

Models and perspectives concerning the identity of Jesus as healer

**Author:**Zorodzai Dube¹ **Affiliation:**

¹New Testament Department, Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of Pretoria, South Africa

Research Project Registration:**Project Leader:** Z. Dube**Project Number:** 13339746**Project Description:**

This research is part of the project, 'Healing during the New Testament', directed by Dr Dube, Department of New Testament Studies, Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of Pretoria.

Corresponding author:

Zorodzai Dube,
zoro.dube@up.ac.za

Dates:

Received: 02 Feb. 2018

Accepted: 03 May 2018

Published: 26 June 2018

How to cite this article:

Dube, Z., 2018, 'Models and perspectives concerning the identity of Jesus as healer', *HTS Theologies Studies/Theological Studies* 74(1), 4925. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v74i1.4925>

Copyright:

© 2018. The Authors.
Licensee: AOSIS. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution License.

This study reviews various perspectives into the identity of Jesus as healer. There are two main perspectives – those that approach the identity of Jesus as healer from a theological perspective focusing on his personhood as messiah and those that use social scientific perspectives from sociology, psychology and anthropology. This study does not aim to evaluate or direct the reader towards a conclusion of Jesus' identity, but only to review various perspectives. Based on analogies from Zimbabwe and comparative insights from the Mediterranean context from which the memory of Jesus survived, it is plausible that the identity of Jesus as healer should be found from the larger Greco-Roman context. Furthermore, given the various healers that existed during Jesus time both within the Jewish and Greco-Roman villages, the explanation of Jesus as healer is plausible from the various social scientific perspectives discussed.

Introduction

This study looks into the two perspectives concerning the identity of Jesus as healer. The first perspective employs a theological lens by focusing on God's healing power demonstrated through the work and ministry of Jesus. In this perspective, the focus is on Jesus' healing power compared to other healers. The healing ministry of Jesus is understood as sign for the messianic age which reveals the identity of Jesus as messiah. Using social science models to understand Jesus' identity as healer, the second perspective developed as a subgroup of the study of the historical Jesus. Unlike the first perspective, scholars with this perspective do not see Jesus as unique. Jesus, instead, is viewed as situated within a broader Mediterranean context with his healings similar to his contemporaries.

The theological perspective: What kind of healing power?

The theological perspective's understanding of Jesus as healer is anchored by epistemological assumptions that Jesus was the Messiah and thus different. Therefore, Jesus, though living in the same cultural milieu with other healers of his time, was unique and his healing ministry had a deeper theological meaning. Howard Clark Kee (1983), representative voice of the theological perspective, demonstrates how the evangelists reported about Jesus' miracles as signs that indicated the dawn of a new eschatological dispensation. Kee, though highlighting healers contemporary to Jesus such as Asclepius and Isis, is interested in showing the unique theological meaning of Jesus' healing. Commenting on Matthew, Kee argues that Matthew's healing narratives are meant to present the church as new Israel, while in Luke the miracles of Jesus reveal God's universal work through the apostles. Earlier, Davies (1913) and Van der Loos (1965) gave a similar assessment to that of Kee, suggesting that the miracles are evidence of God's evident work through Jesus. Van der Loos (1965) further argued that miracles have four dimensions: divine revelation, a sense of awe from the observers, breach against the known order of nature and an event that has a sense of profound meaning to the viewers. Steven Davies, building on this understanding of the miracles, argues that Jesus was able to heal because he was possessed by the power of God (Davies 1995). Pieter de Villiers collaborates this argument, also arguing that despite similarities between Jesus and other healers of his time, Jesus was a uniquely divine man because he was the Christ – an argument which is also supported by Harold Remus. Remus, while taking note of the similarity between Jesus and the Greek itinerant healers, insists that Jesus distinguished himself by being a teacher and 'wounded healer', a phrase which implies that Jesus was the crucified messiah (Remus 1997).

Two observations can be made from this perspective. Firstly, time is the main organising factor in understanding Jesus as healer. This is clearly evidenced from Kee and Davies' argument where Jesus' miracles are put on a time scale and interpreted as signs of divine disclosure. The healings

Read online:

Scan this QR code with your smart phone or mobile device to read online.

of Jesus are a revelation of who Jesus is as Messiah. The miracles of Jesus thus act as a prelude to a bigger eschatological goal of God. Secondly, Jesus' healings are regarded as a mere window into the Christological title of Messiah, with less focus on the methods that Jesus used.

From the viewpoint of critical discourse analysis, this approach is illustrative of the binary approach associated with modernity that the West is superior to others. From this perspective, non-Christian sections of the world were discursively described using pejorative adjectives such as darkness, uncouthness and ungodliness. During modernity, Christianity provided the narrative and symbols that regarded Jesus as the only way to know God; thus, non-Christians were targets of evangelism and conversion. Non-Christian worlds were described as darkness, whereas the Christian West was characterised as the bearer of light. This modern mindset is demonstrated in the manner in which Kee and scholars in this category interpreted Jesus' miracles as signs of deeper divine purpose. Although Jesus lived among other healers of his time, only his miracles are a window to knowing God, in contrast to those of Asclepius. Equally, in Africa, among protestant Christians Western medicine was regarded as better compared to traditional medicine. Traditional healers, despite years of proven effectiveness within African villages, were dismissed as the embodiment of spiritual darkness and abodes of Satan.

Today, this perspective is still cultivated among most Protestant and Pentecostal churches who still regard African healing methods as superseded by that of Jesus – the true Messiah. Similarly in public discourse, it is common to see a sticker on a car stating 'Jesus heals', but rarely will see a similar sticker stating 'Sangoma heals'. The public reaction to one who publicly displays the power of a sangoma is one of affront and disdain that comes from the belief that sangomas are archaic healing practitioners. Discursively, Jesus is seen as a symbol of progress in healing, whereas other forms of healing are regarded as having been replaced by him.

Social-scientific models: What model of a healer?

Social science approaches to the question regarding Jesus as healer focus on models or analogies that help explain the kind of healer Jesus was. From the 1950s, studies about Jesus shifted from who Jesus is – the privilege of his identity as Messiah – to the kind of environment in which Jesus lived. This process resulted in the formation of what came to be known as the Context Group: A project on the Bible in its socio-cultural context which comprise of New Testament scholars such as Dennis Duling, John Kloppenborg, Douglas Oakman, Bruce Malina, John Elliott, Philip Esler, Jerome Neyrey, John Pilch, Richard Rohrbaugh, Wolfgang Stegemann and Halvor Moxnes. The central focus of the Context Group is investigation of the world behind the New Testament and developing models that best explain the social, economic and political situation that produced the text of the New Testament.

Concerning the question of Jesus as healer, the focus would be to present models that explain the manner in which Jesus healed.

The social-scientific approach to the New Testament starts by cautioning us that the world that Jesus lived is no longer in existence, and therefore, we should not make hurried assumptions and conclusions based on our own idiosyncrasies. To bridge our time and the ancient times, models or analogies are used to approximate the world reflected by the New Testament narratives. Models come in two forms: Firstly, direct analogies, which are mostly preferred, derived from the same context or culture. These models have a closer proximity to the culture and world of the Bible. Secondly, models can also come from comparative analogy by studying societies that are deemed to approximate the dynamics reflected by the biblical narratives (Gould & Watson 1982). For example, societies in Africa and Asia in which honour and shame play a dominant cultural role are typical cultures to study and understand the dynamics of honour and shame in biblical times. Questions that are normally raised when dealing with comparative models include: 'what makes a model suitable'? Gould and Watson (1982), who have written extensively on this subject, argue that the suitability of a model lies in its compatibility and assistance in explaining the unknown. An analogue functions to suggest and illuminate possibilities and not dictate meaning. Related to this, as models help the readers to imagine and move from the known to the unknown, greater caution is needed not to force a model upon the biblical narratives.

What do we know about the ancient world in which Jesus lived? Using anthropological perspectives, John Pilch suggests five heuristic cultural characteristics concerning the world reflected by the New Testament. Firstly, Jesus lived in a culture where people believed in 'being and becoming (i.e. state), not doing' as the basis upon which to understand people. This means that a person was expected to act appropriately based on shared community values. In Mark's story of Jesus, for example, Jesus says that a prophet is without honour except in his hometown, a statement that evoked anger from the entire village. Not to respond during public indignation, as Pilch explains, was viewed as lack of understanding or indifference towards community values. Similarly, among the Shona people of Zimbabwe, a person should have *nyadzi*, the ability to act appropriately in any cultural context. However, the term *nyadzi* is sometimes narrowly understood as referring to shame. In its broader context, *nyadzi* is propriety – conformity to accepted standards. Among the Shona, a person without *nyadzi* is considered to lack *hunhu*; *muntu*, which means a human being. Thus, lacking *nyadzi* is being inhuman. For example, in a gathering an elder can rebuke someone by saying *ko hauna nyadzi*, meaning 'do you not know how to act with propriety'? Therefore, Pilch's explanation concerning being or becoming refers to the ability to act appropriately.

Secondly, Jesus lived in context where linear relationships were valued more than individualism, an aspect which relates to the idea of being. I, though now staying in town, grew up in a village where I was taught to value relationships. Among the Shona people of Zimbabwe, though bloodlines are important, the entire village is tied together by a maze of kinship ties. Each household has kinship ties to the next household. Several daily practices and rituals reinforce these ties. For example, people cannot pass each other on the street or path without greeting. When two people meet, they should greet, and not to greet results one being labelled a witch. Here the label 'witch' is used as a deviant control mechanism for people who are regarded as anti-social or do not embody shared social values. Importantly, greeting should be done to anyone and by everyone, and at all time. It is never appropriate to not greet, even after meeting the same person several times during the same day. People, when greeting each other, should stop and return the greeting. Women or young men should bow and clap as sign of respect towards the elders. Common phrases while greeting include *makadini*, which is far deeper than saying how are you. Instead, *makadini* means 'how is the life in you'. Other phrases are *mhoroi*, meaning 'I recognise or respect you'. In addition, the greeting formula such as *makasimba here* asks about the other's health. At a very young age, the young are taught to respect the elders by initiating greeting. Hospitality is another cultural practice among the Shona that indicates the importance of relationships. People, concerning hospitality, visit each other's household without notice and the host is expected to abandon his or her tasks and give attention to the visitor by preparing food or giving traditional brewed juice or water. If one is not comfortable or was about to go somewhere, a modest way should be found which does not present the host as lacking *hunhu*.

Thirdly, people who occupy the pages of the New Testament valued the past and present, and believed that the future is something that belongs to God. In essence, they did not reflect on the future and, in a certain sense, were not interested in the future. This attitude towards time is difficult to fathom for moderns, given our modern culture of financial and insurance policies (Pilch 2000). Value of the past and present is related to the issue concerning relationships and time. The past was considered the granary of wisdom where lessons and stories about the village were derived. The traditions from the elders were a sources of teaching and entertainment when the family meet after a day's work (Malbon 1986). In addition to being haunted by diseases and injuries, subsistence and peasant life is precarious. Kinship ties and community festivals provided meaning to life (Pilch 2000).

Fourthly, people from the 1st-century Mediterranean world believed that nature is uncontrollable (Pilch 2000). Unlike our context, where we believe we can predict the weather and are able to explore the deep oceans and forests, they believed that nature has a life of its own. Illustration can be found from the Shona people who also believe that natural features such as rivers, oceans and forest are the abodes of

terrifying spirits. Thus, unfortunate events such as someone struck by lightning, drowning in a pool or being bitten by a snake in the forest are all interpreted as the spirits communicating.

Fifthly, Jesus grew up in a context whereby people regarded 'human nature as both good and bad, not neutral or correctable', a belief traceable from cultural myths such as the creation story (Pilch 2000). When people reciprocated in humane ways by showing kindness, love and care towards one another, it made them good. However, it was believed that it is inherent to humans to feel jealousy, greed and evil desires. This tension between good and bad explains the goodness of God expressed by creation and yet also the inherent evil that humanity can show towards each other and to nature.

Within such a worldview, what does healing mean? Healing during Jesus' time had a spiritual and a social dimension. The social dimension of healing refers to having a good social standing within the society, being a neighbour and playing one's social role. People who were demon possessed were seen as not having a good social standing within the society. This explains why people who were demon possessed were not part of households, but had to live outside in the forest or between tombs (see Mk 5). Demon possessed persons were seen as deviants and were not allowed in the temple, a place of opposition to Jesus' new household in Mark's gospel. From a social scientific perspective, Van Eck and Van Aarde comment that Jesus' healing, besides dealing with the question of the cause of illness, deals with social restoration (Van Eck 1993). As the spiritual world provides the cause of illness, keeping the equilibrium between the spiritual and the physical was imperative. Pilch explains that sickness and healing was understood as a process by which a disease and certain other worrisome circumstances were made into or labelled as illness (a cultural construction and therefore meaningful) and 'the sufferer gains a degree of satisfaction through the reduction, or even elimination of the psychological sensory, and experiential oppressiveness engendered by his medical circumstances' (Pilch 2000). That sickness or illness had a spiritual explanation is an important contribution by Pilch to help moderns understand sickness and healing in the ancient world.

A similar worldview exists among the Shona people who believe that if one suffers, for example, from a headache, the patient, even after consulting the clinic, consults a traditional healer to inquire about the spiritual cause regarding the accident. A medical condition (headache) thus always, as an underlying assumption, has a further spiritual explanation. The spiritual dimension would provide the psychological explanation towards why the headache happened in the first place. In most of his healings, Jesus would request the healed to see the priest which explains Jesus' awareness that incorporates physical and spiritual restoration.

Jesus and the shamanic healer model

Because of Jesus' various social roles, recent studies describe Jesus as a shamanic social type. No exact meaning and origin of the word 'shaman' has been given. However, the word 'shaman' is believed to have originated in Siberia, referring to one who is excited or 'one who knows'. A shaman is a person who can function in various social roles – divination, exorcism, control of spirits, visions and spirit possession (Craffert 1999; Turner 2003). Through connection to the spiritual world, a shaman, for example, plays a crucial role in politics by alerting the political leaders regarding possible political changes in the future (Moxnes 2003). Among the Shona people, a shaman who works alongside traditional chiefs and politicians is revered and his or her advice is not disputed. Comparatively, the shaman is interchangeable and traceable to local practitioners such as *N'anga* or *Isangoma*. Pieter Craffert and Halvor Moxnes suggest that Jesus fits the model of a shaman complex type because the shamanic healer type would function in diverse social roles. In the case of Jesus, he could heal, teach, give prophecy and operate in many other social roles.

Although initial studies concerning the shaman model were conducted in Siberia, comparative examples can be found in various cultures, including Southern Africa. Several characteristics define a shaman, but two are prominent – experiences of out of body journeys and possession. After engaging in various activities such as playing the drum, dancing and solitude or sleep deprivation, a shaman can experience an out of body journey whereby he or she can travel to another world. An out of body experience can be understood as a trance-like experience where the shaman detaches himself or herself from present reality and their own body and simultaneously exist in another world. This is complicated and difficult to comprehend. Among the Malawian healers, although physically present, they are able to travel to another place and upon return tell us what your relative who is in another city or country is doing. For example, they can tell you that 'I saw your father; he is in the field and your mother is not feeling well and is lying on a mat'. A similar example is found in the Bible where Paul responded to the accusation of him not being an effective apostle by narrating instances when he was transported outside his own body to heaven. Referring to himself, Paul says:

I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up in heaven – whether in body or out of body I do not know, God knows. And I know that this man was caught up in paradise – whether in the body or out of body I do not know but God knows, and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter. (2 Cor 12: 2–4)

Equally Jesus' transfiguration whereby Jesus, Peter, James and John experienced an out of body experience where they saw Moses and other dead ancestors is another example of out of body experience (Mk 9).

Shaman healers perform their healing in a state of possession. Possession and exorcism fall in the same category of spiritual warfare. Possession, in anthropological literature, is seen as coded protest (Dube 2012). Moxnes, for example, and with reference to Jesus and the Roman Empire, comments that Jesus' exorcism was a form of protest against oppression and empowering of people who were oppressed (Moxnes 2003; Horsley 2001). I have personal experiences from my uncle – Morris, a diviner, a famous healer – who would go into a trance during his healing sessions. Among the Shona, possession is characteristic of diviner healers – they use the power of animals (e.g. snakes or baboons), spirits and even mermaids to heal. The baboon spirit because of its knowledge of the forest knows various herbs and is a valuable alien spirit (Shoko 2006). Upon being possessed, the diviner would start to speak unintelligibly and would heal by translating what he sees in the spiritual realm to the people. The possessed, in case of an animal spirit, mimics the type of animal behind the possession. For example, if a person is possessed by a baboon spirit, he would climb tall trees and imitate the baboon in all respects.

From this, it is clear that most characteristics of shamanism are similar to local diviner practitioners known in many African societies. Among the Shona, three categories of healers exist – diviner, herbalist and lot-caster. A lot-caster interprets the spiritual world from reading the signs of the medicated dice – perhaps a similar practice to that recorded in Acts. Herbalists receive training regarding medicine from grandparents or a well-known village herbalist. A herbalist can also function as a diviner by combining acquired knowledge with spiritual guidance from ancestors. A diviner derives his power from the spiritual real through possession and trance. For the diviner to start functioning, the beating of drums and music accompanied by rhythmic clapping of hands is performed. All of a sudden the practitioner would start groaning and fuming to indicate takeover or transfiguration of the individual into another being. In his trance state, the diviner would speak in a different voice. If a patient is inquiring about his or her health, the diviner would start speaking in the exact voice of the person, dead or alive, who caused the sickness (Tedlock 2001); 1 Samuel 28:8, where Saul consulted a diviner who then 'telephoned' the voice of dead, namely Samuel, is illustrative here.

The shaman model, as Craffert argues, is a practical model in explaining a number of social roles found in Jesus' healing practice. Jesus portrayed himself as an exorcist, yet also could heal by touching and pronouncement. In most of his healing, the demoniacs recognise Jesus as more powerful and would plead not to be removed from their host (Mk 1:27; 3:23). Furthermore, the family confrontation of Jesus and his immediate family reveals the cultural belief that exorcisms were understood as spiritual confrontation of spirits, meaning that possession played a major role in the way Jesus operated. Being possessed by the power of God, Jesus would go into a spiritual encounter or conflict with the spirits.

Jesus and the exorcism healer model

Another commonly used label is that Jesus was an exorcist healer. After discussion concerning the shaman complex, that Jesus was an exorcist healer should be regarded as a subcategory of him being a shaman as shaman healer occupies various healings, as well as social and political roles. However, in literature where Jesus is seen as an exorcist healer, it is seen as a unique healing identity. The challenge of describing Jesus as an exorcist healer model is that, so far to my knowledge, there is no social role model to the subject concerning Jesus as exorcist. If Jesus was an exorcist, what models can we use to explain and better understand the practice?

The fact that a majority of studies base their argument of Jesus as exorcist on textual or literary perspectives compounds the problem (Dunn & Twelftree 1980). Graham Twelftree, for example, argues that Jesus' self-identity was that of an exorcist which he then demonstrates using several texts from Mark (Twelftree 2011). The gospel of Mark, according to him, contains enough textual evidence that shows that Jesus was an exorcist healer. As example, he lists the exorcism in the synagogue (Mk 1:21), the Beelzebub controversy (Mk 3:28), the Gerasene demoniac (Mk 5) and the Syrophenician woman's daughter (Mk 7). Jesus in the Q (Mt 11:2//Lk 7:18), upon being asked by John if he was the Messiah, answered by saying:

Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them.

Jesus self-identified himself as exorcist who performed several miracles, including healing, because he was an exorcist. As evaluation, arguing for the exorcist model healer using biblical texts is less helpful because the text does not tell us much, if anything, about exorcists and their social function during Jesus' time. Lack of a model that explain Jesus as an exorcist healer illustrates Halvor Moxnes' concern when he says that 'healing and exorcism have been put into a private sector of illness and healing. They have been viewed as forerunner of what in modern times is the medical sector' (Moxnes 2003).

I concur by adding that to associate Jesus with exorcists is the opposite of a progressive Jesus. An unspoken fear exists among Western Christian scholars who do not want to equate Jesus with folk healers which Christian missionaries demonised and forbid. When Western Christianity spread to Africa through missionaries, travellers and explorers, it met traditional African religious practices where exorcism was central to healing. To separate Jesus from similar practices and to present Jesus as more advanced, exorcism and other folk forms of healing were demonised. For example, in places such as Zimbabwe, Protestant Christianity banned new converts to Christianity from visiting traditional diviners, lot-casters and herbalists, though many of these practices

continued to receive clients even from those who had converted to Christianity.

However, today in African Pentecostal churches a re-appropriation of traditional exorcism practices is happening whereby the African Jesus casts away all forms of demons, including the demons of unemployment, lack of money, barrenness and anger. The re-appropriation of traditional healing practices in African Christianity is evident of the interface between the Bible and African culture. More so, such practices are evidence of how the Bible and Jesus are used to deal with social realities affecting the people (Dube 2015b).

Several social-scientific perspectives refer to Jesus as exorcist. Theoretically, these come from the perspective of psychology and deploy psychological perspectives to imagine the lives of people under an oppressive regime. From this perspective they argue that as the stories about exorcism were told within the context of Roman Empire and the experience of oppression of peasants, exorcism stories were coded posturing (Dube 2012). Building on Halvor Moxnes and Ched Meyers, Amanda Witmer argues that the exorcisms of Jesus had political connotations. From this perspective, exorcisms are understood as emotionally charged narratives told from the perspective of the peasants whose purpose is re-imagining of space free from Roman occupation and oppression (Moxnes 2003; Myers 1988; Witmer 2012). This approach is plausible if we approach the exorcism stories from a narrative and discourse perspective. However, it does not provide anthropological models regarding how exorcists operate, who the patients were or how they started the practice.

In search for a model, comparative characteristics between Jesus' activities as exorcist and the exorcists that are found among the Shona people of Zimbabwe exist. Earlier in this study, this possession has been alluded to. Among the Shona people of Zimbabwe, exorcism is one of the many activities that are performed by a diviner or shaman social type. Being possessed, a healer goes into trance where he gains spiritual power to command a particular sickness. Exorcism is only performed when the healer is possessed or in a trance, which shows that the act is an encounter between two spiritual antagonists. The healer may chose not to continue with the exorcism process if he or she realises that the power to be exorcised is greater than his or her power. If the healer continues with the exorcism, while not having enough power, the healer may die or be severally incapacitated. Therefore, a prudent healer, after noticing that he or she cannot exorcise the spirit, recommends that the patient see a more powerful healer. Sangomas know each other's rank and do referrals depending on the case. More powerful sangomas are those possessed by the water spirit or mermaid. A mermaid spirit knows various herbs and can exorcise a variety of spirits, even the strong ones. From a Biblical perspective, Jesus having been accused of using Beelzebub' power to cast away demons responded by saying 'but no one can enter a strong man's

house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. Then indeed he may plunder his house' (Mk 3:27). Clearly, the passage reveals Jesus' realisation of Beelzebul's power, but Jesus is arguing that his power is more than that of Beelzebul. Verbs from the text such as 'plunder' and 'binds' conjure ideas of intrusion which demonstrate superiority and power on the part of Jesus (Moxnes 2003). The main aspect of the exorcist is being possessed by superior forms of power from which he or she engages the antagonistic spirit in a spiritual battle. Today, the practice is seen among traditional healers – diviners and African indigenous churches (AICs) and African Pentecostal churches (Dube 2015a).

Jesus as the magician healer

Morton Smith, using textual and cultural evidence from Jesus' time, argues that magicians, miracle workers and people called sons of God fall in the same category of people who are referred to as miracle workers. Clearly, Smith has a broader definition of a magician. Concerning biblical narratives, Jesus was primarily accused of performing miracles by the power of Beelzebul, which, according to Smith, shows that Jesus was a magician. For Smith, claims to any form of divinity were associated with practice of magic and people such as 'vagabonds, quacks and criminals' (Smith 1978). As a (re)construction of 1st-century healing practices, Smith's social stratification of magicians as people from the lower class is difficult to digest given that great poets such as Aelius Aristides and emperors such as Nero and Marcus Aurelius knew and had received healing from Hercules (Cotter 1999). Furthermore, shrines such as that of Apollonius of Tyana and Hanina ben Dosa were famous places not only associated with vagabonds. Smith's association of magic and all other forms of claim to divinity with vagabonds conflicts with Pilch who argues that during the New Times medicine and healing was not a professional job, anyone could be a healer (Pilch 2000). Further, in my view, Smith's broad use of the term magic to cover all forms of claims to divinity is not helpful; it does not account for various expressions through which divinity has been deployed in healing. More importantly, his use of the term does not put into consideration the fact, especially during the time Smith wrote, that the term 'magic' has been used pejoratively as false or opposite to true missionary medicine.

Conclusion

The study traces the discussions of Jesus as healer. Two schools are prominent: there are scholars who using a theological perspective conceive of Jesus as a Messiah and his healing as revealing Jesus' identity as divine. Although some scholars in this category also refer to famous healers during Jesus' time, the main purpose is to show the distinctiveness of Jesus' healing power and theological attributes that underline such activities. The larger section of this study discusses views from scholars that come from a social scientific perspective. For these, Jesus lived in a different context than us and models from immediate or comparative

contexts help to explain what type of healer Jesus was. Shaman, exorcist and magician are some of the models that have been used. Although the model of shaman has been well illustrated by scholars such as Moxnes and Craffert, other models such as magician and exorcist are mainly discussed from textual perspectives and less anthropological perspectives. Furthermore, Smith's argument that Jesus models a magician healer, though supported by cultural evidence, seems to be a misfit to the cultural milieu to which the model seeks to explain.

Acknowledgements

Competing interests

The author declares that he has no financial or personal relationships which may have inappropriately influenced him in writing this article.

References

- Cotter, W., 1999, *Miracles in Greco-Roman antiquity: A sourcebook*, Routledge, London.
- Craffert, P.F., 1999, *Illness and healing in the Biblical world: Perspectives on health care*, Biblia Publishers, Pretoria, South Africa.
- Davies, E.O., 1913, *The Miracles of Jesus: A study of the evidence: Being the Davies lecture for the year 1913*, Hodder and Stoughton, Kent, UK.
- Davies, S.L., 1995, *Jesus the healer: Possession, trance, and the origins of Christianity*, Continuum, New York.
- Dube, Z., 2012, 'Casting out Demons in Zimbabwe: A coded political posturing', *Exchange* 41, 352–363. <https://doi.org/10.1163/1572543X-12341238>
- Dube, Z., 2015a, 'Jesus and Afro-Pentecostal prophets: Dynamics within the liminal space in Galilee and in Zimbabwe: Original research', *HTS: Theological Studies* 71, 1–6. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v71i1.2748>
- Dube, Z., 2015b, 'Jesus and Afro-Pentecostal prophets: Dynamics within the liminal space in Galilee and in Zimbabwe', *HTS Theological Studies* 71, 1–6. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v71i1.2748>
- Dunn, J.D. & Twelftree, G.H., 1980, 'Demon-possession and exorcism in The New Testament', *Chruchman* 94, 210–225.
- Gould, R.A. & Watson, P.J., 1982, 'A dialogue on the meaning and use of analogy in ethnoarchaeological reasoning', *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology* 1, 355–381. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0278-4165\(82\)90002-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/0278-4165(82)90002-2)
- Horsley, R.A., 2001, *Hearing the whole story: The politics of plot in Mark's gospel*, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY.
- Kee, H.C., 1983, *Miracle in the early Christian world: A study in sociohistorical method*, Yale University Press, New-Haven, CT.
- Malbon, E.S., 1986, *Narrative space and mythic meaning in Mark*, HarperCollins Publishers, San Francisco, CA.
- Moxnes, H., 2003, *Putting Jesus in his place: A radical vision of household and kingdom*, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY.
- Myers, C., 1988, *Binding the strong man: A political reading of Mark's story of Jesus*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, NY.
- Pilch, J.J., 2000, *Healing in the New Testament: Insights from medical and Mediterranean anthropology*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, MN.
- Remus, H., 1997, *Jesus as healer*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Shoko, T., 2006, 'My bones shall rise again': *War veterans, spirits and land reform in Zimbabwe*, African Studies Centre, Leiden.
- Smith, M., 1978, *Jesus the magician*, HarperCollins Publishers, San Francisco, CA.
- Tedlock, B., 2001, 'Divination as a way of knowing: Embodiment, visualisation, narrative, and interpretation', *Folklore* 112, 189–197. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00155870120082236>
- Turner, E., 2003, 'The reality of spirits', in G. Harvey (ed.), *Shamanism: A reader*, pp.145–152, Routledge, London.
- Twelftree, G.H., 2011, *Jesus the exorcist: A contribution to the study of the historical Jesus*, Wipf and Stock Publishers, Eugene.
- Van der Loos, H., 1965, *The miracles of Jesus*, Brill Archive, Leiden.
- Van Eck, A., 1993, 'Sickness and healing in Mark: A social scientific interpretation', *Neotestamentica* 27, 27–54.
- Witmer, A., 2012, *Jesus, the Galilean exorcist: His exorcisms in social and political context*, Bloomsbury Publishing, London.