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First century models of bodily healing and their socio-rhetorical transformation in some New Testament Synoptic Gospel traditions.

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1. Socio-rhetorical analysis

There are several ways to study the phenomenon of bodily healing as it is referred to in ancient texts. One of the most common is, of course, the historical approach, in which one attempts to reconstruct the phenomenon on the basis of textual indices.

A variant of this approach is one that seeks to integrate the internal analysis of a text's world and a modeling of social and cultural dynamics that are drawn from cognate worlds together with the more widely accepted approach to the historical world of the text. Such an approach would seek to understand healing as an element within a larger web of interrelated realities.

One way to achieve this goal is that described by Vernon Robbins as socio-rhetorical analysis (SR). SR develops the original task of rhetoric, namely, the science of understanding how to communicate, which implies not just stylistic concerns but appropriate setting and context (Robbins, *Jesus the Teacher: A Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation of Mark*).¹ It thus seeks to get at texts understood as “thickly textured” with simultaneously interacting networks of

¹ Robbins provisionally sets this approach forth in conscious contrast with George Kennedy's five stages of rhetorical analysis, viz., determination of unit, situation, disposition of arrangement, techniques or style, synchronic analysis (Kennedy 33-38).

signification” (Robbins, “Socio-Rhetorical Criticism: Mary, Elizabeth and the Magnificat as a Test Case” 164-65). It does so by gathering “current practices of interpretation together in an interdisciplinary paradigm” and reads texts “as forms of activity inseparable from the wider social relations between writers and readers, orators and audiences.” (Robbins, “Socio-Rhetorical Criticism: Mary, Elizabeth and the Magnificat as a Test Case” 165; Eagleton 206)

Robbins introduces SR with the study of inner or intratexture, that is, with the study of the world of the text itself. With Robbins, I believe that the study of innertexture stands as the “initial insight into the argumentation in the text” prior to any analysis of meanings (Robbins, “Socio-Rhetorical Criticism: Mary, Elizabeth and the Magnificat as a Test Case” 171; Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca), in which an interpreter attends to “words, word patterns, voices, structures, devices, and modes in the text” or in other textures as “the context for meanings and meaning effects which are then analyzed with the other readings of the text” (Robbins, Exploring 7). In this first phase, an interpreter will likely explore the repetitive texture and pattern of words, phrases, and topics throughout the unit, as well as the progressive texture and pattern of sequences of words, phrases, and topics that form patterns throughout the unit (Robbins, “Socio-Rhetorical Criticism: Mary, Elizabeth and the Magnificat as a Test Case” 165; Robbins, Exploring 8-14)². Both repetition and progression will help to determine the opening-middle-closing texture and pattern of the text, though, as is obvious to most textual interpreters, opening-middle-closing may also be a heuristic device to delimit a text and thus determine the limits of repetition and progression (Robbins, Exploring 19-21).

In addition, through attention to the tools of narrative analysis, an interpreter will likely attend to the narrational texture and pattern, that is, to the patterns formed by the voices of those in the text, including narrator and actors, who configure the action of the text. Here, an interpreter is most directly concerned with the world created by the text, independently of any

² The basic rhetorical elements of language according to Kenneth Burke are “the repetitive, progressive, conventional and minor rhetorical forms of language” (Burke 123-83).

analysis of the world outside the text (Robbins, *Exploring* 15-19). It is also here, I believe, that aesthetic texture and pattern is important since attention to a character's action -- purposeful, self-expressive, or emotion-fused -- is to attend to the "stage directions" that provide a reader or hearer with a guide to the positioning, direction, and look of the actors on the stage of the text (Robbins, *Exploring* 29-36).

Finally, within the world of the text we can discover argumentative texture and pattern, that is, the argumentation that is provided by characters (including the narrator) for statements made in the text (Robbins, *Exploring* 21-29).

But, the world of the text does not stand on its own; rather, it stands clearly within a larger context. For example, it stands in relation to other texts (Robbins, "Socio-Rhetorical Criticism: Mary, Elizabeth and the Magnificat as a Test Case" 179), whether these texts are or are not part of a related corpus or canon (Robbins, "Socio-Rhetorical Criticism: Mary, Elizabeth and the Magnificat as a Test Case" 181). Analysis of intertexture will involve analysis of (1) "reference" ("with what texts and textual traditions are these phrases in dialogue?"), (2) "recitation" (including the "rehearsal of attributed speech in exact, modified or different words from other accounts of the attributed speech, and rehearsal of an episode or series of episodes, with or without using some words from another account of the story"), (3) "recontextualisation" ("the placing of attributed narration or speech in a new context without announcing its previous attribution"), and (4) "reconfiguration" (modification of a word, phrase, topic or theme), as well as various forms of rhetorical elaboration (including narrative and thematic) (Robbins, "Socio-Rhetorical Criticism: Mary, Elizabeth and the Magnificat as a Test Case" 179; Robbins, *Exploring* 40-58).

Richly textured texts, however, have an existence in a complex web not just of textual recitations and echoes but also of social and cultural relationships, thus leading SR to an analysis on "intertexture" as opposed to intertextuality. The intersection of the world of the text itself with the world within which the text arose comes closest to the historical analysis with which most

textual critics are familiar; however, SR develops the intersection more fully (Robbins, Exploring 58-94).

First, it does so by noting the way in which rhetoric has always pointed to the topics that rhetoric since the time of Aristotle concluded were “primary”, namely, discourse about the world, the social and cultural systems and institutions, and the cultural alliances and conflicts that one can see being evoked by the text (Robbins, “Socio-Rhetorical Criticism: Mary, Elizabeth and the Magnificat as a Test Case” 185; Fowler 85-101; Aristotle 1.2.21-22, 2.22.1-23.30, 3.14.1-4). According to Robbins, rhetoric has always worked with the common social and cultural topics “that everyone living in an area knows either consciously or instinctively” since it was on these that Aristotle argued that rhetorical argumentation, as opposed to dialectical argumentation, was based (Robbins, Exploring 75).

But, second, SR takes rhetorical analysis to a new level -- and clearly transcends purely historical analysis -- by incorporating insights from social-scientific modeling, thus freeing the text from the confines of rigid historical reconstruction. Accordingly, SR is interested in the way social and cultural phenomena are integrated into a text. If we see these phenomena as rhetorical topics, then, we can conclude that such topics for incorporation -- and thus analysis -- would include (1) overarching cultural and anthropological questions, such as honour, guilt, purity, rights, and legal arrangements (both individualist and dyadic), (2) forms of social interaction (such as challenge-response and dialectic interaction), (3) economic wealth exchanges common to the means of production (agriculture, industry, information technology), (4) social relations arising from these exchanges, and (5) self-understanding, including understandings of the body (Robbins, Exploring 75-86).

Here, also, primarily religious texts will evidence an intersection with the socially constructed sacred realm, and thus invite the interpreter to assess those “sacred” moments that enter into the social, cultural, and textual worlds. These moments consist of elements in the text that have to do with experience of the divine, of holy persons, of special forces whether good or

evil, of divine control and guidance in social or personal history, and experience of human redemption, commitment, community, and behaviour that are shaped by encounters with the sacred (Robbins, *Exploring* 120-31).

Summarising to this point: SR is interested in the world that a text creates. This world is in a sense self-contained. It is made up of the building-blocks of words and phrases and their patterns. It is a world of characters that have a textual existence before they have any “real” (i.e., historical) significance, a world in which they act and speak, making rhetorical arguments as they do. But, this world intersects a larger world, a world that, through historical reconstruction we can know. This world has its own social and cultural features, some of which can be known historically or deduced through models. Part of the goal of SR is to provide a configuration of the world around the text, partly on the basis of social phenomena (what humans do) and partly on the basis of cultural phenomena (what humans do or did in the local cultural whence the text has come to us). SR then proceeds to ask how the text and its world intersects this social and cultural world, that is, what social and cultural realities figure in the text.

Having now used the tools of various disciplines to understand the world of the text, the world around the text, and the intersection of the two that we find evidenced in the text -- and in doing so, showing itself to be a creative interpretive analytics, rather than a new form of analysis --, SR makes a remarkably imaginative leap and attempts to understand in what way the author of the text has reconfigured his or her world of texts, society, and culture. It is this that Robbins identifies as “ideological texture”, namely, the integrated belief systems of real people, including writers, original audience, and subsequent interpreters, “the biases, opinions, preferences, and stereotypes of a particular writer and a particular reader.”³

³ Robbins has recently called the analysis of ideological texture “an agreement by various people that they will dialogue and disagree with one another with a text as a guest in the conversation” (Robbins, *Exploring* 95-119).

While I agree with him in general, specifically, I believe that “ideological texture” concerns more accurately the way these belief systems and biases reflect a rhetorical reconfiguration of existing social, cultural and sacred knowledge. Thus, ideological texture starts with the assumption that a rhetorical presentation only becomes necessary to confirm or challenge the existing social and cultural knowledge, that is, when a conflict over social and cultural status is in question. Ideological texture, then, moves us out of the sphere of the static world of the text’s world (the social and cultural texture). The intertexture is evidence of that move but the dynamics of the move remained to be studied. This movement or dynamic itself, then, arises or is caused by conflict or difference because there would be no movement or choice if everything were fine as it is. The movements and choices that people participate in or make lead them out of or into a different relationship vis a vis other individuals, groups, or ideas, rather than simply leaving them where they are, something that would be entirely explicable in terms of social and cultural texture.

This is not to say that the movement that results from conflict is aimless. Some is; some isn’t. Robbins identifies under social and cultural texture what Aristotle called “final topics” as topics “that most decisively identify one’s cultural location” and concern “the manner in which people present their propositions, reasons, and arguments both to themselves and to other people” (Robbins, *Exploring* 86). But, given what I have said above concerning ideological texture as a different analytical stage than social and cultural texture, I think that the four “final topics” of cultural rhetoric that Robbins identifies fit better here: (1) dominant culture (an “imperial” rhetoric that imposes itself broadly throughout space and time, e.g., the Roman empire in the first century C.E. or American culture in the 20th century C.E.), (2) subculture (a rhetoric that mirrors dominant culture rhetoric but in subgroups, like the military, the mafia, ethnic communities living in a setting of a dominant culture), (3) counterculture (a rhetoric that proposes an alternative to the existing rhetorics), (4) contraculture (a rhetoric that opposes existing rhetorics, but with no clear alternative in mind, and (5) liminal culture (a rhetoric

characteristic of moments of transition in individual or corporate lives) (Robbins, Exploring 86-88).

Accordingly, we may say that a text produces a new social and cultural identity, an “image” of the self in the context of society and culture that comes to the hearer or reader of the text as a reconfiguration of existing identities (Ricoeur, “Imagination in Discourse and in Action” 17). The dynamic whereby this happens is in the form of group-creation (or the rejection thereof), described admirably by Robbins (Robbins, Exploring 95).

Eventually, this movement to a new identity will necessitate the creation of an explanatory system that will resolve the conflict using new categories, a process that Ricoeur calls “integration” (Ricoeur, “L’Idéologie et l’Utopie: Deux Expressions de l’Imaginaire Social” 58). It is here most fully that we can see how ideology could be understood as the “guardian of identity” (Erikson 133), since it provides for those within the system “a coherent, if systematically simplified, over-all orientation in space and time, in means and ends” (Erikson 189-90). While it might thus be associated pejoratively with distortion that is itself a priori judged distortionist, as so many interpreters who are influenced by Marxist and liberationist understandings of ideology think of it, it ought not to be seen necessarily as “a systematic form of collective pseudologia” (Erikson 190).

One can see how important an attention to ideological texture is in texts that concern bodily healing. If one thinks of how bodily suffering often causes a “conflict” for someone (for example, a traumatic recognition of one’s own mortality, a fatal flaw in the view of a loving god, a supposition that a life lived well until now suddenly has been pulled from under one), it is also the case that this conflict initiates a movement that has as its terminus the attempt to explain why bad things happen to people and, most importantly for us, whether there is anything one can do about it. One may find the answers within one’s own social and cultural limits, especially in dominant cultures that can explain and deal with such “conflicts”; however, it is also possible the conflict will force the appearance of new attempts to deal with this new conflict, attempts that

often come in the form of adherence to new groups (some of which are associated with powerful individuals) that can deal with the “conflict” better, giving not only a better rationale for the conflict but also dealing with it.

In what follows, I will use the tools of SR, understood as an interpretive analytics, in order to get an overview of the question of sickness and bodily healing, and then to zero in, first, on general models of bodily healing, and then, second, on the way those models are fleshed out in Hellenistic culture in general and in the Hellenistic literature that we call the Gospels of the New Testament in particular. A fuller study should be able to uncover more details, but I doubt that it would undermine the essential argument made here.

2. Models of healing in rhetorical discourse

If we begin with the assumption that sickness is that which does not allow a person to participate fully in his or her normal life, including the social and cultural activities of his/her group, then sickness may be construed as an obstacle or impediment to be overcome in order to allow the persons affected to be restored to their “normal” social and cultural place, which includes both their individual, as well as their corporate, life.

In his ground-breaking study of sects, Bryan Wilson identified 7 ways in which religious groups face and deal with such impediments. Wilson labels his typology of responses (1) conversionist (the problem is in the human heart and when the heart is changed, the problems begin to be dealt with), (2) revolutionist (the problem faced is so dramatic or cosmic that only a complete overthrow and recreation of social or cosmic order will remedy the situation), (3) introversionist (the problem faced can only be dealt with by withdrawal from the situation, or society or world), (4) gnostic-manipulationist (the problem can be dealt with by a rigorous and disciplined ritual introduced into a person’s or community’s life), (5) thaumaturgic (the problem can be dealt with by a supernatural or miraculous intervention), (6) reformist (the problem can be dealt with by progressive reforms of the individual or corporate life), and (7) utopian (the

problem demands a new order, created in a new space and time, without necessarily requiring the destruction of the old order) (Wilson 361-83; Robbins, *Exploring* 72-75) .

In the case of bodily healing, it appears that two of these approaches are especially pertinent, namely, Gnostic-Manipulationist and Thaumaturgical. In the former, a series of diagnostic and prescriptive tools are used to identify and treat the problem and thus lead to healing. In the latter, the diagnosis appears obvious and the prescription is univocal: divine intervention is the only way to deal with the problem, but there is no assurance that the divine intervention will happen, since, as in the case of apocalyptic rhetorical discourse, such an intervention is up to the divine, not the recipient. In what follows, I want to suggest three approaches to bodily healing that can be seen as a kind of configuration of these two social responses to evil.

2.1. Medical Healing

Medical healing is described in discourse that employs most consistently gnostic-manipulationist topics to the complete exclusion of thaumaturgical approaches. This is not surprising since the key to medical healing is an accurate knowledge for diagnosis and a “religious” step-by-step following-through on the prescription for successful healing.

In terms of the “doctor”, we note that in medical healing, a person who is sick in body might go to a person who has a particular body of knowledge or skill, which is based on his ability to determine cause and effect. His skill is primarily one of diagnosis, that is, of identification of disease, and of prescription, that is, of providing medicine or treatment based on an experience of treatment of cause leading to a known effect. The healer does so for a fee.

If the healing is effective, the effect will be the re-establishment of an equilibrium. Primarily, this equilibrium is natural. Accordingly, the healing is based in large part on work with nature, thus correcting a situation in which the sick person was in an un-natural imbalance. There is, however, also an element of social equilibrium, in that the healing will restore the person to the natural social and cultural order, which is usually desirable.

In terms of the one healed, then, the sickness that has led to a person's being out of equilibrium with the natural and socio-cultural order is removed and a natural wholeness is restored. The restoration of the one healed places that person back in society. In that no new socio-cultural order is created, the healed one does not become an adherent of the healer.

2.2. Thaumaturgical Healing

Thaumaturgical healing is found at the other extreme from gnostic-manipulationist, medical healing. Here healing does not result from attention to causes or to "religious" follow-through on a prescription but rather in unexpected (i.e., miraculous) ways that are nonetheless discernible as associated with a particular figure (usually divine or holy). Thaumaturgical healing avoids easy conformity to any model or formula for healing, and thus shares in no way in gnostic manipulationist responses to illness or evil.

The healer involved in the form of healing I call thaumaturgical healing is unlike the medical healer in that his knowledge and skill is clearly from "beyond" and cannot even be classed as knowledge and skill or τέχνη. There is little emphasis on cause and effect, which leads to a perception of the healer as one who can "identify" the problem; rather, there is an emphasis on the ability of the healer to produce a healing, regardless of any identification.

In this model, then, the healing may produce a re-establishment of natural and socio-cultural order. It is also possible, however, that the healing will constitute a transformation, that is, a work over and beyond nature or the existing social and cultural order.

The one healed in this model appears to begin a new life, in contrast with the old life. Because of the new-world-creating nature of thaumaturgical healing there is also a tendency in such a model to create a dependence of the one healed on the healer. Socio-cultural consequences of this dependence can be seen in the creation of new allegiances. While it is unclear in this model whether there is any economic that is exchanged for the healing, it is also the case that in this model we can see the creation of new economic links (for example, the one

healed becomes a client of the healer and begins to provide a portion of his/her income to the healer for continued benefits).

2.3. Magical Healing

I identify magical healing as a form of healing that participates to some extent in gnostic-manipulationist, medical healing and to some extent in thaumaturgical healing. As in the case of gnostic-manipulationist responses, causes can be clearly determined, and results are predictable, based on clear procedures of action; as in the case of thaumaturgical responses, the exact moment of change or form in which the change manifests itself is part of the numinous world, rather than of this empirical reality.

In this model, the healer shares elements of the medical healer and the thaumaturgical healer: the magician does have a clearly defined body of knowledge and skills and is able to connect cause and effect in a clear way; however, the magician also appears to derive elements of that knowledge from beyond the normal world. While the magician is, like the medical healer, able clearly to diagnose (identify), it is not only the diagnosis that leads the sick to him but rather his ability to produce spectacular fruits. Thus, magical healers are known for the way in which they bridge the characteristics of medical healers and thaumaturgical healers.

More uniquely characteristic of this model is the healing itself. If the medical healing consists in the re-establishment of an equilibrium that is both natural and socio-cultural and thaumaturgical healing consists in either a restoration or a transformation that goes beyond the natural, the magical healing consists in a work with nature and with those intermediaries responsible for the governance of nature and natural actions.

The one healed magically, then, may be restored to a previous order but more likely will be transformed beyond the previous order by his or her contact with the powers responsible for the order of the existing world. This leads to a situation in which the person may or may not become dependent on the healer: if the magical healer simply requires a fee for the exchange of

knowledge, the healing resembles medical healing; if, however, the magical healer requires adepts and clients, then, in all likelihood, the one healed will find himself in a similar situation to those who have been healed thaumaturgically, that is, as followers of the healer.

3. First century examples

Healing in the first-century takes shape in a series of specific, interrelated realities that are both common to humans of all times and places and unique to humans of that particular time and place. Socio-rhetorical analysis allows us to provide a kind of taxonomy for healings in the first century. I then apply that taxonomy to models of healing found in a particular body of first century religious texts, namely, the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), with special attention to the latter.

3.1. Medical Healing

For matters of medical healing, it would be possible to look to Hippocrates or Galen on either side of the first century CE. Nonetheless, it seems to me helpful to look to the two leading professors of Hellenistic healing that arose and flourished in Alexandria or in Alexandrian sponsored schools: Erasistratos of Ceos and Herophilus of Chalcedon (Alexandria, first half of the 3rd c. B.C.), given that their schools presented a significant alternative to Hippocratean medicine and lasted well into the first centuries of the Common Era.

The labours of both of these men were directed to identifying causes. Erasistratos sought the distinction of sensory and motor nerves and the growth of the body and the process of digestion. Though he explained all diseases in terms of this latter process (namely, plethora, repletion of the body through undigested nutrition), he did not neglect the local differences of illness nor the constitution of the patient, thus making him an ideal example of medical healer (Oxford Classical Dictionary 404-05).

It is clear that the great efforts of Herophilus and his school were directed towards a "scientific" medicine. In fact, "in contrast to the classified mass of physical observations and disease descriptions of the Coan school of Hippocrates and his followers, the Herophileans were concerned with direct knowledge and precise terminology. In order to achieve this, Herophilus embarked upon a new study of the human body, based on anatomy and human dissection,"⁴ a study that went on to receive the acclaim of Galen. Herophilus' work led to break-through studies in neurology (he discovered, contrary to Aristotle's contention, that the brain was the seat of the intelligence), sexual organs, liver, and eye, but was also interested in dietetics and gymnastics (Oxford Classical Dictionary 510; El-Abbadi 118-19).

3.2. Thaumaturgical Healing

The practice of healing the sick was never confined to the medical profession. Within the practices of many religions of the world down to the present, there always existed seekers of divine intervention to effect their cure when other means had failed, for example, the cults of Isis and Sarapis centered in Alexandria. In Hellenistic and Roman times, Isis acquired a worldwide reputation as the great healer. Even in the words of the skeptic Hecataeus of Abdera, when she was still on earth "Isis was the discoverer of health-giving drugs and was greatly versed in the science of healing; now that she has attained immortality, she finds her greatest delight in the healing of mankind and gives aid in their sleep to those who call upon her... And many who have been despaired of by their physicians, because of the difficult nature of their malady are restored to health by her."⁵

Sarapis, through his partnership with Isis and his association with Imhotep (Imouthes) or his Greek counterpart Asclepius, was also believed to effect miraculous cures. One of his earliest

⁴ <http://www.bibalex.gov.eg/ancient/SCHLSHIP/TOPICS/MEDICINE.HTM>

⁵ <http://www.bibalex.gov.eg/ancient/SCHLSHIP/TOPICS/MEDICINE.HTM>

miracles, we are told, occurred to Demetrius of Phaleron "who is said to have lost his sight when in Alexandria and to have recovered it by the fit of Sarapis; whereupon he composed the paeans which are sung to this day". In Roman times, letters written by visitors to Alexandria from the country usually mention a visit to the Sarapeum and prayers for health. Not far from Alexandria, Strabo tells us, Canopus contained another temple of Sarapis, which was honoured with great reverence and effected "such cures that even the most reputable men believed in it and sleep there themselves on their own behalf or others for them. Some writers recorded the cures and others the virtues of the oracles there."⁶

3.3. Magical healing

Hellenistic texts attest to the abundant practice of magical healing. Such texts are both descriptive and prescriptive, with the latter collected for us in the collection of Greek magical papyri. Nevertheless, the widespread presence of inscriptions found in amulets and pottery discovered in archeological sites suggests that magical healing was perhaps the most widespread form of bodily healing sought in the eastern Mediterranean. We know, for example, of amulets that were meant to be worn or carried by an individual or kept close to him or her:

Although many general amulets were created for the hopeful purpose of keeping the bearer healthy by keeping harmful forces and spirits at bay, a great number of prescriptive amulets were prepared for a specific illness or problem, such as digestive troubles or fever. As with other amulets, medical amulets were made of many materials; however, since prescriptive amulets often featured texts, they were commonly written upon papyrus, certain types of leaves, or metal *lamellae*. Medical amulets could often be prepared by the individual and, with the exception of those amulets written upon gold or silver *lamellae*, they were an affordable method of treatment and prevention. For these

⁶ <http://www.bibalex.gov.eg/ancient/SCHLSHIP/TOPICS/MEDICINE.HTM>

reasons, they were extremely popular over a vast span of time. In classical Greek literature, such amulets are described by comic writers such as Anaxilas, who mentioned people "wearing fine Ephesian charms in little sewed bags," and Aristophanes and Antiphanes, both of whom referred to rings that cost a drachma and were meant to prevent intestinal difficulties and the bites of insects or vermin, respectively. More than four centuries later, the Roman encyclopedist Pliny the Elder discussed amulets at length and indicated that they were popular at all strata of society: even Marcus Servius Nonianus, who was consul in 35 C.E., had attempted to cure his ophthalmia by writing the Greek letters *P*A on papyrus and tying it around his neck. And three centuries after that, a Constantinople physician named Theodorus Priscianus described many other curative amulets. ... "And likewise, write on a slip of paper that is held to the person's ear, 'O Blood, Apuleius of Madaura commands that your running may stop.'" In [other cases], rather than invoking a spirit to heal, the name of Apuleius, who in the centuries after his death was reputed to have been a great miracle-worker, is used to effect magical healing. Numerous other authors also dealt with amulets to some extent. ... Also quite common were amulets for fever, which, after all, must have been a major problem in those days before antibiotics and sanitary conditions. A *lamella* made of a silver alloy and found in Egypt provides a typical example: "I call upon you, the one over the ocean, in (the) spirit (or: "in name of") *Obach*, and by the *Babarathan Baroch Abraham Sabaraam*: protect the one who carries you, from the fever and every matter. If fever seizes him, extinguish it once and for all. (R. Kotansky (1994), no. 59 (=Suppl. Mag. no. 2))" ... In addition to such diseases, amulets could be used to address certain problems. For example, an Egyptian papyrus gives instructions on how to cure insomnia: "This name causes sleep. If a patient suffers from insomnia, take a leaf of laurel, write on it this name and put it under his head or in the mattress". (Suppl. Mag. (1992), no. 74) The name of the spirit invoked is missing from this text, but the rest is clear: all that was needed to create an amulet was a leaf and a magic name, and the insomniac could sleep soundly. ...

These and the many other types of medical amulets that survive, along with the countless others which have disappeared, clearly indicate that amulets played a great part in both healing and preventing maladies of all sorts. Whether used alone to combat illness, or used in tandem with incantations, medicines, prayers, or other forms of healing magic, such amulets held an important part in the health practices of the Mediterranean world in antiquity.⁷

4. Synoptic models

Because of the preponderance of thaumaturgical healing in the Synoptic Gospels and the lack of medical and magical healing in the same texts, I will first discuss medical and magical healings, and then move on to discuss thaumaturgical healing in the Synoptics. My point here will not be to provide an overview of healing stories in the Synoptic Gospels but to show the rhetorical form of the healing stories contained in the Gospels according to the model of healing defined above.

4.1. Medical Healing

In the Hellenistic literature known as the Synoptic Gospels of the Christian New Testament, there is almost no evidence of medical healing. This is in large part because the Gospels are not witnesses to the wider socio-cultural practices of the first century but rather to the intersection of the historical figure of Jesus and his movement with those socio-cultural practices.

Thus, the few, brief mentions of medical healing that occur are better said to be mentions of the failure of medical healing, suggesting that the healing (which does happen) that the writers

⁷ <http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/jod/apuleius/renberg/MEDICALAMULETS.HTML>

are concerned with is other than medical (gnostic-manipulationist) healing.⁸ An example of this is Mk 5.25-26: “And there was a woman who had had a flow of blood for twelve years, and who had suffered much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was no better but rather grew worse.” (Lk 8.43 “And a woman who had had a flow of blood for twelve years and could not be healed by any one”).

Rhetorically, the stories that invoke medical healing function argumentatively as a form of rhetorical contrary: where medical healings have not worked, thaumaturgical healing by Jesus will. It is, thus, fair to say that medical healing occurs in the Gospels as a well-known rhetorical topos used rhetorically in enthymemes as a contrary:

- The form of bodily healing that works is the one that is best.
- This woman found no healing from physicians (medical healing), but she did find healing from Jesus (thaumaturgical healing, as we shall see).
- THEREFORE, the thaumaturgical healing that she finds from Jesus is the best.

4.2. Magical Healing

There is even less attention paid to magical healing in the Synoptic Gospels. This is not only for the same reason as adduced for the absence of medical healing in the texts -- namely, it is inferior to the thaumaturgical healing of Jesus -- but also ideologically so as to silence early attempts to see or criticise Jesus as a magical healer, which as I shall suggest in the next section he clearly is not.

As confirmation of this, we can point to the one claim of magical healing made in the Synoptic Gospels, namely, the criticism by some Jewish leaders that Jesus heals by his appeal to an evil intermediary power known as Beelzebul. Though the accusation is found in Mk 3.22, the story is directly connected to Jesus’ healing powers in Mt 12.22-24: “Then a blind and dumb

⁸ This is, of course, not the case in the so-called apocryphal Gospels, in which a kind of gnostic-manipulationist healing does begin to appear. This, however, is a late development.

demoniac was brought to him, and he healed him, so that the dumb man spoke and saw. And all the people were amazed, and said, "Can this be the Son of David?" But when the Pharisees heard it they said, "It is only by Be-el'zebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons."⁹

Rhetorically, the inclusion of (or better said: reference to) magical healing here again functions argumentatively. Unlike the stories of medical healing, however, it is not merely projected as a contrary, for example, one against the effective (thaumaturgical) healing by Jesus. The situation is more complex, in that magical healing does in fact have to do with healing that comes from beyond, as Jesus' healings do. There is no denial that magical healing works, as in the case of medical healing, one of the only examples of which we have seen to be a failed healing, and thus serving rhetorically as a contrary. Accordingly, then, the point here is not that magical healing does not work. Magical healings are here presented more in the form of a contrast than of a contrary:

- Magical healings happen via spiritual intermediaries, often evil ones.
- Jesus heals by casting out evil, which would be foolish if he were empowered by an evil spirit himself.
- THEREFORE, Jesus heals other than by evil intermediaries.¹⁰

4.3. Thaumaturgical Healing

Finally, we come to the form of healing that is most wide-spread in the documents known as the Synoptic Gospels and therefore to the form of rhetorical discourse that contains these stories, namely, thaumaturgical healing.

⁹ Lk 11.14-16 contains very similar wording and accusation, but the notion that this is a healing is not as clearly expressed there as it is in Mt.

¹⁰ It is possible in the Matthean account that Jesus does agree that he heals via the Holy Spirit, unlike Mk and Lk, but in that he goes on to say that his healing is evidence of God's reign,

As is clear from the Synoptic Gospels, thaumaturgical healing is clearly what Jesus is about as healer. One notes, for example, that the lexica of bodily healing are clearly present in all of the Synoptic texts, thus evidencing the practice of bodily healing throughout; however, the progression of language and narration of the healing stories also evidence the absence of any clear pattern or ritual that Jesus follows, marking off his healings as something other than gnostic-manipulationist responses, and thus as something other than medical or magical healings. We note also no clearly defined body of knowledge or skills in any of Jesus' healings, a situation that has led to various unsuccessful -- and often comical -- scholarly and homiletical attempts to boil Jesus' healings down to a single pattern of healings, one that emphasises either the petitioner's faith (i.e., the emotion-fused action of a petitioner toward Jesus) or the purposeful (e.g., touching) or self-expressive (e.g., repentance or recognition of low status) action of the petitioner, or Jesus' self-expressive action (e.g., in declaring someone well), or some combination thereof. The healing that ensues is clearly not magical in that no intermediaries or heavenly powers are adduced but does not appear to be medical either in that regularly the healing involves powers that are over and beyond the natural and the restorative. Or again, and perhaps most telling of all, is the fact that Jesus' healings never involve the taking of a fee, something common to both medical and magical healing in the Hellenistic world and a point that subsequent followers of Jesus will adhere to and yet be criticised for. Finally, the one healed is clearly restored but also "born" into a new world that begins to revolve around the healer.

In sum, the point is that while the repetition of elements lead us to conclude that what happens is healing given an ill situation, there is no univocal form or pattern that the healing must take. Jesus as healer makes no attempt to identify any cause, and thus any effect, either explicitly through diagnosis or implicitly through the assignation of a medicine or potion or

it is unlikely that we can call Jesus' assertion here a support of magical healing.

incantation or other. I suggest that this is because Jesus' healings are viewed as thaumaturgical healings.

Rhetorically, the thaumaturgical healings by Jesus do not appear to be shaped by either the contrary form (medical) or the contrastive form (magical). Medical and magical healing in the Synoptics may be understood to be rhetorically prefatory and indicative of the central healings of the Synoptics, namely, thaumaturgical healing.

- The divine will heal in whatever way, at whatever time, and in whatever place the divine chooses, often, in fact, contrary to human knowledge or expectation (thaumaturgical healing)
- Some who encounter Jesus are healed in a variety of ways, times, and places, often contrary to expectation, understanding, and even "laws"
- THEREFORE, those so healed through Jesus have encountered divine (thaumaturgical) healing.

5. The ideological transformation of thaumaturgical healing in the Synoptic Gospels

Now, having said the above, it would be possible to conclude that Jesus' healings in the Synoptic Gospels are therefore thaumaturgical healings simpliciter. But, the above is not the end of the story, either phenomenologically or rhetorically. In spite of the clearly thaumaturgical nature of Jesus' healings in the Synoptic Gospels, it is not the case that these healings are simply thaumaturgical in some sort of generic way. Rather, as is likely with all cultural appropriations of the models that Wilson envisions, there is an element of ideological appropriation of the model that shows how the conflict that the model deals with is proper to a particular society and culture and, furthermore, how the solution is directly relevant to a revision and confirmation of certain elements within that same society and culture.

As is clear from the Synoptic Gospels, one of the main ideological assertions concerning thaumaturgical healings there is that they happen for the most part in relation to Jesus and to

Jesus' authorised followers. This may seem tautological, in that the Gospels are the stories of Jesus; however, it underscores an important ideological assertion in the Synoptic tradition: not only are thaumaturgical healings that are described more assured than medical healings and more desirable than magical healings but they are also regularly a feature of the ministry of Jesus. The very fact that this is not exclusively so (cf. Mk 9.38) suggests that this in fact the case.

Second, thaumaturgical healing takes shape as rhetorical miracle discourse, but it does so within the context of rhetorical, prophetic discourse in the Synoptic Gospels. By miracle and prophetic discourse, I mean one of the forms of rhetorical discourse common to the New Testament, forms that can be discerned based on the use of certain, common topoi, argumentation that uses these topoi, and socio-cultural setting (Robbins, "The Dialectical Nature of Early Christian Discourse"; Bloomquist, Carey and Bloomquist).¹¹ Presently, SR considers the following rhetorical discourse modes: wisdom, miracle, apocalyptic, prophetic, suffering-death, and pre-creation.

Specifically, according to Robbins, miracle discourse is characterised by a presupposition that "God responds to humans in contexts of danger or disease and that Jesus is the mediator of these benefits to humans. "Fear" and "cowardice" are common topics in this discourse, and belief is perceived to be the proper response" (Robbins, "The Dialectical Nature of Early Christian Discourse" 358), while "central to prophetic discourse is the reasoning that people to whom God has given a tradition of salvation in the past currently enact a misunderstanding of God's saving action that must be attacked and replaced by an alternative system of belief and behavior. In other words, this discourse is embedded in sharp disagreement with other kinds of Jews over the conditions and behaviors that enact walking in God's ways in the world" (Robbins, "The Dialectical Nature of Early Christian Discourse" 360).

¹¹ The task of determining the outlines and details of these discourses in New Testament texts is the work of the Religious Rhetoric of Antiquity commentary series, edited by Vernon Robbins and Duane Watson, and co-edited by David Gowler, David de Silva, and myself.

The connection, then, between miracle discourse and prophetic discourse is an important one because the prophetic discourse of the Synoptic Gospels is a reconfiguration not of the discourse of the writing prophets (Isaiah, Ezekiel, etc.) but of the great classical prophets Elijah and Elishah. Accordingly, we may suggest that the thaumaturgical healing stories in the Synoptic Gospel traditions function in a similar kind of epideictic way that the stories of Elijah and Elishah did, namely, to enhance the stature of this more-than-prophet-like Jesus, and most significantly his prophetic role over against the Temple and civil structures. Just as bodily healings happened regularly (though not exclusively) in connection with Elijah and Elishah when they were alive, so too do bodily healings happen regularly around Jesus, and they do so for similar reasons.

Third, however, we need to note the role that the followers of Jesus play, namely, the role of those who will follow after Jesus is gone from the earthly scene. In fact, it is the epideictic-like nature of the thaumaturgical healing stories that helps to explain an otherwise surprising absence in the healing stories of the Synoptic Gospel tradition, and the immediate successor to that tradition, the Acts of the Apostles. For, it is in fact surprising to find no “how to” that Jesus passes on to his followers, specifically, to the apostles, given that his mission that he entrusts to them appears to be to follow him and then to go forth and do what he does. Yet, while he tells them throughout what to go out and say in terms of general preaching of the gospel, nowhere is the reader of the Synoptic Gospels told what Jesus told them to do specifically when confronted by cases of sickness. This silence is not surprising, however, if in fact the healing stories are thaumaturgical, as opposed to say medical or magical, and if the stories are intended epideictically. As we can see in Acts, the healing stories associated with Jesus’ followers there -- first the apostles, then the 7 who are chosen in Acts 6, and finally Paul -- perform the same function -- often, in fact relying on medical and magical healing stories to perform the same introductory role -- and they do so in Luke-Acts within a basic, rhetorical discourse that we may further describe as prophetic (e.g., Acts 3), but one that is in fact on its way to becoming apocalyptic.

To develop this latter point, we need to note that each of the Synoptic Gospels reconfigures in unique ways the thaumaturgical healings of Jesus. For example, in Luke-Acts, Jesus' thaumaturgical healings are not only clearly contextualised within prophetic discourse with the epideictic thrust indicated above, but also with a view to hearing again the OT prophetic discourse that targeted the Temple and abuses there, as well as allied abuses in the civil political structure.

We can see this reconfiguration of both miracle discourse that is reconfigured in a Synoptic Gospel like Mark and of the subsequent reconfiguration of that discourse by its merger with prophetic discourse in Luke, a reconfiguration that begins to move the whole -- miracle-prophetic discourse -- toward a completely new discourse, namely, apocalyptic. For example, throughout Luke, bodily healing figures most prominently in the section narrating the ministry in Galilee (4.14 - 9.51), rather than in the section narrating the journey from Galilee to Jerusalem (9.51 - 19.44). Furthermore, we note that in the journey section (9.51 - 19.44) words dealing with healing begin to disappear toward the end of that section, with the exception of the $\sigma\acute{\omega}\zeta\omega$ word group. In terms of a pattern, then, healing appears to burst on the Lukan scene in Jesus' ministry in Galilee and slowly to evolve into a focus on healing as $\sigma\omega\tau\eta\rho\acute{\iota}\alpha$ during the journey. That is, Lukan healings diminish in importance in the measure not only that the ultimate "healing" or deliverance of the world looms larger but also whenever the Temple or its context is invoked (as in the opening and closing chapters), something that we expect in a thaumaturgical healing story that is set in a prophetic, rhetorical discourse mode.

But, after the introduction of the apocalyptic prelude in 19.45, healings disappear (with the exception of 22.51); the same absence characterised the first section of the Gospel, which also took place with the Temple as the focus. This observation is further confirmation of my suggestion that the nexus thaumaturgy - prophetic discourse moves the entire Lukan rhetoric toward apocalyptic discourse (Bloomquist, et al.). But, it is an apocalyptic discourse that does not transfer the outcome to an invisible, otherworldly deity, but to the thaumaturg, Jesus, thus

underscoring the importance of the intertwining of thaumaturgical-prophetic discourse with apocalyptic discourse, rather than the replacement of the former by the latter.

The significance of this apocalypticisation of thaumaturgical healing in prophetic discourse in Luke is clear from the argumentation of Luke 7. In Lk 7.4-5, the Jewish elders plead with Jesus to heal the centurion's slave on the following basis: "he is worthy to have you do this for him, for he loves our nation, and he built us our synagogue". This presumes a complex argumentation; nevertheless, a major premise something like the following can be assumed: "those who express their love for the (Jewish) nation in visible forms are worthy to have a healer like Jesus act of their behalf". Jesus neither assents to nor dissents from this argument.

The centurion's own argumentation, however, is distinct from that of the Jewish leaders and does elicit Jesus' explicit response. When told that Jesus is on the way to heal his slave, the centurion sends word to Jesus in the form of two enthyemes: (a) "do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; therefore I did not presume to come to you" (Lk 7.6-7a) and (b) "say the word and let my servant be healed. For I am a man set under authority etc." (Lk 7.7b-8). These presume major premises as follows: (a) "those who are unworthy should not trouble those who are more important than they are", and (b) "those who are in authority over others need merely give a command and what is commanded will happen". In that Jesus only commends the argumentation of the centurion, as opposed to that of the Jewish leaders, we are left to assume that the healing that does take place is in relation to the argument used by the centurion and not by the leaders; in effect, the centurion's rhetoric, not that of the leaders, has worked.

The story then is nuanced by the presence of the Jewish elders who plead for the centurion's slave on the centurion's behalf and who are thus, like Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, in some measure those who, in doing so, are not merely the bearers of the news of Jesus' healing

word and of their own demise, but who are also the agents of their own demise.¹² Here, then, as in examination of the elements of Mk woven into Lk, we note that healing is not only restorative but also an occasion of judgment.

Accordingly, we may suggest that it is the recognition of the importance of Jesus, over against the Jewish context of Jesus' activity, that "works" rhetorically in Luke and will ultimately lead the Lukan Jesus and his followers beyond the sphere of Jewish Temple and civic reform to an apocalyptic, universalised scenario in which the gathering of God's people is everywhere (Bloomquist). It appears likely, in fact, that it is precisely the element of judgment that begins to gain preeminence in the healing stories as they are reshaped by Lk from the Christian tradition before him. The ideological transformation, then, of thaumaturgical healing stories in Lk clearly begins to bring the implications of bodily healing in the Jesus' traditions into relation with larger, social ramifications and topics (revolutionist, reformist, or utopian?) of Christian discourse.

6. Conclusions: A rhetorical culture of healing?

I have not sought to present an exhaustive study of bodily healing in the Synoptic Gospels, much less in first century Hellenistic texts. What I have sought to do is to present three models of bodily healing that can be suggested by socio-rhetorical analysis and confirmed in first century Hellenistic texts, including the Synoptic Gospels.

I have furthermore suggested that, within the Synoptic Gospels, medical and magical healing play an introductory role to the preponderant form of healing found therein, namely, thaumaturgical healing, associated with Jesus as healer, and subsequently passed on to his followers as the same kind of healers.

¹² A similar pattern can be found in the only other miracle story found in Q, namely, 11.14-23, though as Kloppenborg notes regarding 7.22; 10.20; 11.14-15; 17.5-6, Q is aware of the miracle tradition (Kloppenborg 168).

Nevertheless, this is not thaumaturgical healing as one might find it “generically”, since it is transformed ideologically in the service of the unique rhetorical discourse shaped by the Synoptic authors, a process I have noted most specifically in the case of Luke. And, if we now return to Bryan Wilson’s categories, we can see that the Gnostic-Manipulationist and Thaumaturgical models have trajectories that lead to revolutionist, reformist and utopian import for the question of bodily healing. The latter would be found among those who believe in the social causes of bodily illness and thus the correction of those causes would lead to bodily healing over the long term. In other texts, we should also be able to see the way that conversionist and introversionist responses might be interwoven, since such interweavings would likely be found among those who feel that sickness is brought about through one’s own choices and so, therefore, is healing (e.g., among modern evangelical models of sickness and healing on the one hand and meditation or Christian Science models on the other).

As we can see, socio-rhetorical analysis helps us to get at the richly textured phenomenon that is healing in first-century antiquity and does so by focusing our attention on the various elements that make up the phenomena.

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