

THE HEALING OF THE HEMORRHAGING WOMAN:
MIRACLE OR MAGIC?

BY DONALD HOWARD BROMLEY

1124 GRANT STREET
YPSILANTI, MI 48197
don@annarborvineyard.org

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Introduction

In the story of the hemorrhaging woman (Mark 5:24b-34 // Matthew 9:20-22 // Luke 8:42b-48) we find a healing with suspiciously magical overtones. A bleeding woman surreptitiously touches Jesus' garment, believing that a mere touch will heal her. Upon this touch, an unseen power immediately flows from Jesus, instantly healing the woman. Jesus is unaware of who touched him, but knows that *power* (du, nami j) has gone out of him. He then seeks out the reluctant recipient of his cure.

As John Meier notes, "Those who wish to classify Jesus as a magician find this story a star witness. Conservative scholars, caught in exegetical straits, must maintain the story's historicity while trying to downplay or explain away the magical element."¹ The portrayal in this story of du, nami j is seemingly as an independent, automatic power, which is transferred through clothing. The act of causing supernatural effects through techniques, without the supplication of divine entities (e.g. prayer), is characteristic of *magic*.² However, in order to determine whether this story truly portrays a magical healing, we must examine the historical background and gospel tradition carefully.

¹ John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, 1st ed., 3 vols., The Anchor Bible Reference Library, vol. 2: Mentor, Message, and Miracles (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 709.

² Howard Clark Kee, "Magic and Messiah," in *Religion, Science, and Magic: In Concert and in Conflict*, ed. Jacob Neusner, Ernest S. Frerichs, and Paul Virgil McCracken Flesher (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 123.

Mana and *Du, nami j*

Integral to the notion of magic is the idea that the supernatural world is linked to the physical by invisible bonds of sympathy and antipathy.³ Through these bonds, and by the use of precise rituals, materials, and techniques, a magician can manipulate the spiritual world for his or her own ends. Related to this understanding of unseen bonds is the concept of *mana*, a Polynesian term⁴ that connotes an invisible ether-like substance that transmits unseen forces.⁵ *Mana* can be built up within a person or object, can be gained and lost, and was transferred through various rituals, all of which involved the act of touching.⁶ Belief in *mana* was widely prevalent in the ancient world, as it is within many third-world societies today.⁷ Neither was this concept of a *mana*-like energy

³ John M. Hull, *Hellenistic Magic and the Synoptic Tradition*, Studies in Biblical Theology; Second Series, vol. 28 (Naperville, Ill.: Alec R. Allenson, 1974), 37-38.

⁴ "That invisible power which is believed by the natives to cause all such effects as transcend their conception of the regular course of nature, and to reside in spiritual beings, whether in the spiritual part of living men or in the ghosts of the dead, being imparted by them to their names and to various things that belong to them, such as stones, snakes and indeed objects of all sorts, is that generally known as *mana*." R. H. Codrington, *The Melanesians: Studies in Their Anthropology and Folk-Lore*, Behavior Science Reprints ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1891; reprint, New Haven: HRAF Press, 1957), 191.

⁵ James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*, 1st Touchstone: Abridged ed. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 14.

⁶ David Burnett, *Unearthly Powers: A Christian Perspective on Primal and Folk Religion* (Eastbourne: MARC, 1988), 25-28.

⁷ Susan R. Garrett, "Light on a Dark Subject and Vice Versa: Magic and Magicians in the New Testament," in *Religion, Science, and Magic: In Concert and in Conflict*, ed. Jacob Neusner, Ernest S. Frerichs, and Paul Virgil McCracken Flesher (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 150.; Interestingly, it is somewhat analogous to the concept of *luck*, which might be thought of as an unseen force which is possessed in varying degrees by individuals. (Burnett, 26.)

unfamiliar to the Hellenistic world: the Stoics conceived of the deity as a universal pantheistic *force* or *power* (du, nami j).⁸

The earliest use of du, nami j in Greek literature is related to the verb du, nama i, meaning “to be able.” According to Hippocrates, du, nami j was defined as simply “the existential capacity to affect.” The most important use of du, nami j in Greek philosophy was for characteristics or properties that were active by effecting those things that were nearby. Each perceived du, nami j was thought of as a material substance in itself: an object was hot due to the presence of *Hot*, which was itself an object.⁹

A particular du, nami j is able to reproduce itself, or give its nature to, anything it is near or added to. For example, an object containing the characteristic of *heat* is able to transmit its power through physical contact. Likewise, a power automatically acts upon its opposite by destroying, forcing out, or replacing it, much as *hot* replaces *cold*.¹⁰ In this understanding, power is a neutral substance, which can be transmitted like any other material—it does not depend upon the volition of gods or mortals. A neutral, amoral understanding of *mana*-power, independent of will or personality, is integral to the magical worldview.

⁸ Walter Grundmann, "Dunamai, Dunatos, Dunatew, Adunatos, Adunatew, Dunamis, Dunastes, Dunamow, Endunamow," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 2:287-91.

⁹ Michel René Barnes, *The Power of God: Dunamis in Gregory of Nyssa's Trinitarian Theology* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2001), 21-24.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 28, 32.

The Story According to Mark

Mark describes the healing of the hemorrhaging woman as occurring “immediately” (ευϋϋϋ, j) in response to the woman’s touch, and Jesus is only aware afterward, as he senses that “power had gone out from him” (th.n evx auvtou/du, namin evxelqou/san). However, he does not know who has touched him, and asks his disciples, “Who touched my clothes?” In this way, Mark describes Jesus’ healing ability as involving a sort of substance-like energy that can flow from him *independently* through touch, in response to faith.¹¹ This conception of healing power, as though it were like an electric charge or current, is considered by many scholars to indicate a magical understanding on the part of Mark. According to John Hull, this earliest Gospel had “become saturated with the outlook of Hellenistic magic. The Jewish Son of Man was already radiant with the mysterious magical power of the Hellenistic wonder-working Saviour.”¹²

Despite the conception of du, nami j as a power that is transmitted through physical contact and which works independently of Jesus’ volition, Mark corrects any magical understanding when he emphasizes the role of faith.¹³ Jesus does not continue on his way, but seeks out the person who literally reached out to him. Upon discovering who touched him and why, he declares, “Your faith has healed you” (h` pi, stij sou se, swke, n se). In this way he *reinterprets* the actual means of her healing from one

¹¹ Graham H. Twelftree, *Jesus the Miracle Worker: A Historical & Theological Study* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 75.

¹² Hull, 142-3.

¹³ Meier, 709.

of magic to one of faith.¹⁴ Jesus in no way repudiates her act of touching, but suggests that her *faith* was instrumental (if not the source) of her healing. This was no accidental brush with a stranger; it was a risky endeavor to make physical contact with the person of Jesus, if even his garment.

The Story According to Luke

In the Gospel of Luke, the miracles take on an important role in validating Jesus' ministry. For Luke especially, the miracles demonstrate that God is the source of Jesus' powers.¹⁵ Distinctly Lukan is the attribution by the crowds of Jesus' miraculous healings to God (5:25-26; 7:16; 9:43; 13:13; 17:15; 18:43).¹⁶ These miracles provide evidence that God, or God's spirit, is at work in Jesus.¹⁷ Also, more than in Mark or Matthew, Jesus' teachings are balanced by his miracles, and miracles are portrayed as leading to legitimate, saving faith. To perceive miracles and mighty acts is clearly a basis for trust and discipleship in Luke.¹⁸ In Luke, as in Mark and Matthew, it is the woman's "faith" (*πίστις*), demonstrated by her touching Jesus' clothes, that saves her. It is in light of these Lukan emphases that we must interpret the story of the hemorrhaging woman.

¹⁴ Robert A. Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26*, ed. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 34A (Dallas: Word Books, 1989), 299.

¹⁵ Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 198.

¹⁶ Paul J. Achtemeier, "The Lukan Perspective on the Miracles of Jesus: A Preliminary Sketch," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 94 (1975): 549-54.

¹⁷ Harold Remus, *Jesus as Healer*, ed. Howard Clark Kee, Understanding Jesus Today (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 58.

¹⁸ Achtemeier: 554-6.

As is typical for Luke, he adapts the story so that the focus is shifted away from the recipient of the miracle and toward Jesus.¹⁹ Luke shortens Mark's detailed description of the woman's worsening condition and unsuccessful attempts to obtain healing, and merely mentions that nobody could cure her. Neither do we have Mark's description of the woman's inner thoughts, only that she approached Jesus from behind to touch him. It is likely that this omission is due to Luke's belief that the woman's hope contained an element of superstition. As Vernon K. Robbins observes, "The logic in the story is logic about Jesus and his powers, not about a logical progression from the woman's reasoning about healing to an occurrence of the healing."²⁰

As in Mark, Jesus is aware that "power has gone out" (aorist participle in Mark, perfect in Luke) of him, but Jesus' inner awareness of the transfer is no longer recorded. Instead we immediately have Jesus' question, "Who touched me?" and later his verbalization that "power has gone out from me" (8:45, 46). Luke includes the fact that everybody "denied" (*avrne, omai*) touching him (8:45), and further suggests the woman's desire to remain anonymous by adding that the woman saw that she could not "go unnoticed" (*lanqa, nw*). Also, Luke changes Jesus' initial question from "Who touched *my clothes*?" to "Who touched *me*?", shifting attention from the garment to Jesus and perhaps emphasizing that it is contact with the person of Jesus that is significant, not merely his cloak.²¹

¹⁹ Ibid.: 549.

²⁰ Vernon K. Robbins, "The Woman Who Touched Jesus' Garment: Socio-Rhetorical Analysis of the Synoptic Accounts.," *New Testament Studies* 33, no. 4 (1987): 513.

²¹ John Nolland, *Luke 1-9:20*, ed. Bruce M. Metzger, David A. Hubbard, and Glenn W. Barker, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 35A (Dallas: Word Books, 1989), 420.

Luke, with Mark, records the immediate cure of the woman's bleeding upon her touching of Jesus' clothes, before Jesus is aware of her identity. There is also the enigmatic mention of *du, nami j* as an objective force or substance, which simultaneously "goes out" (*evxe, rcomai*) of Jesus as he is touched, effecting the healing. The idea that healing power goes out of Jesus when he is touched is a major premise in Luke (6:19; 8:46).²² Hull suggests that the concept of power is more prominent and precise in Luke than elsewhere in the New Testament because for Luke, "Power occupies a place in his theory of the relationships between representatives of the spiritual world and mankind."²³

While Luke's use of *du, nami j* is thought by some to suggest a magical worldview,²⁴ there are also indications that Luke views Jesus' miracles in less magical ways than his sources.²⁵ John Hull describes *du, nami j* and *evxousi, a* in Luke as weapons in a cosmic conflict, which he argues "is the framework of a magical universe."²⁶ Luke indeed has a particular emphasis on Jesus' battling of diabolical forces in both exorcism *and* healing.²⁷ Notable is how Jesus "rebuked" (*evpitima, w*) Peter's mother-in-law's fever (4:39), a verb that elsewhere is related to exorcism, and nowhere else is used for healings.

In spite of Luke's use of *du, nami j*, there is no evidence that his worldview is any more magical than that of the other evangelists. While Luke suggests that objects (in

²² Robbins: 512.

²³ Hull, 107.

²⁴ Ibid., 87, 144.

²⁵ Achtemeier: 557.

²⁶ Hull, 87.

²⁷ Green, 198.

this case clothes) coming from or connected to Jesus are an effective means of cure, he is reflecting a belief that pervades all four Gospels (see Mark 5:25-34; 8:22-26; Matt 9:20-22; John 9:1-7).²⁸ Also, Luke omits Mark's healing of the blind man of Bethsaida (8:22-26), with its use of spittle and its two-stage healing, omits the healing of the deaf-mute (7:31-37), with its use of spittle, groaning, and the Aramaic *Ephphatha*, and omits the Aramaic *Talitha koum* from the healing of Jairus' daughter (5:41). These stories are most frequently cited as reflecting magical practices, including the foreign "word of power."

With Mark and Matthew, Luke makes it clear that the hemorrhaging woman's faith was requisite for her healing, "Daughter, your faith has healed you" (8:48). Paul Achtemeier rightly observes, "That Luke is writing for people who understood, and perhaps even credited, magical practices could hardly be denied; but he does more, I would argue, to combat such belief than he does, if only inadvertently, to foster it"²⁹

The Story According to Matthew

As does Mark, Matthew records the thoughts of the bleeding woman approaching Jesus, "If I only touch his cloak, I will be healed" (9:21). However, in this much-shortened version of the story there is no mention of the transfer of *du, nami j*, or Jesus' awareness of it, and the healing is only effected after Jesus' pronouncement, "Your faith has healed you" (9:22). Upon these words, Matthew states that she was healed "from that moment" (*avpo. th/j w[raj evkei, nhj*). As Hull describes:

²⁸ Achtemeier: 556.

²⁹ *Ibid.*: 558.

Matthew changes the order of the healing so that the woman is not healed by the touching of the cloak and there is no power, no miracle-working aura surrounding Jesus which the superstitious can tap. The impersonal atmosphere of compulsion in Mark's account, where the woman manages to control the power for herself, is transformed into a personal faith relationship.³⁰

Matthew's alteration of this narrative has suggested to many that Matthew has purged what he considered magical elements from the story.³¹ At the very least, he was "conscious of some embarrassment about the story."³² He brings the woman's healing into direct relationship with Jesus' healing command, and removes any feature of the story that might have suggested a magical miracle. This was due, it is thought, to a reaction by Matthew against magic, and his awareness that certain techniques of Jesus might be construed as such. Like Luke, Matthew omits Mark's technique-laden stories of the deaf-mute and the blind man of Bethsaida. And in the Beelzebul controversy, where Luke has Jesus driving out spirits "by the finger of God" (evn daktu, lw| qeou/), Matthew has him driving them out "by the Spirit of God" (evn pneu, mati qeou/). There is suggestion that this change is explained by the association *finger of God* had with magical technique.³³

Matthew tends to prune away graphic details and focus on the request for healing and Jesus' healing command.³⁴ Luke (like Mark) will summarize Jesus' healings vividly; "And laying his hands on each one, he healed them. Moreover, demons came out of many

³⁰ Hull, 136.

³¹ Ibid., 116.

³² I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, ed. I. Howard Marshall and W. Ward Gasque, 1st American ed., The New International Greek Testament Commentary, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 346.

³³ Hull, 129, 144.

³⁴ Remus, 45-46.

people, shouting, ‘You are the Son of God!’ But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew he was the Messiah.” (4:40-41, TNIV). The same scene is described by Matthew with more subdued language that is free of details; “He drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick” (8:16). Matthew describes the ease and simplicity with which Jesus the Messiah performed his miracles, unlike the magician who must rely on magical words and techniques.³⁵

The Woman’s Faith

Commentators on this passage agree that faith is the predominant theme for all three Synoptists. Augustine commented, “Few are they who by faith touch him; multitudes are they who throng about him.”³⁶ We know that many are pressing in upon Jesus, but only with the woman’s touch is there a transfer of power and a healing. We can only speculate as to whether there are other sick persons among the multitude who come into contact with Jesus, but if there are (and it seems likely), we can deduce that healing power does not go out to all of them.³⁷ Indeed, there can be no doubt that it is not merely the touch that conveys healing, but that both conscious intention and faith are required as well.³⁸ As I. Howard Marshall describes, “The woman’s faith has saved her because it

³⁵ Hull, 135.

³⁶ Thomas C. Oden and Christopher A. Hall, eds., *Mark*, ed. Thomas C. Oden, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament*, vol. 2 (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 75.

³⁷ Hendrik van der Loos, *The Miracles of Jesus*, ed. W. C. van Unnik et al., trans. T. S. Preston, *Supplements to Novum Testamentum*, vol. 9 (Leiden,: E. J. Brill, 1965), 516.

³⁸“To ask whether it is faith or *du, nami j* that heals the woman is the same as asking whether it is water or the act of drinking that quenches thirst, or whether it is our legs or the power of motion that carries us forward. Each needs the other to achieve the desired

has permitted the ‘going forth power’ of Jesus to do its intended work in her life... Faith saves because it allows God’s saving power in Jesus to save.”³⁹

While all three evangelists clearly indicate the role of faith in the woman’s healing, we do not know for certain the nature of her faith. While it was likely not in Jesus’ divinity, it was at least in his ability.⁴⁰ She knows of Jesus as a powerful miracle-worker, one who emanates healing power from his person, but likely does not have any awareness of his messiahship.

While we know for sure only that the woman desires healing, Jesus’ response to her touch makes it clear that he wishes more for her. For Mark especially, salvation is the activity of God, which suggests perhaps her faith is in God’s saving action.⁴¹

Nevertheless, while the woman seeks to be “saved” (sw, | zw), Mark makes it clear that her touch brings only physical healing (iva, omai) of her body (tw/ | sw, mati).

The various uses of sw, | zw in the New Testament make it clear that the concept of healing and salvation overlap, and are not completely distinguishable. As in this story, “Healing of the body is never purely physical, and the salvation of the soul is never purely spiritual, but both are combined in the total deliverance of the whole man.”⁴²

While the woman may think that she has obtained what she needs with her physical healing, Jesus sees it differently. The woman needs contact with Jesus himself to be fully saved, and not simply anonymous access to his power. The woman has to realize

end.” Christopher D. Marshall, *Faith as a Theme in Mark's Narrative*, ed. G. N. Stanton, Monograph Series; Society for New Testament Studies, vol. 64 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 108-9.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Eric E. May, "'...For Power Went Forth from Him...' (Luke 6:19)," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 14, no. 2 (1952): 98.

⁴¹ Marshall, *Faith as a Theme in Mark's Narrative*, 108.

⁴² John Wilkinson, *Health and Healing: Studies in New Testament Principles and Practice* (Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1980), 33.

that “power in religion without personal relationship and public commitment is little better than superstition or magic.”⁴³ It is for this reason that Jesus pauses his journey to search her out, and why he requires her to come forward and acknowledge her action before the whole crowd. Jesus concludes with a familial term of affection, “daughter” (quga, thr), further emphasizing the establishment of a personal bond between him and the woman.⁴⁴

The Tassels of Jesus’ Garment

While it is clear that all three authors have discouraged a magical interpretation of the woman’s healing, we are still left with the task of understanding her touch of Jesus’ garment. Clearly she believes that a mere touch will heal her, and in both Mark and Luke her belief is justified. Mark has already mentioned Jesus’ clothes as instrumental in healings (3:10), and will do so again (6:56). What we must explore is *why* people (including the woman) believe that physical contact was necessary for her healing.

Matthew and Luke have the woman touching the “edge” (kra, spedon) of Jesus’ cloak. This is likely a reference to the “tassels” (tciyci) that Jewish men of Jesus’ time wore at the corners of their garments, according to Old Testament law (Num 15:38-40; Deut 22:12).⁴⁵ According to Jewish literature, it was believed that the tassels of a holy

⁴³ Nolland, 423.

⁴⁴ Marshall, *Faith as a Theme in Mark's Narrative*, 106-8.

⁴⁵ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke (1-9): Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, 1st ed., The Anchor Bible, vol. 28 (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1981), 746.

man possessed magical powers.⁴⁶ There is also evidence of belief in the special power of clothing in the Old Testament, such as in Elijah's mantle (2 Kgs 2:8-14).⁴⁷ Similarly, within wider Christian circles (cf. Luke 6:19; Acts 5:15; 19:12), there existed a belief that healing power could be transmitted through a healer's possessions or clothing.⁴⁸ The gospel authors seem to share the view that clothing is an extension of and carries with it a person's power and authority.⁴⁹ The woman, like many of her contemporaries, believes that a person's power communicated itself through the clothing they wore.⁵⁰

Having the woman believe that she "only" needed to touch his garment, or even just the *tassel* of the garment, also draws attention to her faith in Jesus' ability to heal. The act of touching is an expression of her faith in him as a powerful healer.⁵¹ It is also possible that Matthew and Luke are interpreting the woman's action as a fulfillment of messianic prophecy; "In those days ten men from all languages and nations will take firm hold of one Jew by the *hem of his robe* (ἄν"κ') and say, 'Let us go with you, because we have heard that God is with you'" (Zech 8:23, emphasis mine).⁵²

⁴⁶ Craig A. Evans, *Luke*, ed. W. Ward Gasque, New International Biblical Commentary, vol. 3 (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1990), 138.

⁴⁷ Twelftree, 133.

⁴⁸ Marshall, *Faith as a Theme in Mark's Narrative*, 105-6.

⁴⁹ Twelftree, 133.

⁵⁰ Loos, 514.

⁵¹ Twelftree, 118-9.

⁵² John T. Cummings, "The Tassel of His Cloak: Mark, Luke, Matthew -- and Zechariah," in *Studia Biblica 1978*, ed. E. A. Livingstone (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1980), 51-52.

Du, nami j Power

The understanding of *du, nami j* as an objectively discernable, emanating force, which transmits healing through touch, is most clearly seen in the story of the hemorrhaging woman in Mark and Luke. While we cannot deny that this healing power was transmitted instantly through touch, and prior to Jesus' awareness of who touched him, the story as a whole does not lend itself to a magical, *manistic* interpretation of Jesus' power.

Scholars have long argued that the seemingly automatic healing should be interpreted as demonstrating a *manistic* understanding of Jesus' healing power. David Friedrich Strauss, demonstrating the mythological nature of the Gospels in his seminal *The Life of Jesus*, compares Jesus in this story to "a charged electrical battery, which a mere touch will discharge."⁵³ This power radiated some sort of field around Jesus, which included his clothes.⁵⁴ The reference to *duna, meij* (pl. of *du, nami j*) was common in Hellenistic culture, referring to healings by physicians, gods, and heroes.

The use of *du, nami j* in the Septuagint predominantly refers to military "forces" or "armies" (lyIx; or ab'c'), or the concept of power as "strength," "might," or "ability" (hr'WbG>, x;Ko or z[o). As John Hull notes, "There is hardly a trace in the LXX of the particular meaning given to the word in Mark and Luke."⁵⁵ *du, nami j* is not used in reference to miracles or miracle-working power, which leads Hull to the conclusion that,

⁵³ David Friedrich Strauss, *The Life of Jesus, Critically Examined*, trans. George Eliot, 3 vols., vol. 2 (London: George Woodfall and Son, 1846; reprint, Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1998), 2:318.

⁵⁴ Hull, 106.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 108-9.

“The New Testament use we are examining does not spring from the Hebrew conception of nature and history, but from the ancient universal idea of the magical miracle, which in turn rests upon a primitive conception of *mana*.”⁵⁶

While Graham Twelftree is right to note that the majority of usage in the Gospels is in keeping with Septuagintal usage,⁵⁷ there is no parallel for the particular use of *du, nami j* as a materialistic, emanating force, as in Mark and Luke. Nevertheless, Luke uses *du, nami j* polysemously, so that the two instances that suggest an impersonal, *manistic* force (6:19; 8:46) must be interpreted within the context of his broader usage.⁵⁸ While Luke recognizes that *du, nami j* can function and appear as a *mana*-like substance, he recognizes it as much more than that.⁵⁹ Luke understands Jesus’ miracles as *acts of God*, and that the source of his power is the Holy Spirit.

It is not so much the fact that an emanating power is instrumental in this healing that has so perplexed scholars as the fact that it appears to happen automatically, without Jesus’ volition. Strauss is right to observe that this idea is “repugnant to the Christian consciousness, which determines the fullness of power resident in Jesus to have been entirely under the governance of his will.”⁶⁰ We must also object to the argument made by some scholars that Jesus already knew who had touched him,⁶¹ and consciously and

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Twelftree, 172.

⁵⁸ Max Turner, "The Spirit and the Power of Jesus' Miracles in the Lucan Conception," *Novum Testamentum* 33, no. 2 (1991): 137.

⁵⁹ Twelftree, 172.

⁶⁰ Strauss, 2:318.

⁶¹ Cf. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 345.

intentionally performed the healing before asking his question, “Who touched me?”⁶²

This argument that Jesus *feigned* ignorance in order to prompt the woman’s acknowledgement of her action,⁶³ although possible, does not appear to be the most straightforward reading of the text. Neither does it appear that the healing was not complete until Jesus’ later pronouncement (despite Matthew’s redaction). We agree with James Dunn that the power, while not magical or automatic, was also not solely at Jesus’ disposal,⁶⁴ and further suggest that it also appears to have its own *volition*.⁶⁵

Conclusion

The story of the hemorrhaging woman challenges our understanding of Jesus’ healing power. The discomfort many scholars have with this story is born out of later Christological conceptions, but should not affect our interpretation of what happened.⁶⁶ Nevertheless, the healing does not constitute a magical miracle. According to our definition above, there would have to be evidence of a technique which was automatically effective. While the hidden touch of the woman at first glance appears to be automatic (in that it was immediate), we have shown that it may also be understood as supplicative, and further examination reveals it to be within the domain of a religious miracle.

⁶² Cf. May.

⁶³ Cf. Nolland, 420.

⁶⁴ James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit: A Study of the Religious and Charismatic Experience of Jesus and the First Christians as Reflected in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), 74-75.

⁶⁵ Cf. Loos, 516.

⁶⁶ Fitzmyer, 746.

While the aim of magic is solely to achieve personal benefit by the manipulation and coercion of unseen forces, the emphasis in this story is rather on *faith* in the person of Jesus. The woman's inner thoughts, and the use of "save" (σω, | zw), rather than "heal" (qerapeu, w), suggest that her trust resides not simply in some magical source of healing *mana*, but specifically in the presence of God's saving power in Jesus.⁶⁷ Also, if Jesus were content with simply being an object of healing power, there would be no need for him to seek out the woman who touched him, yet this is precisely what he does. Jesus brings the healing into the realm of *relationship with* and *faith in* him. He banishes any idea of a magical healing.⁶⁸ As James Dunn observes, "It is this *dependence* on winning a response, on winning people to faith, which distinguishes Jesus' *dunameis* from the possible parallels in Jewish or Hellenistic circles, where faith plays no part."⁶⁹

That this healing is not magical is evident, but it suggests a mode of healing that is contrary to what we might expect. Jesus *experiences* a transfer of healing power: "At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him" (Mark 5:30). This transfer is effected immediately by the touch of his garment: "[She] touched his cloak... Immediately her bleeding stopped" (Mark 5:27, 29). While we would not suggest that this power transfer was contrary to Jesus' will (he never refused to heal), it was not something he *consciously* effected. The most logical explanation is that the woman was healed by the power of the God's Holy Spirit, residing in Jesus, upon her act of faith (the touch). This power is not like magic (or electricity for that matter) in that it is not

⁶⁷ Marshall, *Faith as a Theme in Mark's Narrative*, 105-6.

⁶⁸ Loos, 517.

⁶⁹ Dunn, 74-75.

automatic; it does not affect everyone who touches Jesus, but rather acts in response to the woman's faith. We conclude that while Jesus is not aware of who touched him or why, the Holy Spirit is, and acts on his (the Spirit's) own volition. There is no magical technique involved; Luke makes it clear in the story of Simon Magus (Acts 8:18-24) that the power of the Holy Spirit is not a magical technique or *mana*-like substance that may be bought and sold.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ Cf. Hull, 107.

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