s) submit their requests to God through the ancestors who, in the process, they call their names one by one, from the youngest to the eldest and as far as they can remember.<sup>50</sup> The idea is that 'no one will, tomorrow, say I was not informed in the event that the situation deteriorates from bad to worse'.<sup>51</sup> The point I make here is that, the belief that a name is of great spiritual significance is common across cultures as mentioned in the ancient Mediterranean. By evoking the name, it is anticipated that the evil spirit would know who is it they talk to, how to avoid destruction before the right time and how to bargain for a temporary restoration (Malina & Rohrbauch 1992):

[D]emons cry out essentially to protect themselves against Jesus by using formulas and techniques known from magical practices. Here the technique is the use of the name that is really Jesus' true identity (see also Mark 3:11, 5:7). (p. 181)

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50. When they mention the last one they remember, they tell him or her to inform those they cannot remember of their request so that no one can say that he was not informed. The practice is common in all the communities mentioned in the chapter.

51. John, WhatsApp message, 13 June 2018.

The report by the gospel writers that Legion acknowledged Jesus as the son of the living God and begs him to send the spirits into swine supports this view.

In light of what has been said above, one can see why the two deaf men (Mk 7:31–37) could not talk – were demon-possessed! Although the text does not give the reason for their inability to talk, it is, in light of what has been raised in this discussion, to say that they were possessed by an evil spirit. From what has been said here, it appears the evil spirits were refusing to divulge their names to healers except Jesus, the greatest of all miracle workers of his time. An observation that I have made that is closer to this belief is that, the Shona peoples, for example, are reluctant to divulge their true identities – names, totems, et cetera, to strangers based on the reason that:

‘You cannot tell strangers your name especially your totem. Once an evil person knows your name and totem, you are vulnerable ... it becomes easy for them to bewitch you. Remember witches talk to your ancestors to open the doors and they can only do so if they trick them by calling them out by their names’. (John, interview, 22 June 2018)

There are great affinities in symbolic performances of Jewish and Greco-Roman healers and those commonly practised in Africa<sup>52</sup> today. Symbolic techniques like: rebuke – ‘[b]e quiet and come out of him!’ (Lk 4:35); ‘[c]ome out of the man, you unclean spirit!’ (Mk 5:8); ‘[y]ou deaf and mute spirit, I command you, come out of him and do not enter him again’ (Mk 9:25); a declarative command – ‘[g]o!’ (Mt 8:32); or looking squarely in the eyes (Ac 3:4) were powerful weapons in driving away evil spirits in the ancient Mediterranean and African healing spaces as well. This also involves speaking evil against someone or the spirit – a curse through, for example, spitting on the ground (Jesus used spittle in Mk 6:22–26). Such healing techniques are also common among the African peoples as well. In my ethnographic studies, I have

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52. Prophet healers in AICs, for example, import those actions of Jesus in their healing ministry and the same symbolic expression.

established that Nyanja people of Malawi cast a spell on an individual by spitting on the ground:

Mary. In our culture, say – a mom – has very disobedient children and she tries her outmost to control them but eventually surrenders on them. She will call them, tell them of everything good she did and spits to the ground declaring that, from that very moment, they are not her children anymore. This is a serious curse and these children will not do anything meaningful in their lives until corrective rituals are performed.<sup>53</sup> (Malawian informant, interview, 26 June 2018)

On the other hand, I established that the eye is a powerful tool in approving of or disapproving of behaviours and casting ill luck on persons. My study revealed this belief as one of the strong reasons why the Shona people avoid direct eye contact during conversations with people they do not trust. They try and avoid direct eye contact with a person as much as possible on the belief they can fall victim to the evil intention of that person: *Kana muroyi akakuti ndee kutarisa iwe ukasanganisa maziso ake naye haa ziva kuti wabatana nacho.*<sup>54</sup> There is some truth in this for the ancient people in the ancient Mediterranean as well. In this social world, an evil eye ('ayin ra'ah and 'ayin tsarah, 'narrow eye', which are in contrast to 'ayin tovah, 'good eye') was '... believed to threaten persons and things upon which it falls' (Nanos 2000:8). Nanos continued to say that (2000):

[7]his destructive gaze, intentional or not, is feared to harm especially health (even to the point of death), productivity (the means of livelihood, e.g., farm animals, pottery), and fortune (any good that may occur, especially if it comes suddenly or noticeably, bringing prestige or profit). (p. 8)

The most susceptible victims of an evil eye were 'children and beautiful things or people (especially women, doubly so pregnant ones), and those engaged in rites of passage (birth, marriage,

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53. An informant from Malawi, interview 26 June 2018. This informant went on to say that once parents perform such an act those children are cursed. They will not do anything meaningful in their lives until the relationship with their mother has been restored when elders in the family performing prescribed rituals.

54. Tichaona, WhatsApp message, 15 June 2018.

conversion) are considered most vulnerable' (Nanos 2000:8). In the same context, there is a general belief among African peoples, at least those I know - Shona, Ndebele and Zulus - that most of the challenges they face in their daily lives are directed to them by bad-eyed individuals. These are usually immediate neighbours out to destroy one's lifetime achievements, and in most instances, children, women and the poor are perceived as the most vulnerable! This is a common *misfortune theodicy* among African peoples in general (Bourdillon 1993).

As in ancient societies in the ancient Mediterranean, eye contact communicates a very powerful message in the course of interaction. The point is body language across cultures communicates very important messages. Returning to the casting of demons by Jesus, when he, for example, asked the demon-possessed person's name, it is mostly likely that Jesus was looking straight into his eyes (cf. Mt 19:26). I want to think so because of the said reasons stated above and that (Elliot 2011):

[E]vil eye practice involves all strategies and devices used to ward off, deflect or overcome damage from an evil eye. Along with belief in deities and demons, belief in the existence and destructive power of the evil eye pervaded the Ancient Near East and Circum-Mediterranean. To the malevolent working of the evil eye demon or to humans possessing an evil eye were attributed throughout the ancient world sudden illnesses, injuries, loss of children and family, death of cattle, outbreaks of war and social conflict and other disasters. (p. 5)

It also suffices to say that one's physical appearance and even facial expressions have, in most African communities, attached institutionalised meanings.<sup>55</sup> What was most important was to know certain features as well as expressions and how best to protect oneself from evil intentions of such people.

I now look at how evil spirits were driven into a host and comment on this practice from an African point of view. I have

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55. In my ethnographic studies, I have established that very dark-skinned, old and bereaved women are often accused of witchcraft.



mentioned earlier on that African people believe that spirits reside in hosts. This is close to what Jesus says (Lk 11):

When the unclean spirit has gone out of a man, he passes through waterless places seeking rest; and finding none he says, 'I will return to my house from which I came'. (v. 24)

It is more of a spiritual battle; evil spirits could be sent away or accommodated depending on the preferences of an individual. The African people used as case studies here believe that divine healers have the supernatural powers to send away unwanted evils spirits. I will, for the purpose of this discussion, look at those techniques used in the casting of demons that resonates with the ancient Mediterranean cultures – the sending or taking of the evil spirit into or through a host. In the discussion above, I stated that the Nguni people use a branch from a special tree to take the spirit of the deceased home. In addition, like what Jesus did when he moved the evil spirits into swine, divine healers move the evil spirit from one host to the other:

'If a person is possessed by an evil spirit, the family consults a traditional healer who performs rituals to send it away. The divine-healer talks to the spirit and transfers it to a host. This could be a cock, bull or sheep black in colour.' (Svikiro, interview, 22 June 2018)

In brief, these are some of the mechanism used in exorcisms and one can see striking similarities with other religious and cultural traditions in the ancient Mediterranean. In the next section I try to make sense of spiritual worldview across cultures and techniques used in driving away evil spirits and make some concluding remarks.

## ■ **Evil spirits in the ancient Mediterranean and the African contexts: A discussion**

From what has been said in this discussion, it is quite evident that '[i]n the oral period stories of Jesus' miracles were adapted to a Hellenistic environment from a Palestinian setting' (Freed

2001:203). We can see how, as Glassman (2018:13), these communities ‘attached religious meanings to the ill or well of the body’ by attributing human catastrophes to evil spirits. The human body, as in present-day African communities, was or is seen as the battle ground between evil and bad spirits (Glassman 2018:36). For this reason, certain bodily expressions are symptomatic of demonic possession: living among the graves, abnormal behaviour such as walking naked or suicidal tendencies. The belief is that there is no way a normal person can exhibit such behaviour unless the person is possessed by an evil spirit. What this also means is that evil spiritual elements determine the fate of humans. To do so, they wander about places looking for a host; once they are in there, they bond with the victim and maintain a relationship in the way ordinary human beings bond with their families, colleagues and friends. The bond is broken by divine healers, those people with the supernatural power to talk to the evil spirit and ask it to leave – ‘Go!’. Jesus was one of the many known exorcists and healers in first-century Palestine. The religious functionaries – exorcist and healers – in the ancient Mediterranean used almost the same techniques which are practised in Africa today to drive away the evil spirit: rebuke, asking the name and bargaining with the evil spirit.

By attaching those religious ideas to the general wellbeing of the human body (Glassman 2018:36), evil spirits are seen as not only operating in people’s lives but are actually involved, have control and influence on human affairs. This relationship is a threat to the social order; the evil spirit has to be exorcised and the victim has to be restored to a normal life. The subsequent healing is therefore a demonstration of the superiority of the exorcist over other spirits. This is also true in the casting out of evil spirits in the name of Jesus in the present-day church. However, those divine healings are as some scholars observe ‘... by the institutional meanings with which they are associated’ with (Collins 2004; Glassman 2018:23; Inbody 2015). I see the techniques used in the expulsion of demons as embedded in meanings generated in our day-to-day interactive processes. It is,

for example, inhumane to tell an individual: remember the evil spirits are beings – made to move from their homes without providing alternative accommodation. This, in my view, is the reason why exorcists would transfer the evil spirit from one host to the next. The same thing could also be said concerning the technique of rebuking the evil spirit. The idea is one cannot stay where they call you names and, in the case of asking a name, if people know you very well, they can manipulate you. This is where the secret of asking the name of the evil spirit lies, once you tell people your name and totem, you are susceptible to the malicious activities of evil persons! Arguably, one can reach the conclusion that these religious techniques are, to a greater extent, embedded in social processes (Krause 2007:523).

## ■ Insights

In the ancient Mediterranean and present-day Africa, it is evident that there was or is this belief in evil spirits that interfere in the affairs of human beings. These spirits are very conscious of who they are, what they want and how to get it – they can bargain with the exorcist to direct them of the next move. Some specialised persons were or are consulted in order to drive away the spirit using a number of techniques: rebuke, asking the name, commanding, spitting and so on. By looking at the techniques used by Jesus from an African context, it becomes evident why, in some circles, Jesus was viewed as a sorcerer or magician (Broomley 2004). On the bases of what has been raised in the contribution, it becomes intelligible to African readers why the opponents of Jesus attributed his miracles to the Lord of flies, the prince of all demons. Judging from the striking affinities, it is true that Jesus was both a healer and an exorcist. He healed people of various diseases and cast out evil spirits from his childhood until his death. But how would one explain those miraculous healings? One way to read the healings is by placing the exorcisms within the context of relative deprivation: the people tormented by demons were the sick in search of health and wellbeing.

For this reason, such persons and their immediate communities are likely 'to construct a bond with the divine other for their plight and acquire otherwise un-attainable rewards' (Schieman 2010:28; Glock & Rodney 1965; Stark 1972). This is why, in African communities that relied and seek help from traditional healers, Jesus has been received in the present-day Church as the greatest of all healers.

It is also evident that the selected miracles of Jesus illuminate cross-cultural and religious ideas about the activities of evil spirits and how those ideas shape the healing practices. This is because, in the case of evil spirits, medical procedures, informants<sup>56</sup> believe, do not offer a lasting and permanent solution. The belief is that only divine healers have the supernatural powers to invoke the spiritual world. This could be 'an omnipotent deity who is perceived as satisfying desires may offset the deleterious psychological effects of immutable adversities in everyday life' (Schieman 2010:28). To this end, the symbolic performances of African healers and Jesus, as miracle workers, make those techniques spiritually meaningful in rituals as well as practices followed by the African peoples across the continent.

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56. From the interviews, it emerged that the informants believe that attacks by the evil spirits cannot be solved by seeking medical attention in hospitals. The only solution lies in consulting divine healers or the man of God.



# *Yeshua*, the poured politics of healing

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## ■ Abstract

This chapter focuses on the life of Christ as a first century Hebrew preacher and peasant. It contends that the full view of Christ's divinity is central in his geo-political and social location and that messianism to the Jewish mind is all encompassing of reality – human existence. The *messiah* is to deliver the captives, heal the land and save those who suffer from bodily and spiritual infirmities. However, the healing that Christ does in his ministry is a work of the soteriological process as such; Jesus the healer presented by the missionaries and advocates of African theology evades the mission and full view of the picture of the historical Christ and soteriology. The chapter argues that Jesus as a healer

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to Africans, dogmatically, is a theological injustice as Africa had its own healers who do not emerge from pre-existence (λόγος) and the veil of the transcendent coming down into the political sphere. The essay reminds Christian theology that *messiah* or messianism is a concept developed fully by the Jewish people while in captivity. The final thesis of the contribution is to suggest that a political healer, deeply imbued in substance and mission in the existential context, is needed more than a healer of biological infirmities. In short, the existential context demands such a healer, the real messiah thought of and known by the Jews, and is the same messiah awaited on by the Christian *ecclesia* in the unceasing hope of the *Paraousia*.

**Keywords:** Hebrew preacher; Messiah; Liberation; Political healer; Injustice.

## ■ Healing: Existential or biological significance

To think of Jesus as a healer provides an ecclesiastical cathartic feeling to those affected by sickness, deformity and varying ailments susceptible to mortal bodies. The picture of healing is particularly significant for the marginalised and poor who are in the Christian church. However, it also reveals a Christological setting in the New Testament of the direct presence of God in Galilee. The early church is presented in the Gospels with the healing character of the man from Nazareth who was perceived and received by the early church, as the long awaited (*Meleḵ ha-Mašīaḥ*) messiah or Son of God. The Gospel of Mark has early evidence related to Jesus who reigns above the *ecclesia* clearly addresses this point. The Gospel of Mark provides a landscape and tool of analysis of the life of Jesus and is an early portrayal to the church and believers of divinity in an existential transient process, a historical and momentarily existence of God through the bodiliness of Christ, Jesus from Nazareth of Galilee, the Son of God. The Gospel of Mark similar to other Gospels

maintains the immanence of the bodily appearance of Christ – the physical fruit of the Holy Spirit, who remain present as the person of Holy Spirit and guides the Christian *ecclesia*, until the bodily appearance of Christ in the *Paraousia*.

Some preliminary thoughts to be mentioned in the research to facilitate the discussion begin with the Christological orientation of the writing of the New Testament, Gospels and Epistles alike. The closeness of the doctrine of eschatology and the Jewishness of early Christianity lie in having been a sect emanating within Orthodox Judaism (see Myburgh 1995:35). Finally, the world Christianity is born into a metropolis, and Christianity finds itself as a small cult that needs to compete with other religions and philosophies (Case 1913:63). The Gospel of Mark and the Q<sup>57</sup> source are earlier attempts to portray Jesus' teachings and life. The New Testament scholarships emerging from the West have gone to great lengths to demystify Christ,<sup>58</sup> often rendering him as a magician, healer and shaman (see Crossan in Craffert 2003:251-254). It is significant to note that the genesis of these traditions of seeing Christ within these paradigms emerged from the basis of German idealism that later translated into the quest for rationalism in religion and is depicted in source criticism and form criticism sought to win back the loss of Christology (Luhmann 1989:56). The loss of Christology is based on the rigidity of rationalism and the denial of the transcendent reality. The other side of the spectrum emerging from the black experience and African theology has reached a similar consensus on its own Christology that account within African divinity,

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57. Craffert (2003:245) discussed the Dominic Crossan two-source hypothesis theory and pointed out that Q is the representative of the German word *Quelle* meaning source. The Q sources are presented as a Gospel that consists of agreement of the text between Mathew and Luke's Gospels.

58. Bultmann and his predecessors from the young Hegelians, particularly Strauss, sought to demythologise the New Testament. One can posit that the change in German scholarship is linked to the question of existence of God and the role religion plays in the degrading of human beings contrary to its goal (see Steiner 1997:6).



although the methodologies of these conclusions (in African theology) are different hermeneutically and based on the experience with the divine. African theology has obtained comfort through inculturisation of continuing to view Jesus from these lenses. The major premise for such categorisation stems from the meaning of shamanism as a global phenomenon (see Craffert 2011:151), a world that African can relate too. Harry (n.d.), who advocates for shamanism comments on the healer figure presented by the Gospel of Mark, argued:

The figure of Jesus as depicted in the Gospel of Mark is the oldest of the New Testament descriptions of his life and mission. I argue based on the portrayal of Jesus' baptism, interesting Aramaic and Greek word usages, accounts of Jesus' miracle stories, the centrality of faith, and the cultural milieu in which these events are described to have taken place, that the narrative figure of Jesus in Mark's gospel is best understood as a shamanic figure. Grounded in scholarship on shamanism and Hellenistic magic, I disagree with the attempts to characterize Jesus as an ancient magician but feel viewing him through the lens of a shaman better encapsulates his communal role and contribution. From his baptism as a shamanic initiation to the narratives of his miracles and healings, Jesus fits the archetype of a shaman. (p. 1)

Craffert (2011:153) supported the communal aspect of shamanism by pointing out that shamans have a variety of roles and representations which could range from 'community healer, the mystic and intellectual' and the functions of shamanism are dual in form as they express healer and controller of spirits and divinatory and educator (Craffert 2011:153). The argument that is given by both Harry and Craffert suggests a deep theological and philosophical crisis plaguing the West and leading it to deny the possibility of an incarnated transcendence figure. It rejects in some respect the daring and deliberate stance of the early Church, which proclaimed Christ's full humanity and divinity. Hull (1997:20) pointed out that singing of the early creeds as in Philippians 2:5-11 is a declaration of the pre-existence of Christ by the early church. The danger in portraying Jesus as a sage or shaman in both document hypothesis and

African theology, at least through the lenses of black theology and historical Christian theology, puts him as a manipulator of the realm of the metadivine. A biographical outline of Jesus can assume to present him as a healer. However, theology as presented by the gospel precedes the biographical inclinations. The central point of the argument rests on the absolute acceptance of the uniqueness of Christ that African theology through inculturisation and Africanising Christianity cannot contend with, while it also dispels Western New Testament scholarship that has dispelled the uniqueness of *Yeshua* through its 'rational' hermeneutics. The survival of Christian theology depends on its epistemological dogmatisation of its faith even against modernity – because it is a religion against the Empire. Dube (2018:1) is correct in his analysis when he asserted, '[t]he theological perspective's understanding of Jesus as healer is anchored by epistemological assumptions that Jesus was the Messiah and thus different'. The uniqueness of Jesus is a physiological orientation concerning God in history, *ha-Mašīah* being the Hebrew theological concept meaning Christ confirms the political implication of the transcendent in history, evident in the flesh of this Galilean. It is in Jesus the Messiah that divinity as pre-existence erodes and colludes in a single moment to physiological and political implication of God in history. Messianism predates the given theological etymology of what the church seems to mean when it speaks of Christ, often in reference to the dying for our sins. Moses (1982) is correct in explaining the specifications of what messianism entails:

In the traditions of the ancient Hebrews, it signified the belief in a future great deliverer – a priest, king, or prophet – who would come with a special mission from God. Usually, this mission was seen politically as revolutionary but culturally as reactionary. The belief in a messiah grew out of the Hebrews' experience of oppression at the hands of the great Middle-Eastern empires. (p. 4)

Jesus Christ as the healer is important for a Christian church and a world of malice affected by the fall. The meaning thereof is problematic for those brought into the faith by whip and vices

of trickery. Black Christianity is different from 'white theology'.<sup>59</sup> The hermeneutical tools developed by theological scholarship are developed with blacks in bondage and thus cannot be trusted. Jesus the healer in Christian theology performs healing without the need of aphrodisiacs, concoctions and trances, which are fundamental in black people's world of Spirit. The insistence of Christ healing by word invokes the transcendent as the *λόγος*; the *λόγος* is a mode of explaining in Johannes writings the pre-existence of Christ. The *λόγος* in Hebrew faith is the articulation of that which is beyond and is pre-existent (Mack 1970:47). Jesus the healer is the communion and unity of God as a triad of Father, Son and Holy Spirit; thus, the locus and *telos* of Jesus healing is deeply seated in the heart, mind and body of God and is the work of God in the world to fulfil the work of soteriology. As a commitment to the Hebrew origins of the New Testament and Christianity, Jesus remains the divine wisdom, who the Apostle Paul posits as being responsible for creation, and is the one who knits and holds creation and existence together (Colossians, Ephesians and Philipians). The incarnation is *Ousia* in the Flesh and transcendent philosophical discovery of Being, *Ousia* existentially present, outside reflection of Being's existence through reason. In the incarnation, the *ousia* is in revelation mode, historical and political as the *ha-Mašīah*. The importance of viewing Jesus within the framework of wisdom is critical to his own culture and rescues him from the European orientation, and contemporaneously, it reconfigures truth, linked to wisdom, for non-Europeans (who are not part of western theological traditions or hypothesis) – including Jesus himself. The scholarly debates concerning the person of Christ and the New Testament exclude

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59. Mofokeng (1983:3941) has gone through great lengths to affirm the lenses that black people use in reading themselves within and outside the biblical text. The lenses that black people use differ in content, categories and substance from colonial Christianity, and as such, the view of divinity and the transcendent is knitted in their history and in aspirations of liberation. Erskine (1981:37) has made the argument of atmosphere as a central feature in linking black people with the Old Testament, a similarity imposed by themselves and directed by the Bible.

the wisdom tradition central for Hebrew theology. Mack (1970) stressed the role of wisdom in Israel tradition and asserted:

One of the more interesting problems related to the understanding of Israel's tradition of wisdom is presented by the unexpected entrance into this tradition of a figure called wisdom who is spoken of as a person who lives with God and seeks to dwell among men. The figure appears first in Proverbs 1-9, or perhaps in Job 28, and plays a significant role in the Wisdom of Jesus ben Sirach, the Wisdom of Solomon, and the allegorical interpretations of the Pentateuch which Philo of Alexandria has given to us. (p. 46)

The question of healing must then be viewed twofold; firstly, the transcendent and enigmatic act seen in both Christ and African healers; secondly, healing as an existential act with socio-economic and political implications. The first part of healing suggests the role of metaphysics in healing that is to say the reality, whether by divine omnibenevolence or evoking the unknown that lays in the beyond. The beyond may be the realm where African healers are mandated from or the cistern of wisdom. The second aspect of healing as an existential act confirms the direct immanence of God and a God physiologically breaking into human affairs on a daily basis and within reach for those who need divine intervention – according to Mack (1970:46), wisdom seeks to dwell among humans. Christ can be interpreted in both contexts; however, a better meaning concerning Jesus as the healer rests on the existential, and God breaking into the world to be within, reach to struggling Galilean fishermen and peasants that ordinarily could not afford healthcare. The healing portrayal of the church suggests Christ as the alternative to traditional methods and practices. Häkkinen (2016:8) asserted, '[t]he social stage of Jesus and his family is not easy to determine. All the archaeological evidence from the Roman period points to a simple peasant existence at Nazareth'. The peasantry is an ambience for the revelation of God and for a socio-political and Christological orientation of God.

The woman with the issues of blood (Lk 8:43-48 King James Version [KJV]) and the man laying by the pool of Bethesda

(Jn 5:1-15 New King James Version [NKJV]) are significant pointers in confirming the contrasting viewpoints between the transcendent and existential meaning of healing. These two texts give layers of a perfect marriage between the two points. The woman with the issues of blood spent all her money to aid her sickness; instead, it was virtue emanating from the hem of Jesus' garment that delivered her from her sickness, a confirmation of the transcendent and God's breaking through, willingly or not, to move and deliver the hopeless and financially depleted. Jesus delivers the man by the pool of Bethesda who is always side-tracked by the mobile into this pool of healing through the word and faith. The story suggests a direct consensus and contrast to healing for both African spirituality and the scholarly deduction of Jesus as another sage and healer. Jesus does not dispute the 'healing' properties of the pool of Bethesda,<sup>60</sup> applicable to different cultural methods (shamanic or exorcist) of healing. Christ deliberately contrasts himself with the pool as the cistern of healing-living water. The acts of Christ are an indication of self-revelation, the *logos* existential and soteriological revelatory process and confirming the benevolence of God that is immanent in the world and demands attention. It is this point that the black church must grasp politically and in its ecclesiastical catharsis if Jesus fits the profile of a shamanic or traditional healer. Jesus is a healer with revelation and is pre-existent. Such an outlook provides a basis of not seeing Jesus as another African or Mediterranean healer but the one who is wisdom, is pre-existent and is within reach, metaphysically (by doxology) and existentially, for black people's needs and the oppressed who need the Davidic *Yeshua ha-Mašīah*. It is not ambiguous to see that the missionaries in the zeal for conversion would give Jesus the status of a healer par excellent and somewhat part of human tradition - in an

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60. This narrative because of this angelic pre-supposition indicated by the writer could be linked to the traditional beliefs concerning the angels of God, one being Raphael, the angel of healing.

evangelical stance as Pauline at Athens and the altar of an unknown God (Ac 16).

For African theology, Jesus as a typical healer affirms residues of African minds, and theological expertise at the time has not sought to engage and conceived the importance for liberation and black Christianity the metaphysical ‘history’ of Jesus the healer, the second person in the trinity. The simplification of Jesus as the healer in African theology, document hypothesis and western hermeneutics is a theological injustice to the black converts who have not politically-intellectually engaged in theology and experience of the pre-existing Κύριος<sup>61</sup> of the *ecclesia* but instead find themselves in the manoeuvring, shucking and jiving of others either conversions, rationalism or inculturation. Kunhiyop (2012:79–80) correctly advocated that the danger of African theologies affirms the theology that tends to negate against the revelation of God as it relates to human beings. It is important to note that Africa shares a rich history with Christian theology without the role played by European and their methods of pursuing theology. Van der Merwe (2016) records the following:

Christianity in Africa was certainly not founded with European involvement like organised missions to Africa or colonialism. The roots of the Christianising of Africa reach back to the missions of the Apostles. (p. 562)

Thus, the African and Hebrew experienced the outpouring the *Ruach Kadosh* on Pentecost; the links of Christian theology in Africa are deep. The hermeneutics used in the studies of the biblical text cannot be reduced to modern methods of ascertaining truth.

The methods of history do not account for the life of Jesus in the Gospels but memory is far more important. Lüdemann (2014) is correct in pointing out that:

Like the English word ‘history’, the German *Historie* and *Geschichte* can both refer to a factual account that is available to the public and

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61. Κύριος Greek for Lord or Adonia, viewed from <http://biblehub.com/greek/2962.htm>.

verifiable according to generally accepted standards among scholars. Yet both *Geschichte* and 'history' may also refer to the significance of historical facts and thus to that which cannot be certified by public consent or verified by scholarly canons. *Historie*, however, does not; it refers only to what can be verified according to empirical standards. (p. 45)

Lüdemann stance reflects the fact that there are different definitions to 'definite' things. It is necessary that the hermeneutical lines be drawn for Jesus the healer promoted in African theology with the reality of Jesus the healer in African theology being ambiguously as testified by the missionaries and even by the New Testament scholars. The Jesus known to the missionaries and colonialist is the Being, enveloped within the essence and substance of full humanity and full divinity, intrinsic in the unity of the triad God. The Jesus of the missionaries is the man from Galilee who the early church with its Christological-theological progression breaks with Judaism and who was a man elevated by revelation from a mere man to an immortal being – the fullness of the deity (Col 3:9; McLean 1980) stressed upon the fact that Christianity sees nothing equal to Jesus, he argued:

While individual Christians may acknowledge the inspirational nature of the non-Christian founders of religions, adherents of the major branches of Christianity are united in the belief that Christ has no equal. This conviction in the uniqueness of Jesus has become the unassailable fortress of Christian belief. Such a belief is the product of historical and theological developments in the early church. Through a series of creeds based on theological speculation Jesus the Son was declared to be the very essence of Divinity walking upon the earth, the Godhead Itself united with a deified Holy Spirit in a Trinitarian theology. These creeds, far from descending upon the church fathers as divine revelation, underwent a long historical development that was not contested. (p. 23)

It is significant to note that the Jesus of both missionaries and Western New Testament scholarship is the man from Galilee transformed by political power and ties into an invention of the West. Jesus the healer, cynic and sage, is a theological development of western theology and crisis, church polity and

church history. This view can be elucidated by the fact that the rise of historical criticism, document hypothesis theories, et cetera, is an invention of European enlightenment, empiricism and rationalism that seeks twofold approaches to truth – honesty and lies, reason and faith. It rejects ambiguity, poetry, myth, memory and experience as sources of truth, and thus, blacks ought to be careful when white scholars tell them about Jesus the healer and not the man and deity from Galilee. African theology unlike the West has no crisis of transcendence and its value and reality. The testimony of the Apostle Paul and the pre-biblical creeds of the 1 Corinthians 15, Colossians and Philippians 2:5-11, the *kenosis* theology, give insight to the early church belief of a mere man who is God. Mclean (1980:23) stresses the point that Paul made Christ a deity comparable to the Greek mystery religions but this view loses validity because Christ can only be God within the framework of Hebrew monotheism.

Furthermore, if Jesus is the shaman, then the church is a shamanic mystery school through its sacraments. Mclean (1980:24) is correct when he points to the fact that Pauline Christology dominates after the 'gradual demise of the Jewish wing of Christianity'. Mclean (1980:24) argued '[i]f Christ taught the kingdom, it is true to say Paul taught Christ'.

It is significant to note that Paul's theology pre-exists the tone for Barthian theology with his emphasis on the crisis of Christology and soteriology, the same dilemma that Barth emerged from with his break from liberal theology. Mclean's (1980) views are important though there is a point of disagreement with the view of suggesting that Paul taught differently from Jesus – the kingdom and Christ. This point is important because the early church governed and led by *YHWH Ruach HaKadosh* surely was a movement in progress and the transcendent God working through historical processes. God positing the Self within historical processes is precisely that which underpins the birth of the Jewish nation from its Canaanite past, *YHWH* becoming *El Elyon*. However, it is important to note that the Greek



mythologising of Christ is a western theological crisis, which should implicate the whole of Christianity. Cone (1997) informed us that theology is rooted in the socio-religious experience; as such, the chasm between the profane or secular with the sacred and divine is rooted and knitted together by God in a historical process, a revelation of an ever-moving wheel, permeated by the transcendent. The only time the two are in a hostile engagement is when cultural presuppositions precede and enforce the preference of others. Cone (1997) correctly argued:

Tertullian's question, 'what ... has Athens to do with Jerusalem?' is not our central question. His concern was to state the primacy of faith in relation to reason on matters of theological discourse. We have another concern and thus rephrase that question in the light of our cultural history, asking: 'What has Africa to do with Jerusalem, and what difference does Jesus make for African people oppressed in North America'. (p. 15)

Athens has taken primacy over New Jerusalem, the reason being the 'important' heritage of the West or western civilisation reigning over the faith and memory of the Hebrews faith, as well as above the *ekklesia*.

## ■ Document hypothesis and wisdom

The emergence of the document hypothesis theory emerged as the product of European rationalism, and it can be seen paradoxically as the conjoint first and last gains of the West leading to a prolegomenon of the prevailing scientific gains of the Enlightenment. The documentary hypothesis thus gave a direction of biblical scholarship and a manner of studying the Old and New Testament within the constraints of scientific paradigms. The idea of a text claiming divine authorship by the evolutionary process working through historical events should negate transcendence studied by the virtues of science. The relevance of this historical account unmask a world beyond the text which is as problematic as the confession of Christ by the West as well as the attempts of simply placing Christ within the framework of a

sage – against the backdrop of pre-existence of the logos. The colonial church is as dangerous as the historical Jesus Movement and the hegemony on the views of seeing a first century Hebrew as a sage and divine. To elucidate further, the divinity of Jesus was essential in making colonialism a divinely mandated system – prevalent in Papal Bulls and Protestant zeal. Jesus the sage or healer is instrumental in calming the storm in the white ordained ecclesia, and the healer example validates the conversion, which if read correctly is not so much conversion but a cultural and ontological shift – an allegiance to western standards and civilisation. To place Jesus among the African healers or as the great healer contradicts the charge of heathenism placed on blacks and people of colour by their white converters. Jesus has been significant as a political cultural and existential tool for power by the West and its theology; this is evident in Papal Bulls (1993).<sup>62</sup>

It is significant to note that Western Christian theology has changed from its former self. In the West, God was alive, God died, God became relative as well as truth which was a far decay from the Gospel of John's declaration (17:17 KJV), '17 [s]anctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth'. Christian theology is not an open world but a closed world with its own virtues and perennial truths, using *Pneumatosis* mechanically as a hermeneutics in preserving the revealed truth about a God who works in historical events. The God who becomes an eternal emblematic figure of *Imago Dei* in the creation of physiological existence and *Imitatio dei* as the modus of accepting *Imago Dei* soteriologically as evident in Christ. The crisis of the Jesus Movement and

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62. The Doctrine of Discovery (Papal Bull 1993) records the following: '[t]he Bull stated that any land not inhabited by Christians was available to be "discovered," claimed, and exploited by Christian rulers and declared that "the Catholic faith and the Christian religion be exalted and be everywhere increased and spread, that the health of souls be cared for and that barbarous nations be overthrown and brought to the faith itself." This "Doctrine of Discovery" became the basis of all European claims in the Americas as well as the foundation for the United States' western expansion'.

expedient conversion of black people as well as the crisis of African theology is that Jesus is not clearly seen. The Jesus Movement, which is supported by the document hypothesis theory and textual criticism, ends up with an apocalyptic prophet, healer, sage and revolutionary located in Roman occupation. These conclusions are not necessarily wrong but elusive when viewed outside of the transcendent locus point of the divinity of Christ. The transcendent existential positing through physiological experience and existence does not challenge divinity but binds divinity in historical processes.

The document hypothesis theory, textual criticism, form criticism and all other new methods of viewing into a different hermeneutics for the study of New Testament scholarship are a gain in Christian theology. The validity of this approach was scientific and offered a modern reading of the content of the text. The rise of scepticism and undermining of pre-existence conceptions concerning the New Testament has changed the New Testament. However, alternative views based on context, experience and orientation coming from other modes of protest against oppression and hegemony have surfaced through African theology and black theology. These approaches become relevant in their ontological and historical resistance to the virtue of modern and postmodern thinking. Kunnie (1994:5) argued, '[b]lack theology has emerged in response to European and Euro-American theologies that have either largely ignored black experience or excluded it from the domain of theology'. The exclusion that Kunnie mentions points to a predicated narrative of doing theology, prevalent in the academia. At the same time, the advancements made by western theological orientation for a more scientific, reasonable and modern theological interpretation are problematic for those who have been absent in theological discourse because of their conversion and bondage. The emergence of African theology is valid for a new orientation that must account for a scholarly protest against the grain of accepted logic. Motlhabi (2008:32) argued, '[i]n the early stages of development of an African Theology, African theologians

identified several sources which were considered necessary for gaining a better understanding of it. At the top of the list were said to be the Bible and the Christian heritage'. The Christian heritage of Africa and the black people gives insight to the role blacks played in theology and the role of Christianity in Africa. Pheko (1982:2) emphasised the Christian presence in Africa that places Africa and black people at the centre of theology and its history, leading to the relevance of black hermeneutics into the text. Black theology on the other hand has taken the political aspect of addressing this Christian past, in light of the Black experience and in relation to its future. This approach is an open call to healing the past but politically shaping the future. The black experience has to be viewed in light of the development of western scholarship, Boesak (2004:10) has pointed to how academic thinking was used to justify slavery. The theological crisis of the West in the denial of the transcendent expressed clearly in biblical scepticism has to be viewed in political terms.

Cornel West (1987) has pointed out that a black intellectual must shun from modes of existence that proclaim to be scientific, civil and ideological; the importance of this caution is that it might be necessary to disregard years of 'scientific', 'rational' and modern truth. The black church, black community and black Christianity, scholarly and socially, need to encounter Jesus with cultural significance, which can be drawn from African culture and African theology. Black theology, in turn, restores the existential pertinence of God in struggle and liberation, deeply rooted in the revelation of the transcendent *Yeshua ha-Mašīaḥ*. It is significant then to note the irrelevance of studies in historical Jesus determined by strata, textual variances and cross-cultural reference and dialogue (see Craffert 2003:243). The Jesus of such approaches can be a healer, an apocalyptic prophet, exorcist and miracle worker (Craffert 2003) but black theology sees Jesus the healer dogmatically and affirms liberation in the logos as central to soteriology and the wisdom tradition. Messianism requires liberation and deliverance of the oppressed, Christ is the *Kupōis* of the *ecclesia* and by virtue of being the logos in the

flesh, and the incarnated transcendence comparison of Christ with shamans and magicians is out of bounds. The argument that is often used by New Testament scholars concerning cultural difference and context of the first century – the world of Jesus – compared to us crumbles against the backdrop of oppression and Christianity or Primitive Christianity being a religion against the Empire, *Yeshua ha-Mašīaḥ* crucified by the Empire.

The biological and existential healer who is deeply rooted in spirituality or the world of Spirit permeating the world and does not belong to the West draws to the point that healing as presented in the New Testament is Christological – the Gospels are Christological. It is worth noting that Christ is a Greco-Roman translation of *messiah* – which is more political – and evades the true meaning of Christological presentation of the Gospels – especially since Christology, Christian theology is not within the Hebrew experience in the academia. The messiah is not a shaman in control of healing and against spirits but is a direct confrontation with both, affirming an Adamic picture. The scholarly Christ always shuns the ambiguity presented by the Christian Gospel of the inextricable composition of the kenotic one, the spiritual and political healer. The reality of Christology dawns unto itself the confirmation of the logos as the very deterrent of Christian supremacy over and above African culture. The Christological meaning of the person of Christ (presented by the Gospels) as the healer disrupts both Craffert's (2011) and Dube's (2018) inclinations of the shamanic models of Jesus being possessed by God, because he is God. A significant pointer to understanding the origins of Christian theology is rooted in the Hebrew World which becomes the first direct access of the early thinkers of the church and even for the Christian church through revelation and the hermeneutical presence of the *Ruach HaKadosh*.

The role of the Holy Spirit is significant as it becomes the primary modus of interpreting scripture with a Christological orientation that ends up in the New Testament text, which we possess. The four Gospels have a consensus on Christology, which cannot be ignored in biblical scholarship and is invaluable

to the black experience and our forced inclusion to theology. This Christian past reminds us of the role of the transcendent and yet existential character of God that the early church held as the cornerstone of the faith. Mack (1970) is correct in pointing out to wisdom as a person and found both in Judaism and Christianity. He asserted (Mack 1970):

Traces of this figure are also to be found in the apocalyptic literature of Judaism and it is probable that it is the same figure which certain gnostic groups later employ in their myths about the cosmic fall of Sophia. There is even some consensus now among New Testament scholars that the formulation of the New Testament Christologies of préexistence employing the terms *logos*, *eikon*, and *morphe*, expressed for instance in the Christ-hymns in John I, Colossians I, and Philippians 2, are indebted to the wisdom tradition of Hellenistic Judaism and its reflection about the figure of wisdom for their basic concepts, terminology, and forms. The significance of this figure is therefore not small, and the effort to understand its meaning to postexilic Judaism and for subsequent developments in Gnosticism and Christianity should be rewarding. (pp. 46-47)

The existential face of God has been lost in abstractions that occur etymologically over Greco-Roman Christ and the Hebrew messiah. Luft (1984:266) pointed out that for Pascal, the death of God meant that Western secular society lost God both metaphysically and personally. Camus (2007) provided us with the true face of early Christianity. He argued (Camus 2007):

Actually, we are not sufficiently aware that Christianity is centered around the person of Christ and around his death. We turn Jesus into an abstraction or a symbol. But the true Christians are those who have realized the triumph of the martyred flesh. Jesus being fully human, the emphasis has been concentrated on his death, and one scarcely knows of a more physically horrible death. It is on certain Catalonian sculptures, on the broken hands and cracked joints that one must reflect in order to imagine the terrifying image of torture that Christianity has erected as a symbol. (p. 48)

If God is seen as operating with wisdom the *logos* in the world, then Christ in his divinity is amplified as an infinite healer, wisdom teacher and Son of God. Proverbs (3:19 KJV) records: 'The LORD by wisdom hath founded the earth; by understanding hath he

established the heavens'. Matthew Poole's Commentary (n.d.a, n.d.b) argues that what is meant by wisdom is that:

[*Firstly,*] by Christ, the co-essential and co-eternal Wisdom of God the Father. Or, [*secondly,*] By that Divine perfection of wisdom, which is the fountain of that wisdom that is in man, which Solomon hath hitherto commended; and therefore the commendation of that wisdom tends to the commendation of this, which is a stream flowing from it. Hath founded the earth; hath fixed it in the lowest part of the world. Established the heavens, or fitted or ordered them; framed them in that exquisite order which now they have. (n.p.)

Wisdom must operate within the paradigm of healing as healing seeks beyond normality or even degeneration. Human and other life forms physiology has inbuilt modalities in atomic disposition that are a stimulus to healing and cell multiplicity – a dialectical circle of biological propensity to eternity. Thus, *Yeshua* as the second person of the trinity and the agency of creation through wisdom is not a wisdom teacher continuing a tradition but is the unchanging bowels and loins of wisdom and the healing tradition. Christ provides the *intelligibilis* to the world, which is a product of *creatio ex nihilo*, and at the same time, he is the *kenosis* embodying existence coming from nihilism. The intelligibility of the universe gives epistemic and hermeneutical background to the *λόγος* as wisdom and reason. This outlook fosters in the very idea of how science and the scientific zeal in theology from the Enlightenment can become problematic if science is also struggling with enigma. Lennox<sup>63</sup> (2015) argued:

The very fact that we believe that science can be done is a thing to be wondered at. Why should we believe that the universe is intelligible? After all, if, as certain secular thinkers tell us, the human

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63. I have found it necessary when referring to wisdom tradition and the scientific approach in biblical scholarship to appeal to Christian apologetics in the field of science and mathematics as it relates to theology. This approach seeks to affirm that the transcendent source of Christian theology, God, cannot trust objectively the virtues of science, especially in dealing with recorded human experience and the revelation of God. John Lennox's 2015 article on Science and Faith: Friendly Allies, Not Hostile Enemies, provides the basis of enigma. He argued, '[t]he very fact that we believe that science can be done is a thing to be wondered at' (Lennox 2015:11).

mind is nothing but the brain and the brain is nothing but a product of mindless unguided forces, it is hard to see that any kind of truth, let alone scientific truth, could be one of its products. As chemist J.B.S. Haldane pointed out long ago: if the thoughts in my mind are just the motions of atoms in my brain, why should I believe anything it tells me – including the fact that it is made of atoms? Yet many scientists have adopted that naturalistic view, seemingly unaware that it undermines the very rationality upon which their scientific research depends! (p. 11)

Lennox's insight into the adopted naturalistic view that undermines rationality suggests a flawed existentialism. This form of existentialism disregards the ambivalence within scientific or materialistic worldview, and at the same time, it suggests the many layers of truth which are suppressed by popular conclusions. Lennox (2015:12) asserted, '... science is not the only way to truth. Indeed, the very success of science is because of the narrowness of the range of its questions and methodology'. It is significant then to assess that Jesus as a healer or sage of New Testament scholarship and a semi-docile figure emanating from African theology undermines theological dogma and credo and removes Jesus from pre-existing divinity and historical process of God's unique revelation. To elucidate, this argument of an existential face of the transcendent and pre-existent face of God is validated by scripture with the woman with the issue of blood in Luke (8:43–48 KJV) gives an existential and historical face of God as *Imago Dei* in the biblical text in the book of Luke 8:43–48.

The major points to pick up from the text above are the *twelve years of spending all her livelihood with physicians, touching the hem of his garment, blood stopping*, '[w]ho touched me?' and '[g]o in peace'. These points are central to the question of the existential reality of financial depletion requiring the revelation and intervening of God, the hem of the garment exuding power to heal without consent of the bowels and cistern of wisdom and healing. The self-consciousness of Christ is evident in the question 'who touched me?' concerning the particularity of this healing in the midst of many, it is indicative of the true meaning of power. Power then is not an event and particular; it is particular based on



the experience of the recipient. The immediate response to the miracle by the stopping of the blood accompanied by trembling reveals the omnipresent and omnibenevolence of God translated into the person of Christ, hence daughter go in peace! The method of healing within the confines of existential necessity drives the idea of healing within the method of conducting successful revolution and soteriological implication of reconciliation with the divine, imbued in substance, space and time as *Imago Dei*. The basis of a political healer historicises and animates the real meaning of the incarnation and *kenosis*. The emptying process was not mere catharsis but an assuming of all that affects humans, the very manifestation of the truth concerning God and the law expressed in rabbinical thought as 'Torah not given to ministering angels or spirits' but the gullible and mortal human beings. It is the Christological implications of the divine, providence and human need. The validity of this existential face of a healer as the second person of the trinity is extended in the Synoptic Gospels that express Christ decry of religious and political gluttony (Lk 16:11-13). The Gospel of Matthew (6 KJV) records:

No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. He cannot serve God and mammon.

Christ warning of serving two masters either provocatively identifies himself as the incarnated God – poor by historical location and class – against money. (v. 24)

The idea of placing God and money, implicated by worship or service, speaks volumes in a materialistic and capitalistic world. However, this also gives clear indication of a God who intervenes when finding the truth about the end or limitations of money – where money fails and ends, God appears real and on the side of the oppressed. This challenge to the deified face of mammon is played out in the triumphant entry into Jerusalem then to the temple. Jesus the revolutionary healer overturns the capital of religious and political power. The wisdom by which God created the world with and through takes a stand. To elucidate further the

point of mammon, healing, wisdom, soteriology and Christ, commenting on Proverbs 3:13–20, Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary (n.d.) points out that Wisdom is the Lord Jesus Christ:

Christ is that Wisdom, by whom the worlds were made, and still are in being; happy are those to whom he is made of God wisdom. He has wherewithal to make good all his promises. (n.p.)

Benson Commentary (n.d.) affirms the above thought distinguishing other forms of meaning of the use of wisdom within humanity and Christ *Imago Dei*:

Although Christ be the wisdom of God, and the power of God, 1 Corinthians 1:24; and although all things were made by him, and without him was not anything made that was made, yet it does not appear that Solomon speaks of him here, but rather of that divine perfection of wisdom which is the fountain of wisdom in man. (n.p.)

## ■ Black people worship *Yeshua* and white people worship Jesus

The final thesis in terms of the healing is a realisation of an existential and transcendental act of the second person in the triune Godhead. This facilitates the importance of the transcendent as it acts out the soteriological process that relieves the damned of both soul and flesh. It is possible that with the veil of African theology and its commitment to the African past (see Bediako 1994) that enables them to carry the modalities of the continual life, the principle of metaphysics in turn is moved by this stance of political supremacy over cultural pronouncements. The political implication of the second person of the trinity entails this truth; white people must worship the abstract Jesus and black theology and the church of black believers worship *Adonia Yeshua*. The difference between the two is that Jesus is a cultural icon represented in western ecclesiastical art, the slave ship that he uses to subdue the indigenous and he is primarily European

rather than an enigmatic sematic Hebrew of the first century. The status awarded to Jesus with or without New Testament scholarship is central to the building of western civilisation - the Jesus symbol is ecclesiastical as well as an ontological representative. The artistry to the man Jesus indicates both the power of the painter and commissioner of the painter, the creative force, the painter and piper are both God. Da Vinci (n.d.) gives insight into the ontological vindications and positing of representation by art:

The deity which invests the science of the painter functions in such a way that the mind of the painter is transformed into a copy of the divine mind, since it operates freely in creating the many kinds of animals, plants, fruits, landscapes, countryside's, ruins, and awe-inspiring places. (n.p.)

Da Vinci (n.d.) further asserts:

The mind of the painter must resemble a mirror, which always takes the color of the object it reflects and is completely occupied by the images of as many objects as are in front of it. Therefore, you must know, O painter! that you cannot be a good one if you are not the universal master of representing by your art every kind of form produced by nature. And this you will not know how to do if you do not see them, and retain them in your mind. Hence, as you go through the fields, turn your attention to various objects, and in turn look now at this thing and now at that, collecting a store of diverse facts selected and chosen from those of less value. (n.p.)

The assuming and absorbing of colour of the object through the process of mirror and painting clearly posits the danger of white explanations of divinity and civility through modes of representation. A theology that renders sages away from the incarnated truth, which must affirm his divinity, is a problematic theology. African theology ought to see Christ within the manifold of divine wisdom instead of a sage. Christ is a culmination of wisdom incarnated and restoring blacks back into the dialectical express of divine revelation, which is summed up in Christ. The concept of wisdom in Africa leaves an open possibility away from dogmas or hegemonies of truth but Christ becomes absolute as wisdom. An African proverb holds that

only a fool believes in absolute truth.<sup>64</sup> The validity of this African proverb and Christological inclinations becomes alive when considering theological heresy as critiqued by Pheko (2014) when he argues that:

King Somhlolo of the Swazi nation in Southern Africa is known also as King Sobhuza I. The day he was born his father King Ndvungunywe was struck by lightning and died. Because of this happening the Swazi royal family named their son 'Somhlolo' - 'Omen' or 'Wonder'. Before the Swazi people had ever seen or heard of Europeans coming to Africa, King Somhlolo foretold that 'strange people whose hair resembles bushy ends of an ox-tail and have the colour of red maize, who speak an unknown language and know not our customs are coming to our country'. This African King said that these red-maize people in colour would come with two main things - a button without holes (coin money) and *UMCULU* (Book/Volume). He advised his people to 'study *UMCULU* and understand it; for it will give you life and liberation. It is the message of Mulenzengamunye (God)'. (p. 1)

What Pheko recalls back into the African memory as the memory in the early church is the view that African, indigenous people have not be outside of the scope of the revelation of God, revealed to the Hebrews. However, foreign 'Christianity' may be to them the fact that the kings or shamans were allowed to behold Christ and the message he brings as God geared towards liberation in his wisdom. Thus, Pheko makes a Christological viewpoint of revelation within African culture imbued in essence and destiny to Christian theology. Pheko presents in the colonial missionary zeal the two deities to define the modern world God and Mammon, the Book and button without holes. This realisation then forces the latter to the fluid Jesus (myth and history) being for the white *ecclesia* in saying that; black people must worship *Yeshua* who speaks to the incarnation predicated by the physiological mortal substance of God as a Semitic of Afro-Asiatic stock, lower class and peasant. Christ is wisdom not as a sage but as the very essence to the *logos*. The idea of a Hebrew - person of colour -

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64. Prof. Opoku in the 2015 Black Theology Conference in South African held at the University of South Africa gave a list of African proverbs, which challenge the wisdom tradition or the system of the west concerning its supreme truths.

being the second person of the trinity points to transcendence collapsing into existence by existential positing among the weak. Christ as God is the immanence of God fitting existential needs of the poor as the woman with the issue of blood had depleted her funds and then an unintended miracle or healing happened because of God's nature and not pronounced need. The story of the woman provides a Christology that is both existential (biological) and soteriological.

This Christology affirms biological infirmities and the existential and divine role of the *ha-Mašīaḥ* who takes upon our iniquity and sickness (Is 53). The healing of the woman with the issue of blood is that this time Christ will bleed until the *Paraousia* and apocalypse; his blood is to fill the cisterns of history that whosoever touches the hem of the garment of the bleeding one will be healed. Such is the messianic meaning of healing that conjoins soteriology and the insurgence of soteriology upon the secular and oppression. This is a historical picture, and the portrait of God made flesh fits the role of power and imagination as Da Vinci thinking about art asserts, '[i]f the painter wishes to see beauties that charm him, it lies in his power to create them, and if he wishes to see monstrosities that are frightful, ridiculous, or truly pitiable, he is lord and God thereof ...'. The picture of Christ is entirely on the mind that conceives of his existence.

## ■ Systematic theological reflection of healing

German scholars in discussing the Gospel and the search for the historical Jesus have concluded on the sources of the New Testament. New Testament scholarship has through the document hypothesis presented us with the Q<sup>65</sup> source and the Gospel of Mark to understand the man of Galilee. These sources have been thought to have Christological meaning, and the Christological

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65. See John Kloppenborg (2000). Q stands for 'Quelle', a German word for source.

insight is abundant in the Gospel of Mark as opposed to the Q source – the kerygma<sup>66</sup> is also central to Christology.<sup>67</sup> The centrality of the document hypothesis theory to the content of healing often shrouds the linear of transcendent content to soteriology and Christology. The scientific scrutiny of the biblical text gives the text a literary outlook instead of a theology and produces a theology without mission. Hurtado (1990) discussing Burton Mack concerning Mark being the inventor of myth argued:

The first major problem is in Mack's portrayal of earliest Christian history, upon which his presentation of Mark rests. Mack sees the historical Jesus as a teacher of aphorisms, likening him to a wandering Cynic sage, and rejects the widely shared view that Jesus' message involved an eschatological orientation. After Jesus, the earliest Christian groups, 'Jesus movements' located in Palestine, were essentially 'synagogue reform movements' in which Jesus was seen as the ideal teacher of a preferred form of Jewish practice. The true nature of Jesus' ministry and the earliest forms of the Jesus movements, however, have been lost, and subsequent Christianity derives from Mark's adaptation of the kerygma of the 'Hellenistic Christ cult', an 'aberration' that developed in Antioch at a sufficient distance from 'hasidic' influences in Jerusalem. The Christology of this Christ cult, into which Paul was converted, developed in two major stages: first a 'martyr myth' ('the earliest "christology"'), then a more developed kerygma of Christ as dying or rising saviour-god with attendant features of a cultus ('mythic ritualisation of the meal', baptism and its symbolic associations, the notion of 'spiritual presence' and 'liturgical materials, including acclamations, doxologies, confessions of faith and hymns'). Mark's distinctive and revolutionary creation was the use of the kerygma of this 'Christ cult' as a framework to reinterpret 'the ministry of Jesus and present it in narrative form'. (p. 20)

The above gives insight into how Christian theology without the use of its own apparatus becomes reduced to a fairy tale about

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66. Bultmann according to Luhrmann (1989) saw Kerygma as Christological and important.

67. Luhrmann's (1989) article on The Gospel of Mark and the Sayings Collection Q gives insight to the German scholarship which has changed biblical scholarship leading to a more scientific approach to scripture, an approach that is insufficient to discuss the revelation of the divine.

Jesus the sage. The same representation of Jesus as a healer is to be considered for African theology, which has tended to be neutral and seeking space in order to articulate for African culture and traditions. It is important to suggest that the aim of African theology is commendable and invaluable in methods of articulating the Christian Gospel in Africa. However, the danger it faces is that it removes Africans geographically, politically and theologically outside the theological landscape of God's unique revelation. Moloney (1987) argued:

Under the heading of Christology one can distinguish reflection primarily concerned with the person of Christ from that primarily concerned with his work. The latter perspective, that of soteriology, has a special resonance in Africa, and of course it can never be totally absent from any Christological reflection. However, in order to limit the subject matter, I will omit the more systematic presentations of African soteriology. My emphasis will be on the person of Christ and how the mystery of the God-man is seen in African theology. One possible approach to our question would be to take various titles of Christ in Christian preaching and to reflect on those, which seem particularly meaningful in the light of the African tradition. For this, Mbiti has singled out Son of God, Lord, Servant of God, Savior. Not relevant in the same way are titles like Messiah, Son of David, Son of Man. That is to take traditional Christological themes with an African resonance. An opposite and more promising method also suggests itself: to take traditional African themes with a Christological resonance. This second approach is the one I will follow, and in this perspective I will treat of Christ as Master of Initiation, Healer, and Ancestor. (p. 506)

The stance on seeing Christ as a Master of Initiation, Healer and Ancestor are precise methods to indigenise black spirituality. It gives exotic meaning to the world of Spirit that black people occupy in relation to the divine. While at the same time, it gives a sense of sophistication of the world of Spirit of the West, in a sense, their world is one that is perennially impregnated with profound philosophical insight. It is a world that they can build and by ideological and historical shift can destruct with minds and pens at the expense of the faith. The importance of legitimacy of Christian theology rests on the testimony of the biblical text itself; the foundations of faith are inherent and infallible in the

Bible concerning *Yeshua* being God and human. The idea of being God locates God in the sphere of immanence and confirms an aseity of God, a process of transcendental historicity of divine phenomenon inconceivable to humanity – the creation of a deity by the human mind is not the genealogy of the transcendent, sacred and divine. The humanity of Christ makes *Imago Dei* a historical event that is to see fruition in the *Paraousia* and the *Visio Dei*, a theology of *Yeshua* as healer, must wrestle with pre-existence and see consummation of history and wisdom into Christ as God absolute. Moloney (1987) asserted:

Christ was himself initiated into the tradition of his people by being named, circumcised, and presented in the Temple. He was also initiated into the fulness of God's plan by being brought to the perfection spoken of in Heb 2:10, 5:9, and 7:28. This happened to him especially in his death and resurrection, which can be understood as a kind of initiatic ordeal through which one is transformed into a higher mode of existence. Indeed, without the redemptive acts of the paschal mystery, Christ's initiation process would have no more than exemplary significance; but, through their causality on our redemption, Christ's initiation is truly cause of our being initiated into a whole new mode of existence, and he is the one who leads us into the fulness of life. Thus Sanon Benezet Bujo would want to see this process against the background of inter-Trinitarian life; it is a kind of extension into our lives of the Father's generation of the Son, by which He 'initiated' the latter into the intradivine life. (p. 507)

He (Moloney 1987) further argued:

In this way our Lord comes to be seen as the Master of Initiation, the elder brother (Rom 8:29), at home in his Father's house (Lk 2:49), as befits a son (Jn 8:35), making others become children of the same household (Mt 23:8, 10; Mk 3:34f.). As in the initiation process symbols are used as vehicles of the highest values of the community, so Christ leads us on through symbols, especially the sacraments. (p. 508)

Moloney's (1990) point is important but the stress must be put on the fact that *Yeshua* in occupying the political and apocalyptic office of liberator who is the *messiah*, Christ, through the incarnation becomes *Adonia*. *Adonia* becomes the mystical name whom other theologians believe is above all other names but



*Adonia* is linked to the messianic secret. Κύριος is the operational point that submits God to God according to Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:22–28 (NKJV), Κύριος is also the affirmation of the *kenosis* of Philippians (2:5–11). The equality with God that Christ has positions liberation as part of the cosmic order, God’s nature, and thus, Christ is not initiated if he remains the substance of the *logos* or the second person of the trinity. Paul speaks of Galatians 4:4 of Christ being born under the law to redeem those under the law; Christ affirmed this in his baptism (Mt 3:15 NKJV), ‘[p]ermit *it to be so now*, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness’. Jesus the healer is vague for both African theology and western liberal theology. A systematic theology has to account for the faith. and for God having a face, the biblical text in the Old Testament has particular moments in which God reveals himself; the following in scripture are evidence of the anatomy of God and celestial sphere of existence, the physiology of the next and immediate dimension. Exodus 33 (9–11, 18–23) is an existential impulse on the part of Moses (the political liberator) who requires a physiological and an anatomical identity of the divine, transcendent and Holy. To seek to see God’s face plays into an Adamic psyche and Adamic Christology rooted in the futuristic *Visio Dei* for the *ecclesia* a reminiscent of the immediate identity of God that draws into himself as the ground of *Imago Dei*. The face of God completes human existence, and the existential presence of Christ is invaluable. The story of the Garden of Eden and God’s visitations are transformed by the fall. God now must invite humanity to his presence. The other response that Moses receives from God in the requirement for God to unveil the physiology of who God is occurs when God pronounces justice in a sense as a symbol of God’s face, imbued and embedded in God’s will, mercy and justice in Exodus 34 (1–3, 5–7 NKJV).

The style of this section in Exodus according to the methods of Old Testament scholarship can be accredited to the Yahwistic group because of the persisting repetition of the name of God YHWH. The conclusion of Exodus 34 results in Moses having the direct incomprehensible and unintelligible radiance of the

*Kadosh Divinus*. The one who sought to see the face of God in Exodus 34:29–35 becomes the one who cannot be seen. The effects of the fall condemn human logic and reason to behold the face of God. It can be argued that perhaps God does not show his face because in the future we will see his face. In a sense, it is as if when Moses went down Christ outside the bounds of time would follow and become the one whose face we can behold with its glory that made it difficult for the Israelites to see Moses face. God’s direct refusal for Moses to behold his face confirms the transcendence of God and the impossible grasp of anatomical physiology of the divine *logos*, which can only be beholden through *kenosis*, the existential ambience for revelation. John 1:14 (NKJV) declares: ‘14 [a]nd the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth’. The attribute of truth points to a pneumatological identity imbued in Christology’s meaning. It affirms the importance of the prophet Isaiah and vision of God in the temple, Isaiah 6 (1–8 NKJV).

The vision of Isaiah reveals God enthroned and as Holy, Holy, Holy and reveals God in the temple in the holy of holies surrounded by seraphim. R.C. Sproul has pointed out that the vision of Lord and the death of Uzziah run parallel to the founding of Rome or the village of Roma – the nation later to crucify the deity. However, what is of significance is the vision of glory and the impact it had on the prophet Isaiah that results in him seeing his unclean mouth. God cleanses him through the seraphim who places the coals on the mouth of Isaiah. The response of Isaiah is to respond to the call of God; however, the Christological meaning of this call and cleansing fits the cross that when *Yeshua ha-Mašīaḥ* who responded through incarnation to the call, on the cross is given vinegar and bile for his thirst, placed upon his lips – as coal was placed upon the lips of Isaiah. The suffering of Christ on the cross reminisces the old Christian song entitled ‘He could have called ten thousand angels’, *Yeshua* before Pilate declared a kingdom of otherworldliness – a new messianic dispensation. The song reconfigures the vision of Isaiah and Christ’s enthronement on

the cross. Contrary to the glory of the temple of God, he is shrouded in darkness, the trembling of the land with Christ enthroned on the cross binds the vision of Isaiah, and the trembling of the Temple in Matthew 27 (45-53 NKJV). He that crieth *Eloi, Eloi* is the same who the seraphim's sang with their face and feet closed with two wings and flying declaring Holy, Holy, Holy. The angels who could not behold him because of glory and splendour cannot behold him with such shame and the legions of angels reject him because of the lack of understanding the plan of God expressed in I Peter (1:12 NKJV) 'things which angels desire to look into'.

## ■ Insights

These things, which angels sought to see, were confirmed to be true in African metaphysics and the visions of the sages as indicated by Pheko (2014). Thus, Christ as healer is joined in theological reflection and in revelation of God as God, liberation and wisdom incarnate. The healing ministry of Christ also undermines the healing of Judaism, which is ritualistic - in matters of moral and physical impurity. *Yeshua* heals by word and that linguistic ministry sets ablaze the world as well as against infirmity. *Yeshua* the existential healer and second person of the trinity is a manifold or myriad of representation but the meaningful discourse on healing requires transcendence and a Holy God to be existentially within reach. Mbiti (1997:522) is correct by instructing black or African theologians to dream during long lectures and not only at night.

# Conclusion

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## ■ Conclusion

That Jesus was one of the best and renowned healers is an undisputed fact. However, though reported as one of the best healers, Jesus competed with folk healers and professional healers of his time. In several chapters, especially the healing of the women with the flow of blood, we are explicitly told about the existence of other healers who charged hefty fees. In addition to folk medicine and professional healing sectors, we are aware of the presence of public healthcare, care whereby communities have public and known methods of tackling particular illnesses. Concerning historical questions and comparisons to other healers, two conclusions need to be made. Firstly, Jesus' healing practices of touch, spitting and commanding are found among other healers such as Asclepius. This conclusion allows us to

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reflect that, within his context, Jesus was not seen as a unique healer. Instead, he shared the cultural ideas about healing. Secondly, and equally important is the fact that though Jesus shared cultural healing worldview, Christian healthcare system represented by Jesus was less elaborate. For example, people were simply healed by faith or even from a distance, which is the case in the story of the Syro-phoenician woman and the story concerning the healing of Jairus' daughter. Unlike Asclepius, who used dreams and animals such as snakes, cats and owls, Jesus had none of these. Based on this, we can concur with Hector Avalos' (1999:84) conclusion that Christian healthcare system was easy to assess and less laborious.

Concerning the contextual aspects, one conclusion needs to be made, which is, African communities equivocally accepts Jesus as a healer. African traditional religion believes that God endows religious practitioners, such as Sangoma and Chiefs, with various abilities, and upon being sick, an individual is free to choose the practitioner he or she wishes. Spirits are judged based on the efficacy and not the type or nature. Thus, for Africans, the fact that Jesus is a healer does not preclude the place and function of other healers. Several contributions, especially that of Elliot Tofa, remind us of this dilemma. How do African believers navigate the plural market of healers where Jesus is one of the choices? Historical protestant theology expected Africans to only have Jesus and the missionary hospitals as a source of healing. However, the imposition of Jesus as healer could not hold – under the cover of the dark, Africans continue to visit various shrines consulting concerning various issues. The essays from Chris Manus and Elliot Tofa testify that Africans see Jesus as one of the healers – if not one of the best. Africans, similar to their view regarding ancestors, have a hierarchical view of power. Equally, Jesus is regarded as one of the best healers whose narrative in the Bible testifies his closeness to God.

The contributions in this volume make us ask an important question – how do we theorise Jesus' healing practices? To theorise is to attempt to create a descriptive lens from which one

can make sense of the phenomenon. Surely, Jesus' healing practices are acts of love and care. However, such descriptions lose the large plausible lens from which we can understand Jesus' healing. We suggest that Jesus' healing should be understood from the perspective of restoration and shalom. The healing is a restoration because it sought to restore the previously sick person to his or her family, making the latter reassume his or her role as father, mother, sister or neighbour. From a large theological frame, Jesus' healing is shalom – it is his praxis proclamation of wholeness and peace. The healings, symbolically, recreate a chaotic, desperate and hopeless situation that is whole and peaceful. Reading the healing stories of Jesus, we are reminded of God whose existence of imminent – the Immanuel for desires wholeness and shalom. In addition, they are prophetic in that they remind us that God is in the business of restoring and recreating bodies into whole by evacuating dark forces that cause pain and tears. Jesus' healing miracles are shalom – a proclamation of peace and restoration now and into the future. In Jesus' healing broken bodies, institutions such as households, economy and politics find restoration. The healings are from God, through Jesus, proclaiming to the world that 'it is well' – shalom unto you.



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# Index

## A

accept, 6, 54, 86, 92–93, 95  
acceptance, 72, 187  
Africa, 3, 5, 7, 12, 16, 22, 24, 27, 32,  
34–45, 47–51, 54, 68–72, 74,  
91–93, 99–100, 102, 104, 106,  
108, 110, 114, 126–128, 130–131,  
133, 141, 162–164, 167–171, 173,  
179–180, 183–184, 191, 194, 197,  
204–205, 208, 213  
African Pentecostalism, 54, 115  
African, 4–7, 10, 15–16, 20–24, 26–27,  
29–32, 34, 37–51, 53–54, 58, 64,  
67–70, 72, 74, 91–95, 99–100,  
104, 108–109, 113–115, 122,  
125–126, 129–130, 132, 136, 140,  
156, 161–162, 164, 166, 168–181,  
183, 185–187, 189–198, 201,  
203–205, 208, 210, 212, 214  
age, 23, 37, 59, 65, 67, 87, 94, 110, 149  
agency, 9, 101, 103, 108, 200  
AIDS, 85, 100, 104, 108–111, 140,  
157, 163  
apocalyptic, 91, 196–197, 199, 209  
awareness, 100, 133, 148

## B

Baptist, 6, 31, 40, 46  
bargaining, 161–162, 173, 179  
behaviour, 134, 168, 171, 179  
Bible, 4–7, 26, 107, 117, 130, 135, 188,  
197, 209, 214  
birth, 51, 141, 145, 147, 166, 168, 176, 193  
business, 23, 127, 144, 215

## C

care, 30, 46, 48, 107, 152, 154, 156, 159,  
213, 215  
celebration, 4, 8–11, 13–15

challenges, 4, 50, 64, 102, 133,  
162–163, 177  
change, 23, 72, 93, 95, 124, 153, 155,  
158, 160, 185  
character, 6, 37, 59, 109, 184, 199  
characteristics, 114, 117, 120–122, 146,  
149, 168, 173  
charismatic, 19, 39, 48–49, 54, 67, 125,  
129, 164  
child, 61, 94, 105, 145, 147, 152, 157,  
166, 169  
childbirth, 140, 142, 146–147  
childhood, 168–169, 180  
children, 11, 15, 93, 105–108,  
128–129, 137, 139, 144, 151, 157,  
176–177, 209  
Christ, 4, 20, 23, 48, 50, 60, 69–70,  
72, 93, 95, 99–100, 104–106,  
108–111, 119, 174, 183–190, 192–212  
Christian, 21–22, 24–27, 29, 31–32,  
34–40, 43, 45–46, 48–51, 54,  
59, 66, 68, 71, 91, 99–100, 104,  
110, 118, 120, 153, 173, 184–185,  
187–188, 191–192, 195–200, 205,  
207–208, 211, 214  
Christological, 23, 43, 46, 70, 100,  
108, 110, 184–185, 189, 192, 198,  
202, 205–208, 211  
Christology, 27–29, 31, 39, 45, 51, 100,  
104, 108–109, 153, 185, 193, 198,  
206–208, 210–211  
church, 5, 7, 23, 26, 29, 32, 34–36, 38,  
40–41, 43, 47–51, 68–69, 99, 111,  
119, 122, 126–127, 130, 133, 142,  
159, 169, 173–174, 179, 181, 184,  
186–187, 189–190, 192–193, 195,  
197–199, 203, 205  
city, 42, 55, 57, 79  
colonialism, 35, 191, 195

- community, 3–5, 8, 12–14, 17–18, 25–27, 38, 48, 50, 59, 66, 72–73, 76, 92–93, 104, 111, 117–119, 122–123, 133, 135, 137, 150, 155, 157, 172, 186, 197, 209
- concept, 59, 73, 146, 156, 184, 187, 204
- context, 5, 7–8, 10, 12, 17, 20–21, 26, 29, 31, 39, 69, 71–78, 80, 82–92, 94–96, 101, 103, 109, 122, 125, 132, 135–136, 141–143, 146–147, 149, 156–157, 161–162, 164, 166, 168–170, 172, 174, 176–178, 180, 184, 196, 198, 214
- contextual, 5, 23–24, 37, 44, 97, 132–133, 135–136, 159, 214
- create, 158, 171, 206, 214
- creation, 29–30, 38, 90, 188, 195, 200, 207, 209
- cross-cultural, 162, 181, 197
- crucified, 29, 41, 198
- crucifixion, 22, 33, 42, 45, 48, 51
- culture, 9, 16, 19, 23–24, 36–37, 67, 81, 86, 91, 94, 101, 115–117, 130, 134, 136–137, 139, 142, 144–145, 158, 160, 176, 188, 197–198, 205, 208
- D**
- death, 10, 16, 25, 29, 32–33, 57, 64, 68, 95, 99, 105–107, 109, 116, 120, 123, 134, 139, 142, 144, 149, 168–169, 176–177, 180, 199, 209, 211
- defined, 9, 12, 34, 75, 109, 114
- deities, 28, 58, 72, 81, 177, 205
- deliverance, 54, 60, 66, 115, 126, 128–129, 197
- demon possession, 12–14, 72–73, 75, 86–87, 170
- dependence, 104, 107, 110
- development, 51, 55, 115–116, 119, 141, 158, 192, 196–197
- dignity, 42, 159–160
- disease, 8, 71–74, 77, 79–80, 86, 90, 93–96, 110, 122, 127, 142, 152–153, 162–163
- E**
- economic, 7, 9–11, 14, 31–32, 69, 101, 115, 138
- education, 69–70, 137–138
- embodiment, 6, 75, 103, 138
- environment, 31, 35, 93, 139, 178
- eschatological, 19–20, 31–32, 207
- Europe, 31, 37, 39, 130
- exclusion, 51, 133, 142, 152, 196
- exorcisms, 68, 87–89, 91–92, 120, 161–162, 164, 166, 168–170, 172, 174, 176, 178, 180
- F**
- faith community, 119, 122
- families, 10, 12, 20, 92, 139, 144–145, 157, 179
- family, 3, 7–8, 10–17, 19, 24–26, 73, 78, 92–94, 105, 129, 139, 144–145, 157, 169, 171, 173, 176–178, 189, 205, 215
- father, 10, 12–15, 17, 25–26, 30, 55, 63–64, 68–70, 77–78, 82, 90, 106, 126, 145, 155–156, 164, 168, 188, 200, 205, 209, 211, 215
- fear, 10, 45, 68, 93, 132, 139, 142, 151, 154, 157, 159–160
- G**
- Genesis, 76, 90, 185
- God, 6, 8–10, 12, 21–22, 27–36, 38–40, 42–50, 55, 57, 60, 65–70, 76, 79, 82, 86, 90–92, 105, 114–115, 120, 122, 124–130, 135, 139, 145, 153–154, 157, 159, 163–166, 168, 170, 174–175, 181, 184–185, 187–195, 197–206, 208–212, 214–215
- gospel, 11, 20, 22, 24, 27–29, 32–35, 37–39, 42, 45–46, 50, 54,

- 58-60, 65-67, 84, 87, 90-91, 99,  
114, 116, 118, 120, 122, 125-126,  
132, 144, 148, 150, 162-163,  
169-170, 173, 175, 184-187, 195,  
198, 202, 206-208
- Greco-Roman, 20, 23, 28-29, 53-58,  
60, 62, 64, 66, 68, 70-78,  
80-82, 84-88, 90-92, 94-96,  
145, 164-166, 175, 198-199
- Greek, 28, 55, 68, 75-76, 78-79, 81-82,  
120, 135, 144, 166, 168, 186,  
191, 193
- growth, 43, 72, 93, 95
- H**
- healing, 3-8, 10-21, 32, 39, 42-43,  
53-68, 70-74, 76, 78, 81-94,  
99-100, 104, 108-111, 113-116,  
118, 120, 122-126, 128-134, 136,  
138, 140, 142, 144, 146, 148-150,  
152-154, 156-158, 160, 162-167,  
169-170, 172-175, 179, 181,  
183-184, 186, 188-190, 192, 194,  
196-198, 200-204, 206-208,  
210, 212-215
- health, 17, 20-21, 56, 58-59, 64, 67,  
72-75, 77, 80, 92-95, 104-108,  
110, 132-133, 153, 162-163, 176,  
180, 195
- heaven, 25, 30, 38, 54
- hermeneutics, 132, 187, 191, 195-197
- hidden transcript, 132-133, 154
- HIV, 100, 104-105, 107-111, 140, 157, 163
- holistic, 8-9, 32, 44
- Holy Spirit, 6, 32, 36, 49, 60, 66, 126,  
185, 188, 192, 198
- hope, 20, 25, 32, 39, 46, 82, 111, 133,  
159-160, 184
- households, 12, 16-17, 215
- human, 28-29, 34, 42-43, 46, 72, 77,  
80, 93, 96, 100, 109, 111, 115, 120,  
122, 124, 159-160, 168, 179-180,  
183, 185, 189-191, 199-200, 202,  
209-211
- humanity, 6, 10, 44, 91, 108, 120, 127,  
159, 170, 186, 192, 203, 209-210
- I**
- Identity, 4, 15, 25, 27, 49, 101, 119, 156,  
174, 210-211
- Imago Dei, 195, 201-203, 209-210
- implications of, 29, 38, 70, 202
- importance, 11, 65, 67, 89, 123, 149,  
188, 191, 197, 203, 208, 211
- inclusion, 51, 70, 199
- infirmary, 71-75, 86, 92-93, 95-96, 127,  
163, 212
- influence, 39, 85, 144, 146, 149, 179
- injustice, 184, 191
- inside, 56, 65, 110, 143, 154
- interpretation, 6, 24, 29, 44, 56,  
68-69, 93, 125, 136, 156,  
170, 196
- Israel, 9, 120, 132, 140, 166, 189
- J**
- Jerusalem, 41, 66, 120, 194, 202, 207
- Jesus, 3-8, 10-14, 16-51, 53-56,  
58-74, 76, 78, 80, 82, 84-96,  
99-100, 102, 104-111, 113-134,  
143, 145-146, 148-156, 159-170,  
172-181, 183-199, 201-208, 210,  
213-215
- Jewish, 10, 20, 23, 25-29, 37-38, 41,  
44-45, 56, 58, 68, 76, 85-86,  
117, 120-121, 123, 134, 143-145,  
148, 150, 155, 164-166, 175,  
183-184, 193, 207
- justice, 41, 45, 132, 210
- K**
- Kingdom of God, 22, 27, 32, 70, 159
- kingdom, 22, 27, 32, 70, 92, 124, 126,  
130, 159, 193, 211
- L**
- language, 13, 90, 109, 115, 119-120, 135,  
158, 177, 205

laws, 37, 142, 147, 151  
 leadership, 37, 40, 137  
 leper, 61, 63, 65, 89, 113-116, 118,  
 120-124, 126, 128, 130  
 liberal, 100, 193, 210  
 liberation, 35, 50, 100, 132-133,  
 157-160, 184, 188, 191, 197, 205,  
 210, 212  
 love, 6-7, 25, 41, 47-48, 154-155, 159,  
 202, 215  
 Luke, 11, 26-28, 36, 41, 46, 58, 60-66,  
 114-115, 119, 123-124, 130,  
 185, 201

**M**

marginalisation, 138, 159  
 Mark, 11, 13-14, 16-17, 25, 27-28, 36,  
 42, 60-66, 84-85, 87, 89, 94,  
 113-114, 116, 118-126, 128, 130-136,  
 142-144, 146-148, 150-151, 153,  
 156, 159, 174, 184-186, 206-207  
 Mary, 27, 43, 47, 61, 94, 167, 169, 176  
 medicine, 21, 55, 57, 75, 86, 92, 100,  
 109-111, 137, 162-163, 213  
 memory, 14, 90, 113-116, 118-120,  
 122, 124, 126, 128, 130, 155, 191,  
 193-194, 205  
 mercy, 94, 114, 132, 210  
 Messiah, 13, 20, 27, 58-59, 66, 168,  
 183-184, 187, 198-199, 208-209  
 metaphor, 13, 22, 48, 100, 109-110  
 miracle, 45, 57, 67, 86-89, 91, 123-124,  
 128-129, 155, 162-169, 175, 181,  
 186, 197, 202, 206  
 mission, 5, 22, 30, 34, 38, 43, 121, 160,  
 183-184, 186-187, 207  
 moral, 28, 31, 212  
 motivation, 62, 106

**N**

narrative, 4, 114, 117, 120, 123, 125,  
 133-134, 143, 148, 156, 186, 190,  
 196, 207, 214  
 nature, 30, 38, 44, 81, 86, 96, 100-101,  
 103, 115, 120, 134, 137, 143-144,  
 148-149, 159, 192, 204, 206-207,  
 210, 214

Nazareth, 13, 22, 28, 54, 62-64, 69,  
 89, 184, 189  
 need, 10, 22, 31, 34, 46, 48, 65, 67, 69,  
 73, 81, 92, 96, 110, 143, 147, 151,  
 168, 188-190, 197, 202, 206, 213  
 New Testament, 3, 5-7, 9, 23-24, 45,  
 71-74, 85-87, 114, 131, 184-188,  
 192, 194, 196, 198-199, 201, 204,  
 206, 213

**O**

Oduyoye, 44-45, 51, 100  
 Old Testament, 9, 94, 146, 149, 167,  
 169, 188, 210  
 oral, 8, 59, 114-118, 120-122, 124, 178  
 orality, 8, 17, 66, 113-120, 122, 124, 126,  
 128, 130

**P**

Palestinian, 23, 37, 117, 119, 123, 178  
 paradigm, 23, 26, 40, 42, 46-47, 200  
 parents, 12, 24, 106, 176  
 participation, 72, 74-75, 92-93  
 peace, 4-5, 8-10, 33, 41, 59, 154,  
 201-202, 215  
 people, 3-4, 6, 9-13, 15, 20, 22-23, 31,  
 33, 39, 42, 46, 51, 58-67, 70,  
 74-76, 80-81, 86-90, 94, 103,  
 108-109, 114-115, 117-119, 121, 123,  
 128, 130, 134, 136-137, 139-140,  
 147, 151-152, 154-155, 158, 160,  
 162-163, 165-166, 168, 170-173,  
 176-180, 184, 188, 190, 194-197,  
 203, 205, 208-209, 214  
 philosophy, 19, 28, 34, 99, 131, 183  
 political healer, 184, 198, 202  
 politics, 37, 102, 115, 126, 137, 183-184,  
 186, 188, 190, 192, 194, 196, 198,  
 200, 202, 204, 206, 208, 210,  
 212, 215  
 poor, 32, 34, 108, 158, 177, 184,  
 202, 206  
 population, 22, 31, 39, 58, 141  
 poverty, 12, 34-35, 75, 107  
 power, 4, 6-7, 13-14, 16, 21, 30, 32, 34,  
 39-41, 43, 54, 56-59, 62, 65-66,

- 68–69, 75, 81–85, 87–90, 92, 94, 101, 103, 106, 108, 110, 115–116, 122–124, 126, 144, 148, 151, 153, 155–156, 165, 174, 177, 179, 192, 195, 201–204, 206, 214
- prayer, 12, 36, 40–41, 46, 54, 64, 66, 68–69, 76, 78, 105–106, 108, 115, 123, 126, 129, 166
- process, 13, 21, 38, 55–56, 72, 88, 93, 95, 102, 114, 126, 135–136, 143, 157, 174, 183–184, 190, 194, 201–204, 209
- prophetic, 36, 45, 68, 156, 215
- protection, 6, 83, 110
- public transcript, 132, 138
- purity, 87, 120, 132, 134, 142, 146–147, 149–155, 158–160
- purpose, 28, 39–40, 104, 118, 149, 153, 170, 178
- R**
- relation, 54, 103, 194, 197, 208
- relationship, 7–8, 12–13, 26, 35, 44, 72, 78, 93, 95, 164, 176, 179
- representation, 204, 208, 212
- research, 87, 101–104, 164, 173, 185, 201
- responsibility, 35, 37, 39, 48, 156
- restoration, 4, 7–11, 14–15, 17–18, 21, 62, 94, 108, 118, 131, 133, 174, 215
- resurrection, 32, 51, 60, 94, 99, 209
- risk, 26, 135, 140
- ritualistic, 19–20, 37, 212
- Roman, 13, 20, 23, 28–29, 31, 40–41, 44–45, 53–58, 60, 62, 64, 66, 68–78, 80–82, 84–88, 90–92, 94–96, 125, 144–145, 162, 164–166, 175, 189, 196, 198–199
- Romans, 25, 30, 72
- Rome, 24, 57, 120, 122, 211
- S**
- Sabbath, 9, 37, 122, 169
- salvation, 25, 92, 122, 127
- Sangoma, 6–7, 162, 214
- school, 107, 131, 193
- scripture, 198, 201, 207, 210
- separate, 49, 86, 101
- services, 6, 58, 126, 130, 140
- Shalom, 3–18, 72, 92–93, 96, 215
- societies, 4, 9, 11, 15, 67–68, 75, 82, 108–109, 117, 122, 132, 137–138, 140, 144, 146, 156, 171, 177
- society, 3, 19, 25, 31, 39, 45, 47, 53–54, 71–72, 74, 79, 85, 92–93, 99, 103, 113–114, 121, 123, 131, 134, 137–138, 142, 144–145, 151, 155–156, 158, 160–161, 183, 199, 213
- soteriology, 183, 188, 193, 197, 203, 206–208
- South Africa, 3, 7, 50, 54, 68, 71, 114, 128, 131, 183, 205, 213
- space, 16–17, 33, 38, 129, 136, 144, 202, 208
- spaces, 93, 174–175
- status, 5, 12, 14–15, 41, 50, 56, 77, 79, 93, 111, 145, 149–150, 155, 158, 160, 190, 204
- stories, 3–5, 7–8, 10–11, 17, 87–88, 92, 102–103, 109, 116, 118, 141, 149–150, 162, 167–169, 178, 186, 215
- story, 11, 13–17, 85, 106, 114, 118, 120–125, 131–133, 136, 142–143, 146–150, 155–157, 159, 170, 190, 206, 210, 214
- suffer, 80, 140, 142, 157, 160, 183
- suffering, 78, 92, 111, 133, 147, 152, 154–156, 159, 211
- symbolic performances, 162, 173, 175, 181
- T**
- temple, 23, 36–37, 55–58, 61, 65, 202, 209, 211–212
- theocentric, 19–20, 27–28, 42–44
- theology, 3, 6, 21, 28, 31, 33–35, 37–38, 43, 48, 50–51, 53–54, 71, 99, 104, 109, 113–114, 161, 183–189, 191–201, 203–205, 207–210, 213–214

## Index

therapeutic paradigms, 19–20, 22, 24,  
26, 28, 30, 32, 34, 36, 38, 40,  
42, 44, 46, 48, 50  
transformation, 26, 34,  
102, 136

### U

urban, 20, 23, 87, 107

### V

value, 30, 93, 101–102, 145, 193, 204  
values, 67, 102, 120, 125, 134, 137–138,  
160, 209

violence, 10, 133, 138–140, 142, 156–160  
virtue, 36, 101, 190, 196–197  
virtues, 194–195, 200  
vulnerable, 48, 175, 177

### W

wisdom, 46, 81, 94, 167, 188–190, 194,  
197, 199–205, 209, 212  
womb, 146, 152  
women, 15, 47, 99–105, 107–108,  
127–128, 132–134, 136–149, 152,  
155–160, 169, 176–177, 213  
written, 28, 59–60, 101, 115, 120

This collected volume provides African views on the person of Jesus as the Messianic Healer. Some views are methodologically grounded, while others are expressed in ordinary ways. Nevertheless, all are African voices that need to be heard in the scholarly world with respect to the healing authority of Jesus. Specific methods used in this book include Feminist approach, Reader-response approach, Tri-polar approach, and Ethnographic studies. Through these methods and other views, the readers in Africa and beyond will be able to get more insights on the New Testament stories of healing performed by Jesus or in his name during the New Testament times and in contemporary Africa. More interestingly, the book also shows similarities and dissimilarities between the healing practices by Jesus and those of the Greco-Roman world, as well as those of the African world of today. By doing so, it might arguably be the first book of its kind, as long as a collective and qualified exegesis of healing stories in Christian Africa is concerned. In terms of Biblical scholarship advance, this book is a testimony for the dawn of the era where African views are also voiced through some specific methods and not only via ordinary readings. Readers of similar minds will surely be inspired by this book and get motivated to take African critical and existential scholarship to a higher level.

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