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The Man with the Flow of Power: Porous Bodies in Mark 5:25–34

CANDIDA R. MOSS
candida.moss@nd.edu
University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, IN 46556

In the history of scholarship, the story of the healing of the woman with the flow of blood has been treated as just one of many miracle stories that amplify the mysterious powers of the Markan protagonist and underscore the importance of faithfulness. Whether Jesus is viewed as a Hellenistic divine man (θεῖος ἀνήρ), a prophet styled in the fashion of Elisha, or some combination of the two, this passage—like so many other healing stories—serves to demonstrate his δύναμις.[1] Scholarly interpretations of the passage have therefore focused on fleshing out the specific details of the woman's ailment, magical or prophetic parallels to the account, and the relationship of this story to the surrounding narrative concerning Jairus's daughter.

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[1] For the view that Jesus is a θεῖος ἀνήρ, see the classic studies of Rudolf Bultmann (*The History of the Synoptic Tradition* [trans. John Marsh; New York: Harper & Row, 1963]) and Martin Dibelius (*From Tradition to Gospel* [trans. Bertram Lee Woolf; New York: Charles Schribner's Sons, 1935]). For the argument that Mark's Gospel was composed to combat the view of Jesus as divine man, see Theodore J. Weeden, *Mark: Traditions in Conflict* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971). For a criticism of these positions, see Jack Dean Kingsbury, "The 'Divine Man' as the Key to Mark's Christology—the End of an Era?" *Int* 35 (1981): 243–57. For a summary of the controversy with particular regard to miracle stories, see Barry Blackburn, *Theios Anēr and the Markan Miracle Traditions: A Critique of the Theios Anēr Concept as an Interpretative Background of the Miracle Traditions Used by Mark* (WUNT 2/40, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1991). On Jesus as a new Elisha, see Raymond E. Brown, "Jesus and Elisha," *Per* 12 (1971): 85–104; D. Gerald Bostock, "Jesus as the New Elisha," *ExpTim* 92 (1980): 39–41; and Thomas L. Brodie, "Jesus as the New Elisha: Cracking the Code," *ExpTim* 93 (1981): 39–42.

This article takes its rise from the intriguing suggestion in Mark 5:28–30 that the touch of the woman instigates an unconscious flow of power from the body of Jesus. I will argue that the bodies of the woman and Jesus parallel each other in the sense that both are porous and leak uncontrollably. When viewed in the context of Greco-Roman models of the body, both the woman and Jesus appear weak, sickly, feminine, and porous. In the case of Jesus, this presentation subverts the dominant medical practices that have failed the woman with the flow of blood. Furthermore, it reverses the traditional association of porosity and weakness, both because Jesus leaks a positive, healing power and because this leakage of power points toward his concealed identity.

I. Scholarly Interpretations of Mark 5:25–34

In Mark 5:25–34, a woman who has suffered from a flow of blood for twelve years comes to Jesus in the crowd. Traditional medical solutions have failed, leading her only to grow worse.[2] Being unable to reach Jesus she clutches the hem of his garment. Power flows out from Jesus and she is healed. In the history of scholarship, this pericope has attracted the attention particularly of scholars interested in the woman's gynecological ailment and its relationship to purity.[3] These interpre-

[2] It may well have been the custom to call in many physicians—at high cost to the patient—to provide as many solutions as possible. See M.-J. Lagrange, *Évangile selon Saint Marc* (1911; 9th ed.; EBib; Paris: Gabalda, 1966), 140; and C. S. Mann, *Mark: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 27: Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1986), 285. For a discussion of potential cures offered to the woman, see William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 192 n. 46. It seems likely that Mark both uses the failure of the physicians as a foil to the efficacious physician services of Jesus and offers a standard critique of contemporary medical practices (so Ernst Lohmeyer, *Das Evangelium des Markus* [1937; 17th ed; KEK; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967], 101; and Adela Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary* [Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007], 280–81).

[3] Gerd Theissen, *The Miracle Stories of the Early Christian Tradition* (trans. Francis McDonagh; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 134; Mary Rose D'Angelo, "Gender and Power in the Gospel of Mark: The Daughter of Jairus and the Woman with the Flow of Blood," in *Miracles in Jewish and Christian Antiquity: Imagining Truth* (ed. John C. Cavadini; Notre Dame Studies in Theology 3; Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), 83–109. For a review of feminist scholarship on the passage, see Mitzi Minor, "Old Stories through New Eyes: Insights Gained from a Feminist Reading of Mark 5:24–34," *Memphis Theological Seminary Journal* 30 (1992): 2–14. For a Japanese feminist perspective, see Hisako Kinukawa, "The Story of the Hemorrhaging Woman (Mark 5:25–34) Read from a Japanese Feminist Context," *BibInt* 2 (1994): 283–93. For the argument that menstruation was *not* impure or socially isolating in ancient Jewish society, see the fascinating analyses of Shaye J. D. Cohen ("Menstruants and the Sacred," in *Women's History and Ancient History* [ed. Sarah B. Pomeroy; Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991], 273–99; and "Purity and Piety: The Separation of Menstruants from the Sancta," in *Daughters of the King: Women and the Synagogue. A Survey of History, Halakhah, and Contemporary Realities*

tations have centered on the woman's femininity, anonymity, and ritual impurity to fascinating effect. The placement of the narrative at the center of the story of Jairus's daughter (5:21–24, 35–43), in which a young woman twelve years old—the age of childbearing—is raised from the dead, only reinforces the theme of female reproductive abilities. But the specifically gynecological nature of her medical condition and the contrast with Jairus's daughter have led scholars to focus on her identity as a woman to the neglect of her disability.[4] We have received this account as a story about women but have allowed her femininity to wash over her infirmity. Her condition is specifically gynecological, but the focus on the flow of blood causes us to overlook the broader perception of bodies in the ancient world.[5]

Other interpretations of this pericope have focused on analogous practices in Hellenistic magic.[6] The practice of healing via physical touch is not unprecedented. Gerd Theissen draws attention to an anecdote in Plutarch's *Life of Sulla* in which a woman, Velaria Mesalla, extracts a thread from Sulla's garment in the hope of securing a portion of his luck (35.4).[7] David E. Aune likewise notes that, in the ancient world, healings could take place by coming into contact with the clothing of a charismatic healer or magician.[8] He cites examples in which the sick are healed of

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[ed. Susan Grossman and Rivka Haut; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1992], 103–50), and Ross S. Kraemer ("Jewish Women and Women's Judaism[s] at the Beginning of Christianity," in *Women and Christian Origins* [ed. Ross S. Kraemer and Mary Rose D'Angelo; New York: Oxford University Press, 1998], 65–66).

[4] The majority of commentaries on the subject rightly group these two accounts together. See, e.g., Joel Marcus, *Mark 1–8: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 27; New York: Doubleday, 2000), 354–73. For recent studies on infirmity and disability in the Bible, see Jeremy Schipper, *Disability Studies and the Hebrew Bible: Figuring Mephibosheth in the David Story* (Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 441; New York: T&T Clark, 2006); Hector Avalos, *Illness and Health Care in the Ancient Near East*: *The Role of the Temple in Greece, Mesopotamia, and Israel* (HSM 54; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995); idem, *Health Care and the Rise of Christianity* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996); idem, Sarah Melcher, and Jeremy Schipper, eds., *This Abled Body: Rethinking Disability and Biblical Studies* (SemeiaSt 55; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007); Saul M. Olyan, *Disability in the Hebrew Bible: Interpreting Mental and Physical Differences* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008); and Rebecca Raphael, *Biblical Corpora: Representations of Disability in Hebrew Biblical Literature* (Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies; London/New York: T&T Clark, 2008). For a discussion of disease and sickness in the New Testament, see Peder Borgen, "Miracles and Healing in the New Testament: Some Observations," *ST* 35 (1981): 91–106.

[5] In seeking to broaden the context within which the woman's condition is understood, I do not mean to suggest that the specific nature of the woman's condition is unimportant. The flow of blood is evocative as an image and was isolated by ancient Greeks and Jews as a specific medical condition.

[6] See S. Eitrem, *Some Notes on the Demonology in the New Testament* (SO suppl. 12; Oslo: A. W. Brøgger, 1950), 44.

[7] Cited in Theissen, *Miracle Stories,* 134.

[8] Aune, "Magic in Early Christianity," *ANRW* 2.23.2 (1980): 1507–57.

disease by touching the possessions or garments of powerful magicians and healers. The statue of a hero, for example, was believed to have the same healing powers as the person it represented.

In the canonical NT the closest unrelated analogy for this kind of magical healing via osmosis is found in the summary of Paul's healings in Acts 19:11–12: "God did extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, so that handkerchiefs or aprons were carried away from his body to the sick, and diseases left them and the evil spirits came out of them."[9] In this pericope, objects that had come into close contact with Paul were somehow endowed with his healing powers. The story appears to conform to the phenomenon of healing through touch. The most notable expression of this practice is found in the development of the late antique cult of the saints, in which healings and other religious blessings were conferred on pilgrims through physical contact with the relics of the saint.[10] Given the popularity of this idea, it would seem that the woman's motivation in approaching Jesus is to acquire healing through the magical transference of healing powers through Jesus' garments. Aune, Adela Yarbro Collins, and others have concluded that the healing of the woman with the flow of blood is a simple instance of magical transference of power communicated through touch.

This interpretation, which doubtless expresses the underlying narrative framework of the miracle story (cf. Mark 3:10), is augmented by a small but critically important lacuna in the Markan account. The power that heals the woman does not come from the garments but from Jesus himself. In the words of Mark, the power goes out of him (ἐξ αὐτοῦ) not out of his garments.[11] We cannot argue that Jesus' garments were already endowed with power by virtue of their proximity to his body because it is only at the moment that the woman grasps the hem of his garment that power leaves *the body of Jesus himself*. This is not an act of simple magical transference from garment to woman; the woman's touch pulls power out of Jesus himself.

An alternative, biblically based interpretation is offered by Robert H. Gundry, who notes the parallels between this passage and an incident involving the bones of Elijah in 2 Kgs 13:20–21.[12] In this passage a corpse is thrown into Elijah's tomb,

[9] NA[27]: Δυνάμεις τε οὐ τὰς τυχούσας ὁ θεὸς ἐποίει διὰ τῶν χειρῶν Παύλου, ὥστε καὶ ἐπὶ τοὺς ἀσθενοῦντας ἀποφέρεσθαι ἀπὸ τοῦ χρωτὸς αὐτοῦ σουδάρια ἢ σιμικίνθια καὶ ἀπαλλάσσεσθαι ἀπ᾽ αὐτῶν τὰς νόσους τά τε πνεύματα τὰ πονηρὰ ἐκπορεύεσθαι.

[10] Julius Rohr, *Der Okkulte Kraftbegriff im Altertum* (Philologus, Supplementband 17; Leipzig: Dieterich, 1923), 9–15.

[11] An analogy to this healing narrative might be the incident in the *Acts of Pilate* in which a leprous child is healed by the water in which the infant Jesus is washed (B.11 Add).

[12] Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 280. See also Marcus, *Mark*, 359; he cites Exod 17:11–12 as another parallel to this event. As the positioning of Moses' hands during combat does not relate to healing or physical touch, it does not seem to me especially relevant here.

where it comes in contact with the bones of the prophet and is miraculously revived. The "wonder story" effectively closes the Elisha cycle. The passage has much in common with Mark 5:25–36, and it is likely that there were some in Mark's audience who read the two stories together.[13] It certainly demonstrates, as Gundry notes, that it is not necessary to understand the Markan story as an example of Hellenistic magic or against the backdrop of Greco-Roman medicine.[14]

At the same time, however, there are a number of important differences between the accounts; in the first place, both Elijah and the man thrown into his tomb are dead.[15] Technically, then, the man is not healed—he is revivified (cf. 1 Kgs 17:17–24 and 2 Kgs 4:18–37).[16] Second, the mechanics of the healing differ. In the Elisha story, the healing takes place via contact between the bones of Elisha and the body of the man. In Mark, the garments of Jesus serve as a proxy, and the emphasis is on the movement of power that goes out of Jesus and into the woman.[17]

There are substantive differences between the magical and prophetic instances of healing via touch and the mechanics of the woman's healing in Mark. Additionally, neither explanation takes account of the parallels between the body of the woman and that of Jesus. In the Markan account, the characterization of the woman's body contrasts strikingly with that of the body of Jesus. Just as the woman's body hemorrhages blood, so also Jesus' body leaks power. Perhaps, then, we should consider the passage in light of ancient models of the body. Evaluating their physiologies within the context of Greco-Roman notions of the body is not determinative for understanding the account, but it does shed light on the ways in which ancient audiences would have understood the passage.

II. Ancient Medical Models of the Body

In order to consider the woman with the flow of blood to be disabled, her impairment must be examined within the worldview that would have framed her condition as a disability. In the case of this current study we will turn from the

[13] It is by no means necessary to do so. An alternative reading of the Elisha story would see the bones of Elisha as part of a prophetic topos in which the revivification of dead bones anticipates and illustrates the power of God (cf. Ezek 37:1–14).

[14] Gundry, *Mark*, 280.

[15] This article is, in part, a study of the body of Jesus. As such, a comparison with the bones of Elisha is in some respects inappropriate. The bones of Elisha are not an intact body, let alone a living person.

[16] There appears to be a concrete difference between revivification and healing. See Alan F. Segal, *Life after Death: A History of the Afterlife in the Religions of the West* (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 145. Avalos does not include this story as an example of healing in *Illness and Health Care in the Ancient Near East.*

[17] The difference between contact with the body and contact with the bones is less striking when it comes to transmitting impurity. See Lev 15:7, 11, 21–22; and Marcus, *Mark*, 359.

specific contours of gynecology to the broader context of the body in Greco-Roman medicine. What were the characteristics of healthy and sick bodies in the ancient world? Putting aside for the moment statements about the value of abled and disabled bodies, we must first ask how they were constructed. What are the hallmarks of a sick body in the world that Mark inhabited?

In *The Corinthian Body*, Dale B. Martin argues that two distinct views of the origin and treatment of illness were popular in the ancient world; a theory of imbalance and a theory of invasion.[18] According to the former view, an imbalance of the humors caused by moral or emotional imbalance would result in a bodily disease of some kind, which could be remedied by balancing out the difficulty. As the second-century medical writer Galen notes:

> Health is a sort of harmony . . . for in every instance, health in us is a due proportion of moist, dry, warm and cold, sometimes of molecules and pores, sometimes of atoms or items or minims or isotopes, or of each of their primary elements; but always we function in our parts through their due proportion. (*Hygiene* 1.3)[19]

Galen's description of the healthy body owes much to Aristotle's preoccupation with balance and moderation. Health is a sense of good proportion, and a balanced, well-regulated body is a healthy body.[20] Disease is a symptom of excess, of an overabundance of heat, cold, dryness, or moisture. The cure is brought about through the application of the opposite—for example, administering heat to a cold body. A sick body, therefore, is one that fails to achieve this sense of balance; it is unordered, unbalanced, and uncontrolled.

Invasion etiology, by contrast, focuses on the boundaries of the body. The body is a closed but penetrable entity that remains healthy by fending off hostile external forces and preventing them from invading the body. Disease is seen as an alien entity, caused by external factors that invade and pollute the body. This more popular view of disease emphasizes issues of pollution, contagion, and bodily invasion. According to classical medical writers, invasion etiology was common "in the

[18] Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995). Martin's work is indebted to a number of anthropological studies of disease, most notably Margaret M. Lock, *East Asian Medicine in Urban Japan: Varieties of Medical Experience* (Comparative Studies of Health Systems and Medical Care 3; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980). To be sure, Martin's thesis has not met with universal acceptance, but it is of great significance to study of the body. The argument here is not that what was true for Corinth is therefore applicable to Mark. Rather, Martin has identified certain models of thinking, found in a variety of ancient authors, that suggest that porosity and control were of great importance to constructions of bodily health.

[19] Robert Montraville Green, trans., *A Translation of Galen's Hygiene (De sanitate tuenda)* (Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, 1951).

[20] The same interest in balance is evident in Hippocrates' classic *On Affections.* For a discussion of the medical theory of the humours, see J. T. Valance, "Humours," *OCD*, 733.

old days" and among the people who believed that disease was the result of an attack by the gods or *daimons* (Celsus, *On Medicine* proemium 4). Contagion etiologies such as this were viewed by Theophrastus as superstition or *desidaimonia,* but their popularity persisted despite the concerted efforts of the more philosophically minded medic.[21]

While porosity was less of a concern among the intellectual elite, even ancient philosophers maintained that there were a number of *poroi,* or channels, through which blood and air could flow into the body. As channels, *poroi* allowed external matter to enter the body for destructive purposes.[22] The surface of the body was not a sealed boundary; it was a permeable membrane through which manifold hostile objects could enter the body and wreak havoc in it. Correspondingly, attempts to prevent or alleviate disease are concerned with patrolling the body's borders, avoiding pollutants, and purging invaders. Boundaries must be regulated and checked and invaders must be fended off. Sickly bodies were those that failed in this effort to remain impermeable. They were porous, and it was this porosity that permitted a *daimon* or other agent to enter and contaminate the body.

Overlaid on the idea of porosity is a particular construction of gender. In the ancient world sexuality was constructed using a sliding scale with male and female at either pole. This male–female continuum was hierarchical, and, predictably, males stood at the top. Aristotle famously writes that women are incomplete males: like undercooked bread, female bodies never achieved the heat, dryness, or impermeability that make up healthy bodies.[23] Women are colder: they are moist, squishy, and porous. The interchangeability of feminine and weak is demonstrated in Hippocratic theories of gestation. A hot, dry womb will produce both male infants and strong infants. A cold, wet womb will produce females and weak children.[24]

Oversaturation and softness are equated with weakness and femininity. Galen's exposition of the causes of moistening conditions reveals that excess fluid can penetrate the body through bathing or excessively warm air and make it soft. Galen is very concerned to offer detailed advice for men so that they can avoid oversaturation and its feminizing effects. Becoming effeminate means weakness, softness, porosity, and moisture. Galen writes:

> In moist conditions one must suspect either untimely use of sex relations or weakening of the strength from some other cause; or thinning of the body from excessively gentle massage, or from too much bathing, or from the air of the house in which he lived being warmer than necessary. (*Hygiene* 5.2)

[21] Theophrastus portrays the "superstitious man" in *Characters* 16.14.

[22] See Plato, *Tim.* 88 c-d, in which Plato describes the particles that enter the body as inflaming or chilling it.

[23] Cited in Hippocrates, *Acut.* 1.34; cf. Clement of Alexandria, *Paed.* 3.3.

[24] G. E. R. Lloyd, "The Hot and Cold, the Dry and Wet in Greek Philosophy," *JHS* 84 (1964): 104.

Galen's discussion here relates to the soft and moist nature of the feminine body. His analysis is nevertheless applicable to our discussion. Soft, weak, and feminine bodies are vulnerable to external elements. The weakness leads to a "thinning of the body," and it is precisely this thinning that makes the individual susceptible to attack. Once again, the problem is one of porosity: Galen is concerned that the body will become saturated, feminine, and porous. A soft, thin, feminine body is one that is vulnerable to external attack and forces.

In both of these theoretical systems, there is a pervasive concern about the boundedness of the body. Even in ancient writers such as Galen, who were not particularly concerned with invasion, there is considerable anxiety about growing too thin and porous. Weak, porous, feminine, and moist become interchangeable terms for those at the lower end of the somatic scale. In "popular" theories of disease, this porosity becomes threatening. It can pollute, disrupt, and contaminate. Porous bodies are vulnerable to external attack and threaten the subjects and those around them with contagion. To return to the initial question: What are the characteristics of a healthy body in the ancient world? We find that it is impermeable, dry, hot, hard, regulated, and masculine. Conversely, a sickly body is drippy, leaky, moist, uncontrolled, feminine, soft, and porous.

III. Rereading Mark 5:25–34

In the account of the healing of the woman with the flow of blood, the mechanics of the woman's illness fit perfectly with the model of the porous body so popular in the ancient world. The woman's condition is such that she has been leaking blood for twelve years. The pathological loss of blood by a woman is described by Mark as a ῥόος, or "flux." It was this term (or the related noun ῥοῦς) that was used by Greek medics to refer to a diseased gynecological flow of blood.[25] The very nature of the woman's illness is that her body lacks the appropriate boundaries and unnaturally leaks its contents into the world. The image of the prolonged and abnormal twelve-year flow of blood suggests both the sodden malleability of the suffering body and her hyperhydrated feminine identity.

In the same way, the portrayal of the woman's cure also conforms to the Greco-Roman understanding of the healthy body. In describing her transformation, Mark utilizes language of hardening and drying up. The Greek term to describe her heal-

[25] Aristotle, *Hist. an.* 1.220–23: "Further, of all female animals the human female has the most abundant blood, and menstrual flows are more plentiful in women than in any other animal. This blood if it has become diseased is known as a flux" (trans. Arthur L. Peck, *Aristotle, Historia Animalium* [3 vols.; LCL; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965], cited by Yarbro Collins, *Mark,* 282 n. 149). For a discussion of the "flow" as a disease in Hippocratic medicine, see Lesley Dean-Jones, *Women's Bodies in Classical Greek Science* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 129–30.

ing is ἐξηράνθη, from the root ξηραίνω, which, in the passive, literally means "dried up," "scorched," or "hardened."[26] English translations usually render this word as "ceased," presumably to make the event more intelligible for readers, but the Greek implies that the woman's "cure" is one of bodily hardening and drying. On those other occasions where ξηραίνω is used in the Gospel it means "scorched" or "hardened" (cf. Mark 3:1; 4:6; 9:18; 11:20–21). The drying of the woman's blood could have a number of meanings. It could simply mean that the abnormal bleeding dried up.[27] An alternative suggestion by Kevin Wilkinson takes the scorching more seriously and suggests that the woman becomes menopausal in anticipation of the genderless eschatological kingdom of God.[28] Regardless of whether we choose to interpret the healing eschatologically, it is clear not only that the woman's condition has abated but also that her entire body comes to resemble the healthy body of Greco-Roman medicine. She is hardened, dried, and bounded.

The woman's transition from sickly, effeminate leaker to faith-dried healthy follower parallels the faith-based healings of the Gospel of Mark as a whole. The emphasis on her faith as the agent of her healing is typical of Markan miracle stories in general.[29] What is unusual, however, is the *mechanics* of her healing and what these mechanics can tell us about the porosity of Jesus' body. According to Mark 5:30, the woman initiates her own healing by pulling power from an unsuspecting Jesus:

> She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and *touched his garment*. For she said, "If I touch even his garments, I shall be saved." And immediately *the flow of blood dried up;* and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. And Jesus, perceiving in himself *that power had gone forth* from him, immediately turned about in the crowd, and said, "Who touched my garments?" (5:27–30)

According to the narrative, the woman is healed because power flows out of Jesus through his garments to the woman. The flow of power is one that is physical and discernible to Jesus himself. He immediately notes the loss of power and demands to know who touched him. Theological rereadings of this passage have focused on

[26] LSJ, 1190, s.v. ξηραίνω.

[27] D'Angelo, "Gender," 98.

[28] Kevin Wilkinson, "'The Fount of Her Blood as Dried Up': Dessication, Gender, and Eschatology in Mark 5:24–34" (unpublished paper, 2001), cited in Yarbro Collins, *Mark*, 282 n. 149.

[29] While Bultmann categorizes 5:24b–35 as a miracle story (*History of the Synoptic Tradition*, 214), Dibelius sees the interest in faith in 5:25–34 and classes it as a "less pure type" (*From Tradition to Gospel*, 43). It seems that this "impure" form articulates precisely Mark's view of the connection between health and faith as particularly exemplified in his treatment of exorcisms. We should note that the usual translation of πίστις as "faith" overstates the religious character of the epistemological category of "trust." For post-Reformation readers "faith" carries with it a particularly instrumental religious tone that, for Mark and his readers, πίστις did not entail.

Jesus' ignorance about the loss of power rather than on the body of Jesus itself.[30] But the curious flow of power from Jesus can tell us much about the physiological composition of the Markan protagonist. While many scholars have concentrated on the parallels between the woman with the flow of blood and Jairus's daughter, they have neglected the obvious comparison between Jesus and the woman. In the narrative, the flow of power from Jesus mirrors the flow of blood from the woman. Like the woman, Jesus is unable to control the flow that emanates from his body. Like the flow of blood, the flow of power is something embodied and physical; just as the woman feels the flow of blood dry up, so Jesus feels—physically—the flow of power leave his body. Both the diseased woman with the flow of blood and the divine protagonist of Mark are porous, leaky creatures.[31]

Using either of the Greco-Roman models of disease reviewed earlier, the Markan Jesus appears weak and sickly. He is unable to control, regulate, or harden his porous body. He is not only acutely porous; he is unable to regulate and control his own emissions. According to both models, Jesus is weak. The nature of his porosity may enable the Markan Jesus to heal others, but his physiological makeup resembles that of the sick and diseased. Even if he is the source of healing, the Markan hero is himself physiologically weak. His powers use the pathways of bodily weakness and illness, uncontrollably leaking through his broken skin.

Moreover, in the narrative it is the sickly woman who exerts control over the body of the physician savior. It is the woman who is able to pull divine power out of the passive, leaking Jesus.[32] To be sure, this ability is framed using the typical Markan language of faith, but there is no escaping the power that she exerts over his body. This is something of a reversal of fortunes for the physician and patient. Here the disabled woman ably controls the body of the spiritual and physical physician.

The mechanics of the healing not only reverse the power dynamic between patient and physician; they also subvert traditional models of contamination. In the words of W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, "Instead of uncleanness passing

[30] Eager to demonstrate that the flow of power does not leave Jesus at a deficit, Friedrich Preisigke argued that the power of Jesus was constantly being replenished by God (*Die Gotteskraft der frühchristlichen Zeit* [Heidelberg Universität Papyrusinstitut, Schriften 6; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1922], 207–8). The efforts of Preisigke point not only to trinitarian debates about emanation but also to the implicit association of porosity and bodily loss. For concern over Jesus' apparent lack of knowledge, see Gundry, *Mark*, 280.

[31] The use of the terms "leaky" and "drippy" in preference to less pejorative terminology is deliberate. The notion of leaking implies weakness or failure. A leak is a tear in something that should be solid. The more theologically palatable concepts of Jesus "emanating" or "radiating" power render the porosity positively. By using terminology of bodily weakness "inappropriately" to refer to divine power, I intend to underscore the contrast between assessments of human and divine porosity.

[32] See Charles E. Powell, "The 'Passivity' of Jesus in Mark 5:25–34," *BSac* 162, no. 645 (2005): 66–75.

from the woman to Jesus, healing power flows from Jesus to the woman."[33] Both the Levitical purity laws that had segregated the woman from society and the failure of previous physicians to treat the woman are here rendered impotent. The woman herself controls the leaky physician (see Lev 15:7, 11; Num 5:1–5).

The presentation of Jesus as a passive, uncontrollable medical agent has not sat well with many readers of Mark. The Gospel of Matthew removes the troublesome issue of uncontrolled emissions of power altogether:

> Then suddenly a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his cloak, for she said to herself, "If I only touch his cloak, I will be made well." Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, "Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well." And instantly the woman was made well. (Matt 9:20–22)[34]

Matthew's redaction of Mark reconfigures the mechanics of the woman's healing. While the woman certainly believes that she will be healed through physical touch, Jesus preempts her actions, turns to face her, and pronounces that her faithfulness has saved her. While the content of Jesus' saying in Matthew is not notably different from that in Mark, its placement renders her somewhat passive. She is healed by Jesus for her faithfulness, and the embarrassing presentation of Jesus as confused and disordered is avoided.[35] That Matthew feels the need to abbreviate the story in this way may well confirm the argument that the Markan narrative is not

[33] Davies and Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew* (3 vols.; ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 2:130, cited in Marcus, *Mark*, 367.

[34] NA[27]: Καὶ ἰδοὺ γυνὴ αἱμορροοῦσα δώδεκα ἔτη προσελθοῦσα ὄπισθεν ἥψατο τοῦ κρασπέδου τοῦ ἱματίου αὐτοῦ· ἔλεγεν γὰρ ἐν ἑαυτῇ, ἐὰν μόνον ἅψωμαι τοῦ ἱματίου αὐτοῦ σωθήσομαι. ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς στραφεὶς καὶ ἰδὼν αὐτὴν εἶπεν, θάρσει, θύγατερ· ἡ πίστις σου σέσωκέν σε. καὶ ἐσώθη ἡ γυνὴ ἀπὸ τῆς ὥρας ἐκείνης.

[35] Whatever problems Jesus' lack of knowledge in the Markan story may have caused for readers such as Matthew, bodily porosity was known to have some advantages in both ancient medicinal and divine contexts. In the case of menstrual fluids, the flow of blood was believed by some physicians to contain medicinal powers. Not only did menstruation function as a κάθαρσις or καθάρδια, carrying away impurities and uncleanliness; menstrual blood served as a component of amulets and medicinal compounds (see, e.g., Pliny, *Nat.* 28.23.82; and D'Angelo, "Gender," 89–91). There is, of course, a considerable difference between the assessment of "normal" menstruation and the flux of blood in Greek medical writers, but these examples nonetheless illustrate the premise that "normal" bodily porosity is evaluated positively.

The same interest in the positive function of bodily porosity may be found in *Bereshit Rabbah,* which cites the LXX translation of Gen 1:26–27: "A man with orifices he created him." Against David Daube, Daniel Boyarin writes that *Bereshit Rabbah* is less concerned with the primal androgyne myth than it is with the proper function of bodily orifices (the usual meaning of the Hebrew *nĕqûbāyw*). Boyarin's argument would seem to suggest that, in some rabbinic circles, properly functioning orifices were part of the created order. See Boyarin, *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture* (New Historicism 25; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 36 n. 9. I am grateful to Tzvi Novick for this reference.

a straightforward healing-by-touch miracle narrative. Elsewhere, in Matt 14:36, people beg to touch and are healed by touching the fringe of Jesus' garment. Matthew may have simply abbreviated the story of the healing of the woman and transferred the element of healing by touch to the later account. Even if this is the case, he still removes the awkward sequence of events in his Markan source and frames both miracles as more straightforward displays of power. That Matthew rewrites Mark in this way indicates that he finds the implicit physiological characterization of the Markan Jesus to be problematic.

Even if Mark's presentation of the body of Jesus has troubled some, it is not necessary to suppose that Mark himself views the porosity of Jesus' body and the leaking of divine power negatively. Porosity was viewed positively in the context of ideas about divine beings concealing themselves in human form. The epiphany motif, the idea that gods travel the earth in disguise as human beings before revealing themselves in displays of greatness, was a well-established convention of Greek mythology. The human shells that the deities inhabited in disguise could barely conceal their divine brilliance and glory. Descriptions of divine beings traveling in disguise frequently refer to their shining faces and the way that their bodies emanated light.[36] The principle of divine light flooding through the confines of the fragile form provides another example of the inability to regulate the boundaries of the body viewed positively as a sign of power. Vestiges of this idea echo in the background of the Markan transfiguration (9:2–8), in which Jesus' face shines as brilliantly as the sun.[37] The woman's response to Jesus may add further weight to this reading. Following her healing, the woman approaches Jesus with fear and trembling (φοβηθεῖσα καὶ τρέμουσα). This response is, as noted by Ernst Lohmeyer, the standard biblical response to a theophany.[38] It is also, in Greek mythology, the appropriate response to the epiphany of a god or goddess. It may well be, therefore, that some readers interpreted Jesus' porosity as another clue to his concealed identity.

IV. Conclusion

Regardless of whether the reader finds the use of Greco-Roman models of healthy and sick bodies convincing, the narrative parallels between the body of

[36] See, e.g., *Homeric Hymn* II (To Demeter), 111–12.

[37] On the epiphany motif in the transfiguration, see H. C. Kee, "The Transfiguration in Mark: Epiphany or Apocalyptic Vision?" in *Understanding the Sacred Text: Essays in Honor of Morton S. Enslin on the Hebrew Bible and Christian Beginnings* (ed. John Reumann; Valley Forge, PA: Judson, 1972), 135–72; and Candida R. Moss, "The Transfiguration: An Exercise in Markan Accommodation," *BibInt* 12 (2004): 69–89.

[38] Lohmeyer, *Das Evangelium des Markus*, 130. To these examples Marcus (*Mark,* 360) adds 4 Macc 4:10 and Phil 2:12, which connects the presence of God with salvation, as does Mark 5:33–34.

Jesus and the body of the woman with the flow of blood are unmistakable. It would appear, therefore, that the woman with the flow of blood contrasts with both Jairus's daughter and Jesus. Many interpreters have read the contrast between the two bodies as an example of divine power washing over infirmity, but it is clearly the woman who is the active agent in her healing. She pulls power from the otherwise passive and unsuspecting Jesus. While the woman becomes dried, hardened, and more masculine, the Markan protagonist *qua* physician remains porous, leaky, and effeminate.

That the body of Jesus is positioned at the center of a "Markan sandwich" about women only underscores his porous femininity. Both Jesus and the woman appear porous, unregulated, and weak. Porosity, however, is not de facto a negative. The leakiness of the body of Jesus and the "fear and trembling" of the woman may have suggested—to those familiar with such myths—that Jesus is divine.

The healing of the woman with the flow of blood serves two connected purposes. First, it inverts the traditional medical power dynamic in which a physician imparts healing to a patient. Having abandoned the more mainstream medical practices that had made her worse, the woman pulls power out of Jesus himself. The body of Jesus serves as an alternative health care system—free and accessible—to the expensive and ineffective physicians the woman has already visited. Second, the story implicitly undercuts the association between porosity and weakness so prevalent in the ancient world. The porosity of Jesus serves a positive function; it facilitates the woman's cure and stands as a marker of a hidden, divine identity. Even if, in the rest of the Gospel of Mark, Jesus acts as a divine physician and cathartic scourge, his own body continues to remain porous and uncontrolled, contaminating others with divine power.

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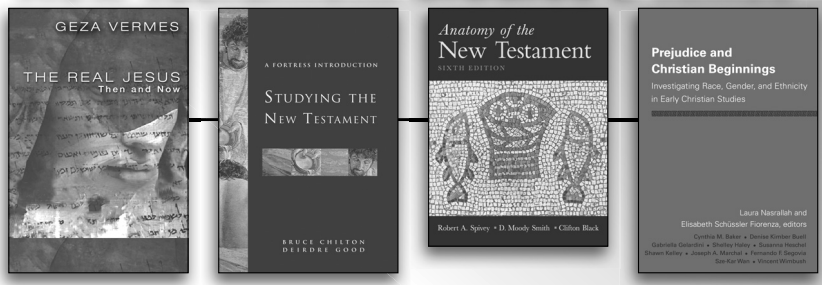

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