

Jesus, Healer of the Canaanite Woman's Daughter in Matthew's Gospel: A Social-Scientific Inquiry

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Abstract

This study assesses the historicity of the healing story of the Canaanite woman's daughter in the Gospel of Matthew (15:21–28) primarily by means of a cross-cultural anthropological analysis. It is the second part of a larger study, the first being the healing account of the hemorrhaging woman (9:20–22). A social-scientific inquiry demonstrates that the account is possibly rooted in the activity of Jesus. Matthew's redaction of Mark does not take us farther away from the historical Jesus; quite the contrary, it underscores characteristics of Jesus' ministry even while it features theological concerns of the *Sitz im Leben* of the later Christian community.

The purpose of this study is to assess the historicity of the healing story of the Canaanite woman's daughter in the Gospel of Matthew (15:21–28) primarily by means of a cross-cultural anthropological analysis. It is the second part of a larger study, the first being the healing account of the hemorrhaging woman (9:20–22; Love). In the first essay I established that Matthew's version, spliced into the healing story of the ruler's daughter (9:18–26), most probably originated with Jesus for four interrelated reasons: (1) the woman's faith, (2) her identity as an Israelite outcast, (3) the location of the healing in open space, and (4) its violation of Second Temple purity boundaries. These four factors coalesced, I affirmed, to validate the woman's identity as an Israelite in need of healing (Matt 10:1–16; Malina 1999b: 33)—the focal point of Jesus' theocratic mission to Israel.

I chose to explore these two accounts in tandem for four reasons. First, the woman who suffered from hemorrhages apparently was an Israelite, whereas the Canaanite woman and her afflicted daughter were gentiles. Second, both women probably were outcasts but for different reasons. The Israelite woman was a pariah probably due to her continuous physical impurity (Lev 15:25–30). The Canaanite woman's status as an outsider was due to her being a gentile, the possibility that she was a prostitute, and her daughter's misfortune of being "tormented by a demon" (15:22). Third, Jesus commends both women for their faith (9:22; 15:28). Finally, Matthew locates both stories in open space. Jesus heals the woman who suffered from hemorrhages while making his way to the house of a leader of the synagogue. Departing from Mark's portrayal (7:24), Matthew identifies the confrontation between the

Canaanite woman and Jesus outside the house (15:22). (This open spatial setting is antipodal to the domestic environs of the healing stories of Peter's mother-in-law [8:14] and the synagogue leader's daughter [9:23–25].)

As I noted in the first study, an historical assessment of any gospel story, let alone a healing account, is most difficult. First, all gospel narratives describe the *Sitz im Leben* of the Evangelist's day, which means that the material has passed through at least two earlier stages—the period of Jesus' activity and the period of initial compilation. The matter is further complicated for Matthew (in comparison to Mark) in that the narratives are heavily edited and tend to stress and/or suppress certain features for theological reasons (Held). For example, Meier states of the story of the healing of the Canaanite woman's daughter, "Weighing all the pros and cons, it seems to me that the story ... is so shot through with Christian missionary theology and concerns that creation by first-generation Christians is the more likely conclusion" (1994: 660–61). Second, as Malina points out, every "person seeking to evaluate the historical authenticity of Jesus' deeds ... must necessarily assume and apply some theory of reading, of language and

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of social meaning, whether they are aware of it or not" (1999a: 351–52). Third, for many scholars gospel descriptions are "problem-filled behaviors" largely "because there is no room for them among the patterns of conduct and perception available in contemporary U.S. and northern European social systems" (Malina 1991a: 352).

Healing stories add to the problem. Since the period of the Enlightenment, accounts of Jesus as a healer have been variously interpreted (see Theissen 1983, Theissen & Merz 1998) out of conceptions "available from the contemporary social system" to which scholars have been "enculturated" (Malina 1999a: 353). As Theissen and Merz indicate, the miracles of Jesus "seem to us to be an unhistorical 'gleam' born of longing and poetry which has attached itself to the historical figure of Jesus" (1998: 281). As Pilch states, "The advent of modern science in about the seventeenth century disrupted the bio-psycho-spiritual unity of human consciousness that had existed until then" (1993: 233). What is needed from a social-scientific perspective is an evaluation established on "the imaginary constructs of readers and hearers of the Gospel documents" (Malina 1999a: 352).

I established in the first study that cross-cultural anthropological models are useful because the social conceptions of reality therein described are more analogous and indigenous to the social system context of first-century Mediterranean, Palestinian society. A social-scientific systems analysis provides a thick description based on the cognitive maps of how people in Palestine believed their universe worked. A difficulty, but not an insurmountable problem, is that the models or portions thereof may be analogous to the periods of both Jesus and the Evangelist. Because of this I do not hesitate to utilize criteria developed by other scholarly methods that are not social-scientific in nature, such as distinctiveness/dissimilarity, multiple attestation, coherence, cultural environment and language, and embarrassment. These measurements are utilized as they relate and/or add to the cross-cultural analysis.

Finally, as in the first study I will utilize three social-scientific models germane to the healing story of the Canaanite woman's daughter: (1) a model of healing in non-Western societies especially characterized by spirit involvement/aggression, (2) a model of social domains, and (3) a model of a native taxonomy of illness—degrees of impurity. The first model, broad in scope, is designed to better understand illness, healing, and healers in a social-cultural perspective quite different from the biomedical approach largely operative in advanced industrialized societies like the United States and northern European countries. The notion of spirit aggression assumes that illness/sickness is a misfortune due to the effect of cosmic

forces. The other two models more specifically assist the reading of the Matthean story. The model of social domains concentrates on two foundational spheres—politics and kinship. What does it mean for a gentile woman to persistently and aggressively petition Jesus, an Israelite healer, to heal her daughter in open space in the district of Tyre and Sidon, Phoenicia, part of the Roman province of Syria (15:21)? This is especially pertinent in light of Jesus' particularistic statement, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (15:24; cf. 10:5, 6). The taxonomy of degrees of impurity model helps clarify how the human body, where purity issues are manifest, is a microcosm of the social body. How might the woman and her daughter's possible personal and social impurity interface with the fabric of social, religious, and political issues of Jesus as a healer?

Social-Scientific Models

Model 1—Healing in Non-Western Societies

How is illness experienced and treated in agrarian societies like the Roman Empire? From an anthropological perspective sickness is related to two broader phenomena: cosmological or religious forces, and social relationships and interpersonal conflicts (Hahn: 24). "Illness" denotes a social-cultural perspective in which many other persons besides the sick person are involved (Pilch 1986: 102). Both patients and healers are "embedded in a cultural system." It is the "whole system that heals," that is, it is "the total fabric of life in which attitudes and actions are imbedded" (Blum & Blum: 20). As the Blums state, "Health beliefs and practices must be viewed within the context in which they occur, since focusing on them in isolation distorts or detracts from their meaning and function" (20). Jesus as an Israelite healer should be viewed, not in isolation but in association to the cultural system (Pilch 1985: 143). A systems theory approach, accordingly, takes into account social relations and cultural expectations of societies. Sickness and healing belong to the organized patterns of thinking, judging, and behaving shared by the members of a society (Hahn: 2; Blum & Blum, chap 2; Albaugh). This is quite different from the biomedical approach largely operative in advanced agrarian societies like the United States and northern European countries, in which the focus often is on a narrow hierarchy of molecules, cells, organs, and human bodies (Hahn: 97). Persons in advanced industrial settings do not readily see Jesus' healing activity as being essential to his task in a social-political sense.

In societies like ancient Rome sickness and healing

may be classified along the lines of witchcraft, sorcery, and spirit aggression (Murdock: 73, Foster: 773–82). “Without exception,” Murdock states, “every society in the sample which depends primarily on animal husbandry for its economic livelihood regards spirit aggression as either the predominant or an important secondary cause of illness” (82; see Pilch 1991: 200–09; 1992: 253–56). Spirit aggression assumes that illness/sickness is a misfortune due to the effect of cosmic forces upon human lives (Pilch 1986: 102, 104). Sun and moon belong to the array of cosmic forces. The sun’s power gives warmth and life; it also causes headaches. Seeds, women and the moon wax and wane together. Ill people may be moonstruck (Blum & Blum: 31–32).

Evidence for spirit aggression abounds in Matthew. For example, the demon-possessed son (17:14–20) is “moonstruck” (17:15); that is, as an epileptic he is under the moon’s cosmic influence or power, a term found only in Matthew in the Second Testament (4:24; Ross: 126–28). Cosmic forces have invaded and made their habitation within him. Jesus rebukes the demon (17:18) as he does the violent, life-threatening power of a storm on the sea (8:26) that prompts the disciples to ask in amazement, “What sort of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?” (8:27). Jesus’ fame as a healer is summarized in the second reference (4:24). Throughout all Syria people brought persons “afflicted” with “various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics (‘moonstruck’), and paralytics” and “he healed them” (4:24). The language of affliction assumes a context of spirit aggression over which Jesus has healing authority (9:6, 8; see 10:1; 21:23, 24, 27; 28:18). Other examples include the two demoniacs (8:23–34), the identification of mutes and the blind as demon-possessed persons (9:32; 12:22), John the Baptist (who is accused of having a demon—12:18), and the Canaanite woman’s daughter (who “is tormented by a demon”—15:22).

Further, the religious-political implications of the Beelzebul controversy (12:22–32) converge over the question, “Does Jesus cast out demons by the prince of demons (9:34, 12:24) or by the Spirit of God (12:26, 28)?” Matthew’s language is unequivocal, forceful, uncompromising, and violent (12:22–30). The spiritual realms of God and Satan are like two kingdoms, cities, houses that if divided are unable to stand (12:25–26). The strong man first needs to be tied up before his house can be plundered (12:29). Blasphemy against the Spirit of God will not be forgiven (12:30–31). Accordingly, Matthew presents Jesus as a Spirit-led servant-prophet (see 12:18 based on Isaiah 42:1–4; 12:28; 3:16, 4:1) who struggles with the religious-political powers of Jerusalem (see 21:14).

Magical practices flourish in pre-industrial settings

among all social groups but especially among lower-class urbanites and peasants (Sjoberg: 275; Blum & Blum: 25, 31–35). Sjoberg (277–78) states, “Restorative magic ... has prevailed in feudal orders from the most ancient ones in the Near East to those in the Greek and Roman periods, in Central and Eastern Asia, in medieval Europe and pre-Columbian America, down to those that survive today.” Since evil spirits upset the order of life, causing illness or other social or physical disasters (Sjoberg: 277), magical practices ward off evil and correct imbalances in the spiritual order (Blum & Blum: 31–32). Magical rituals presume “the sympathy of word, deed, and concept: peasants believe that by naming their wish, what they wish shall be, with the proviso that the energies of the supernaturals will be enlisted toward this end” (Blum & Blum: 32).

Whether Jesus is a Hellenistic magician has sparked provocative scholarly debates (Smith; Hull; Meier: 535–75; Twelftree: 190–207). Even though Matthew appears to avoid “any explicit magical-manipulative connotations” (Duling: 109, cf. e.g., Mark 7: 31–37; 8:22–26) traces of magical influences possibly remain. My interest is not to decide whether Jesus is a magician or a charismatic healer (Theissen & Merz, 305–08), but how persons like the Canaanite woman might perceive Jesus and accordingly act. Therefore, I use the term *magic* non-pejoratively “as the art of influencing the superhuman sphere of the spirits, demons, angels and gods” (Theissen & Merz: 305, n. 22).

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Finally, it is useful to describe the social sectors where illness is experienced. Based on Arthur Kleinman’s cross-cultural materials on healing (1986: 29–47; 1989), John Pilch (1988: 60–66; 1991: 181–209; 1992: 26–33; 1994: 154–77) has identified three overlapping social sectors. First, there is the popular sector (1991: 194–197), a family-centered environment of sickness and care which manages between 70 and 90 per cent of sickness (Kleinman 1986: 33) and treats people by “the lay, non-professional, non-specialist popular culture” (Pilch 1986: 103). Since public welfare services seldom exist (Sjoberg: 251), the family (sometimes assisted by guilds) is the primary welfare

security agency. Persons outside this safety net frequently suffer social and religious isolation and ostracism. Nothing is said to indicate that the Canaanite woman has such a safety net. Second, there is the folk sector, a community context of care and healing. Here, village cohesions, persons credited by neighbors with recognized powers, interpret for individuals and their families the presence and absence of illness (Pilch 1991: 197–200; Sjoberg: 315–16). In this sector, the deviant condition, illness, is “observed, defined and treated” by a “web of relations involving family, social network, village, etc.” (Neyrey 1995: 4). Again, nothing in the story indicates that the woman is part of a “web” of “folk” relations to which she could turn, even though such “folk” networks can be detected in Matthew (see 4:24; 9:2; 14:35). Instead, without agency or help from others she aggressively appeals to a healer belonging to another ethnocentric social sphere. Finally, the professional sector is comprised of “professional, trained and credentialed healers” (Pilch 1991: 192–194; Jackson: 9–31; Kee: 27–66) that mainly serve the urban upper classes (Sjoberg: 315–16). Jesus is not a “professional” healer. Neither is there evidence that the Canaanite woman has economic resources to procure professional care (see the contrasting example of the hemorrhaging woman in Mark [7:26]). Rural and urban lower-class populations—peasants, artisans, outcasts, and expendables—experience health care mediated by the popular and folk sectors (Siegerist 1961: II, 306; Jackson: 138–69). Jesus is a healer among those who experience and treat illness in the popular and folk sectors. The woman also belongs to these same sectors but may lack communal resources for assistance.

Model 2—Social Domains

In the ancient Mediterranean there were four “foundational social domains” which social science scholars analyze—politics, economics, religion, and kinship (family) (Hanson 1994). These four spheres, Hanson states, “are never discrete entities that operate in isolation from one another” (1994: 183). Rather, they are socially embedded to the extent that one sphere’s definition, structures, and authority may be dictated by another sphere. Yet, two of the domains, politics and kinship, are polar opposites so that one may speak of political religion and domestic religion, but not simply of religion (Malina 1999b: 30). Or, one may speak of political economy and domestic economy, but not simply of economy. The domains of religion and economics, accordingly, are embedded either in politics or the family. For example, religious leaders such as Caiaphas, members of the Jerusalem Sanhedrin, and the Pharisees are political personages, and the Jerusalem

Temple is a political edifice where sacrifices are made for the public good (Malina 1999b: 30). Conversely, domestic religion and economy are family centered and focus on the kin group (Malina 1999b: 31).

Jesus’ behavior and words including his healing activity and that of the twelve belong primarily to the public, political, Israelite social domain. When Jesus proclaims a coming kingdom of heaven (Matt 4:17) he has an Israelite theocracy in mind (Matt 10:5; 15:24; Malina 1999b: 36). When Jesus heals the unfortunate, the crowds praise “the God of Israel” (Matt 15:31; see 8:11; 22:32). When Jesus recruits the twelve to help in his theocratic task (Matt 4:18–22; 10:2–4) he commissions them as healers (10:1) and charges them to go nowhere among the Gentiles and Samaritans. Their mission is to the “lost sheep of the house of Israel” (10:5, 6)—to “all the towns of Israel” (10:23, see 7:6 and 19:28–29). These particularistic words probably are authentic to the period of Jesus (Malina 1999b: 36). As Malina (1999b: 33) puts it, Jesus urges “Israelites to get their affairs in order ... and to heal those in need of healing (Matt 10:1–16).” The model of social domains sets forth the following social-scientific criterion for authenticating the deeds and words of Jesus. If an activity or statement attributed to Jesus in the healing story “makes direct and immediate political sense, then it is authentic” (Malina 1999b: 43). In that light the statement of Jesus to the disciples, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (15:24), has historical probability.

The kinship domain (household/family), however, as a plurisignific social metaphor, may also have political significance. Embedded in the household, kinship is the most basic unit of social organization in agrarian societies—families, villages, cities, and empire (Elliott 1991: 165–266). For example, in ancient Israel the core social identity of the household flowed out of an ethics of solidarity that “shaped a network of understanding and care that moved beyond the immediate compound family to include ... the totality of the ‘children of Israel’” (Perdue: 167). Ancient Israel as a household was a “cosmos for human dwelling” (Perdue: 178). Israel’s head, Yahweh (Jer 3:4), created and established (Deut 32:6; Mal 2:10) his beloved son (Ex 4:22; Isa 63:16; Jer 3:19; 31:9; Hosea 11), or daughter (Lam 2:13). Household imagery warned Solomon’s descendants that Israel would be cut off from the land if they failed to obey the Lord (1 Kgs 9:7–8; see Jer 12:7; 22:5). Jesus’ lament over the city of Jerusalem echoes this ancient theme: “See, your house is left to you, desolate” (Matt 23:38). Matthew labels the ancient Israelite tabernacle as the “house of God” (12:4) and recalls that God’s house “shall be called a house of prayer” (Matt 21:13; see Isa 56:7; Jer 7:11). Phrases like “house of Israel” and

“house of God,” therefore, beyond their historic identity are social metaphors that particularize Israel. Kinship as a plurisignatic political metaphor is important especially when viewed in association with the public, political, social domain. Jesus belongs to the particularistic social entity of the Israelite household. The Canaanite woman is outside Israel’s plurisignatic kinship domain.

*Model 3—Native Taxonomy of Illness—
Degrees of Impurity*

Finally, a native taxonomy of illness based on “degrees of impurity” (Neusner 1973; 1978: 1–17; Pilch 1981: 119–33; 1991: 207; Malina 1981; 1993; Neyrey 1986: 91–128; 1991: 271–304) follows certain purity/pollution insights of Mary Douglas (1966; 1975). For Douglas, purity is defined as normality and wholeness; pollution and taboo refer to matter “out of place”—dirt—a cultural system of order and disorder (1966; Isenberg: 179–75; Isenberg & Owen: 1–17). Purity rules are symbols, a cultural language that expresses and reflects larger social concerns that work in concert with other structures of thought to deliver and support a common message. Douglas identifies four kinds of pollution boundaries: (1) danger pressing on external boundaries; (2) danger from transgressing the internal lines of the system; (3) danger in the margins of the lines; and (4) danger from internal contradiction (1966: 122). Accordingly, Pilch locates so-called leprosy with the boundary of the human body, spirit-possession as an invasion against the boundary, and women’s illnesses as a concern for domestic boundaries (1986: 104). The encounter between Jesus and the Canaanite woman involves principally the danger of pressing against external boundaries.

The human body is a center where purity issues are manifest—a microcosm of the social body. Order and chaos at all cultural levels (the individual or the community) indicate social attitudes toward ill persons (Neyrey 1996: 93). The Blums state, “Failure to observe the rites of purification, the sensitivities of the spirits, a disregard for the taboos that protect against pollution, are all dangerous omissions—omissions that will bring disaster to the offender” (21). Neyrey has demonstrated that there is a “thorough correlation between socio-political strategy and bodily concerns (1996: 93). This correlation may be clarified in the accompanying purity/political “map.” My use of purity “maps” follows the work done by Neyrey (1996: 91–95).

The use of this map will highlight a social/purity tension within the story. On the one hand Jesus is constrained by the political limitations of his mission to Israel. But on the other hand he is prompted by the core value of God’s mercy that follows weak structural boundaries and weak

Purity/Political Map for Jesus

Political locus—Kingdom of God
No network of control
Mostly rural villages/peasants of Galilee
God of Israel
Core Value—God’s mercy
Mission—Inaugurate Israel’s theocracy
Structural implications
Weak boundaries
Inclusive strategy among Israelites
Legitimation in Scripture
Genesis and prophets
Weaker Purity Concerns
Weak bodily control
Public, bodily contact with sick,
Demon-possessed, bodily deformed

bodily control.

Having set forth the three models, I will now interpret the story from a social-scientific perspective. When problems over Matthew’s gentile vision are considered along with a number of departures from Mark’s version of the account, a social-scientific reading tips the balance in favor of a historical core that originates with Jesus.

Jesus, Healer of the Canaanite Woman’s Daughter in Matthew’s Gospel

How can the nucleus of the story stem from Jesus when it appears integral to Matthew’s theological vision for a gentile mission (Meier 1994: 660–61)? Matthew asserts a universalistic vision as early as the genealogy (1:1, 2–6a) and as late as the instructions given to the eleven to spread the good news of the kingdom of heaven to *panta tà ethne* (28:19). Between these extremities supporting evidence abounds—such as the distinctive rendition of the wise men (2:1–12), the assertion that God can raise up children to Abraham from stones (3:9), an Isaiah fulfillment quotation concerning “Galilee of the Gentiles” (4:15), the centurion’s faith (8:10–11), and an assertion that a gentile inclusion would precede the end (24:14; see 25:32 and 26:13). Within the story itself and in contrast to Mark, Matthew emphasizes the woman’s submissive demeanor through the use of *prosekúnei* (imperfect tense; see 8:2; 9:18; 14:33; and 20:20)—“she began to worship” him (15:25). Matthew also features a commendation of the woman’s faith by Jesus, “O woman, great is your faith!” (15:28). Certainly, a story about a gentile woman noted for

her great faith would contribute to a gentile mission initiative especially when the community heard it in light of the healing of the centurion's servant (8:5–13).

But, there is also evidence within the narrative that runs counter to such a vision. First, Matthew omits Mark's statement by Jesus to the woman, "Let the children first be fed ..." (Mark 7:27) and inserts in its place "It is not fair to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs" (15:26). Nowhere else does Matthew attribute such negative and particularistic language by Jesus toward a gentile, let alone a woman. (For analyses of the tension between Matthew's particularism and his universalistic vision see Levine; Brown 1980: 193–221; 1978: 73–90; 1989: 388–99.) In contrast, when the gentile centurion comes to Jesus and makes his appeal, Jesus replies, "I will come and heal him" (8:6). Further, Matthew's account accentuates a number of refusals by Jesus. The healer ignores the woman's repeated cries for mercy (15:23a, 22) and refuses to send her away even though the disciples beg him to do so (15:23). Apparently, she is not this Israelite's concern. In addition, by modifying Mark's statement from "and he said to her" (Mark 7:27a) to "and he answered" (the disciples, Matt 15:26a) Matthew underscores Jesus' refusal to deal with the woman until the actual challenge and response (15:26–28). Matthew makes clear that Jesus' behavior and language is grounded in his exclusive mission to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (15:24; 9:24; 10:5–6; see also 9:36; 18:12; Jer 50:6). Perhaps this is why Luke omits the story—its Judean ethnocentric perspective is out of step with a universal vision (Burkill: 25).

Another difficulty rightly observed is that Matthew's account, like Mark's, follows and fits the context of the dispute initiated by Pharisees sent from Jerusalem to examine Jesus over purity matters (15:1–20//Mark 7:1–23). But a number of issues once more emerge over Matthew's alterations of Mark's account. To begin with, Matthew's usual practice of shortening stories from Mark is not followed in this instance. Instead, Matthew lengthens the narrative that in turn alerts us to what is omitted, altered, substituted, or added. At the outset Matthew singles out the woman as a "Canaanite" (15:22) a disparaging reference conjuring up the ancient enmity between Israel and the Canaanites (Davies & Allison, 2:547). By doing so, Matthew deletes Mark's more neutral identification, a "Greek, a Syrophenician by birth" (Mark 7:26)—an identity shift that may alter as well any assumption that the woman has a relatively high social/economic status (contra Theissen 1983: 210–11). Further, Matthew changes the scene's venue to an outdoor, open space (15:21)—male turf, whereas Mark begins the story by telling his readers that Jesus "entered a house" (15:21//7:24) and ends it with

the woman returning home to her daughter healed and lying on the bed (15:21//Mark 7:29). Nothing in Matthew's rendition points toward a domestic environment—we do not know even if the woman has a home. In addition, Matthew omits Mark's secrecy motif (7:24) and tells his readers that the woman "came out" to Jesus (15:22). By doing so the woman seizes the initiative and speaks frequently and persistently (15:22, 25, 27)—an abridgement not only of Mark's development but a reversal of gender expectations. Mark further softens a potential gender embarrassment by reserving the woman's words to the end of the story and envisaging them as a response to what Jesus says (7:27, 28). A final addition is the woman's address to Jesus, "O Lord, Son of David" (15:22, 25, 27; Duling 1992), interpreted typically as a messianic christological title (1:1; 9:27; 12:23; 20:30, 31; 22:42). But would the woman understand the address in this way if the story originated with Jesus?

How then does a social-scientific reading demonstrate that the foundation of the account originated with Jesus? First, and perhaps foremost in light of the model of social domains, Jesus' statement to the disciples, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (15:24), has authentic historical probability in that it "makes direct and immediate political sense" (Malina 1999b: 43) in Jesus' mission to establish an Israelite theocracy (10:5; 15:24; Malina 1999b: 36). This includes as well the assignment of the disciples to go nowhere among the gentiles and Samaritans. Following Jesus' example and instructions, their mission is only to the "lost sheep of the house of Israel" (10:5, 6)—to "all the towns of Israel" (10:23, see 7:6 and 19:28–29). They, too, should ignore the unexpected, aggressive, invasive behavior of the Canaanite woman. Following the purity/political map of Jesus, the third model, the political locus of the kingdom of God is centered in the God of Israel. Jesus' mission is to inaugurate Israel's theocracy, an inclusive strategy only among Israelites.

Linked as well to this criterion is the political plurisignificance of the phrase "house of Israel" (15:24; 10:6) ensconced in Israel's ethnocentric, endogamous, household particularism. When Matthew identifies the woman as a Canaanite, he reinforces the historic enmity separating two ancient particularistic political households—Israel and Canaan. The woman's ancient heritage also entails a particularism, a historic political enmity that is probably reinforced by Jesus' statement, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs" (15:26). Only in Matthew does Jesus teach, "Do not give dogs what is holy; and do not throw your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under foot and turn to attack you" (7:6). The term *children* identifies the "house of Israel." The term *dogs*

identifies gentiles, in this case Canaanites. Whether “the lost sheep of the house of Israel” denotes a group within Israel or all of Israel (9:36; 10:6) is unknown within the account. But the proverb communicates a powerful, ethnocentric social symbol that is challenged by the woman’s response, “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table” (15:27). Her riposte is not a clever rebuttal but a continued appeal for mercy. She seeks one “crumb” from this Israelite folk healer. She wants him to heal her daughter whose suffering outweighs the social kinship boundaries that separate her and Jesus. Now, Jesus is faced with a dilemma: a gentile makes her appeal based on the core value of God’s mercy. By doing so, she also challenges the weaker boundaries of Jesus’ inclusive strategy only to Israel. This forthright tension is enlarged by Matthew’s consistent appeal that Jesus’ mission is legitimated out of the prophetic tradition of Hosea, “Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy not sacrifice’” (9:13, repeated in 12:7 from Hosea 6:6 [Septuagint]). It is also amplified by the way Matthew links the verbs “to have compassion,” “to have mercy,” and the titles, “Lord” and “Son of David.” The theme of mercy is found in 9:27; 15:22; 17:15; 20:30, 31; the theme of compassion is found in 9:36; 14:14; 15:32; 17:20; 20:34; and the title “Son of David” is located in 9:36; 12:23; 15:32; 17:20; 20:34. These instances should be compared also with 5:7; 15:25; 18:26, 27, 33. As Duling (1992: 112) notes,

Four of the five instances of the verb ‘to have compassion’ (*splangchnizomai*) and five of the eight instances of the verb ‘to have mercy’ (*elleō*) occur in connection with healing and in almost every case the poly-significant titles Lord and/or Son of David appear as part of the semantic field.

All of this adds to the Scriptural appeal of the purity/political map of Jesus and heightens the impediment of extending mercy to a gentile woman. This anomaly does not fit the central Matthean trajectory of Jesus’ confrontation with the temple establishment. What we might expect given Jesus’ mission to Israel is a clash of the prophetic call for mercy in the social/political context of the Judean temple. This, indeed, is the case when in Jerusalem two Israelite political/religious “systems” collide as Jesus heals the blind and lame in the temple (21:14). Duling (1992: 113) states,

like David, but unlike the Sadducees and Pharisees, Jesus need not maintain temple purity; indeed, as the great healer/exorcist, the great patron or benefactor of the peasants, the impure, and the expendables, he heals in the very center of Jewish political, economic, and religious life, the seat

of religious purity, the Jerusalem Temple. The response of the children signifies that he stands against the Temple establishment, as well as the High Priestly aristocracy and the scribal retainers [Matt 21:1–17].

Nevertheless, Matthew preserves an instance of a clash between Jesus’ theocratic mission to Israel and his commitment to the core value of mercy.

Returning to the narrative, the woman’s single-handed persistence may be due as well to her social status. Ringe (7) and Corley (166) believe the woman is a prostitute. If so, probably she is cut off from household and kinship ties—a family-centered network of assistance and support. Put another way, probably she is not a matron or a widow with an urban household at her disposal. Her lack of male agency best explains her venturing into male space alone. As a “single parent,” she would find subsistence a daily issue. The model of healing in non-Western societies reinforces this reading. She must seek help for an illness of spirit aggression without social systemic relief. She belongs to the popular and folk social sectors, but as an outcast and/or expendable she cannot depend on a network of healing. Her need outweighs the social-historical barriers between Canaanites and Israelites. She knows only that a famous itinerant Israelite healer has come her way this one time. She believes that he alone can heal her daughter. Perhaps that is why the woman bests the healer in the challenge/response, prompting Jesus to state, “O woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish” (15:28). Ethnocentric issues have been challenged—overcome and/or suspended—by the distinctive nature of the encounter and exchange. The uniqueness of these factors also points to the activity of Jesus, a social embarrassment that is preserved in the Matthean account.

Finally, there is the issue of what is meant by the woman’s address, “Lord, Son of David” (15:22). At the level of the Evangelist, the term *Lord* hints at Jesus’ divinity since it is used of God in scripture and linked with terms of worship. The woman addresses Jesus as “Lord” three times (15:22, 25, 27) and kneels before him (15:25). However, the term may be an address of respect by an inferior to a superior (7:21; 9:24). Similarly, the expression “Son of David” is used as a title in requests in a number of Matthew’s healing stories (9:27; 12:33; 15:22; 17:15; 20:31) signifying a messianic meaning at the time of the Evangelist (1:1; 12:23; 21:9; 22:42). Jesus as the “Son of David” is the expected messianic healer-king.

It seems unlikely that a Canaanite woman would address Jesus in this manner unless she understood the words in another way. I propose that this is the case and

that she identifies Jesus out of a social setting of magic and healing set forth in the model of healing in non-Western societies. Since evil spirits upset the order of life, causing illness (Sjoberg: 277), magical practice corrects imbalances in the spiritual order (Blum & Blum, 31–32). As a “peasant” she believed that she could enlist divine help for this end (Blum & Blum, 32). Seizing the initiative, the woman names her wish and names her healer. She sees Jesus as a holy man with magical powers.

But why would she specifically address Jesus as “Lord, Son of David”? She might do so out of a widespread Solomonic/Son of David-healer/exorcist tradition. Here, I draw on research by Duling (1975, 1992), Fisher, Lövestam, and Berger who have identified a pre-Christian “Solomon-as-exorcist” (Son of David-exorcist) trajectory in both literary and popular Jewish culture in Egypt, Palestine, Mesopotamia, the DSS (11 QpsApa), Pseudo-Philo, and Josephus (ANT. 8.2, 5) and from a later period probably influenced by the Second Testament in the Testament of Solomon and perhaps elsewhere (the magical papyri; Test Sol) (Duling 1975: 249). The woman possibly knew this tradition since it was available to non-Israelites in such regions as Tyre and Sidon. Interestingly, Matthew compares Jesus to Solomon in a context of casting out unclean spirits/demons and declares that something greater than Solomon is here (12:42). Not to be forgotten is that Matthew uses the title “Son of David” for Jesus as a healer (9:27; 12:23; 15:22; 20:30; 20:31; 21:15). Thus, my hypothesis is that the woman used the address, “Lord, Son of David,” out of a social background of magic and healing. She perceived Jesus to be a “Solomon-as-exorcist” healer and persistently pursued her wish, believing the gods could supply her need. Indefatigably but deferentially she appealed for mercy and addressed Jesus as “Lord, Son of David.” By the use of “Lord” she showed respect to Jesus’ authority as a healer. By the use of “Son of David” she identified Jesus out of the “Solomon-as-exorcist” tradition. This interpretation parallels the pervasive place of magic in societies like Roman Palestine and lends credence to the assertion that the central part of Matthew’s story belongs to the most primitive layer of gospel tradition—the activity of Jesus. By the time of the Evangelist the address is understood christologically within the Christian community.

Conclusion

But what difference does a social-scientific reading of the story make for the woman, her daughter, and Jesus? The woman’s status, if she is a prostitute, probably is not altered. She still lacks the systemic support of the kinship domain, the resources of the folk sector. She cannot “go

home”—return to a family or count on male agency in a male dominated society. She still must go it alone in a social world characterized by community solidarity. But her life is made less burdensome. The woman and her daughter no longer are dominated by the oppression, both social and personal, that the weight of misfortune produces due to cosmic affliction—spirit aggression. Now she can devote her energies more vigorously to issues of subsistence. She also has learned that she can penetrate dangerous social-political boundaries—external boundaries of open space, male territoriality, and the ethnocentric walls that separated Canaanite and Israelite heritages—even though at great risk. She, too, can give praise to the “God of Israel” whose healing power has been mediated through an Israelite healer. For Jesus, the heart of his theocratic mission has been complicated in that he has extended the core value of mercy and crossed over his own defined limit to “go nowhere among the Gentiles” (10:5). This relatively isolated incident will not impair his final confrontation aimed at the heart of the political, economic, and religious Israelite system, the Jerusalem Temple. But, he must now take into account that an Israelite healer has become a patron or benefactor of an outcast gentile woman. The scope of his task among Israelite peasants, the impure, and expendables (the “lost sheep of the house of Israel”) now embraces a non-Israelite. By acknowledging the woman’s “great faith” he has placed her alongside such Israelite women as the woman who suffered from hemorrhages.

A story deemed laden with “Christian missionary theology and concerns” and therefore the “creation by first-generation Christians” (Meier: 660–61) can, through social-scientific inquiry, be seen in another light. In doing so we discover the possibility that it is a story rooted in the activity of Jesus. Matthew’s redaction of Mark does not necessarily take us farther away from the historical Jesus; quite the contrary, in this instance it underscores characteristics of Jesus’ ministry even while it features theological concerns of the *Sitz im Leben* of the later Christian community. Now, I am better prepared to ask how these stories functioned in the time of the Evangelist. Certainly, they remained large in the memory of the disciples and eventually became a challenge for the Matthean church in its universal vision. Both Jesus and the Evangelist bring out of their treasures “what is new and what is old” (13:52).

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CORRECTION

Please Note: Because of electronic transmission problems, the "Works Cited" section of Sabine Van Den Eynde's article in our previous issue (31:4) was distorted. The section is reproduced correctly below.

Works Cited

- Beal, Timothy K. 1999. ESTHER. BERIT OLAM: STUDIES IN HEBREW NARRATIVE AND POETRY. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press.
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