

Doctoral Thesis Abstract

Thesis title: Healing Drama in the Isaianic Discourse. A Dialogical Analysis of the Suffering Servant Song (Isa. 52:13–53:12) in the Context of the Book of Prophet Isaiah

Author: Martin Dănuț-Daniel

Divine healing, as need and as possibility, is a topic often debated, especially in Pentecostal-charismatic movements, where the position of believers on this subject is generally positive, but also in confessional contexts where the actuality of miraculous healings is a matter of controversy. This concern has given rise to various devotional and instructive writings - testimonies of believers about miraculous healings, statements about God's availability to the suffering believer, and even suggestions on how to access the divine grace for healing. However, the situation is definitely different in the academic context. Not only that in the theological literature the topic of healing is not treated with due care, but even when it is debated, in most

cases theological arguments fail to overcome basic concerns such as cessationism and the counter-arguments brought against it. Consequently, although a strong presence in the biblical literature, the divine activity of healing has not been adequately studied exegetically, nor has it received due attention in the treatises on biblical, historical, or contemporary theology. This shortcoming is especially evident in studies on Old Testament literature. Therefore, an appropriate contextualisation of the present work within the research literature on the topic of healing, the thesis surveys both specific studies aimed at interpreting pericopes that describe miraculous healings and also studies that address the socio-historical and literary context in which these pericopes fall, as well as the methodology used, according to the specifics of the literary genre in which each of the texts analysed fits.

Starting from this premise, that is, from the fact that the exegetical literature addresses only superficially the subject of the manifestation of divine healing activity in the world of ancient Israel, this thesis offers an analysis of the theme of healing in the book of the Prophet Isaiah, paying special attention to how this theme is present in the so-called Suffering Servant Song (Isa. 52:13–53:12).

The thesis brings both methodological and thematic contributions. Methodologically, it is first observed that the preferred position in exegetical studies about the divine healing activity is to deny the historical value of the pericopes in which such acts are described. The position of commentators in general is that these descriptions of divine acts of healing belong to fiction rather than to the world of historical realities and consequently to the realm of theological statements. Another category of researchers limited themselves to evaluating healing practices in the ancient Near East from a historical-anthropological perspective, completely disregarding any religious or cultic dimension of healing. This approach, and others like it, have obviously reduced the theological significance of the divine acts of healing by subjecting the biblical pericopes that describe them to purely historical evaluations.

The present thesis also recognises the fact that there is an interpretive facet diametrically opposed to this historical approach, but just as harmful from a theological point of view. In some contemporary Christian interpretations, biblical pericopes about healing receive exaggerated attention, unjustified by the literary contexts in which they appear. Such exaggerations have given rise to unjustified interpretations and practices, which intend to

reproduce the acts of healing described in the Scripture within contemporary contexts, presumably in order to "provoke" the repetition of the miracles of healing described in the biblical text.

The present study is intended to be a response to the contradiction of methodological approaches and interpretations of biblical healings mentioned above. The thesis offers a critical examination of the theme of healing in the book of the prophet Isaiah, paying special attention to the way in which this theme is rendered in the so-called Suffering Servant Song (Isa. 52:13–53:12), in order to bring to the fore the possibility of a critical theological approach to the subject of healing. It is shown that healing was a real, crucial experience in the life of the Israelite prophets, and consequently in the experience of ancient Israel, both before and after the exile. The thesis supported, therefore, in this paper is that an analysis of the biblical text that gives due methodological attention to the dramatic relational universe portrayed in Isaiah shows that YHWH uses the prophet (in this case Isaiah) as a divine agent for healing both the people of Israel and others. nations.

This argument is made by appealing to a dialogical approach, following the Bakhtian model, combined with aspects of analysis of the dramatic character of the prophetic literature. This approach

demonstrates the importance given to the subject of healing in the book of the prophet Isaiah, in the socio-religious context of ancient Israel. In this way, the study contributes to the articulation of an Old Testament theological vision regarding the divine act of miraculous healing of the nation. At the same time, this approach makes a contribution to the study of the isaianic text because it portrays prophecy as a development of a healing drama.

An important aspect in the development of the proposed analysis is the interaction with the themes discovered in the literature on a wider thematic area and their application to the isaianic text. Thus, topics such as: the mode of relational development between YHWH, the prophet and the people of Israel are explored; studies addressing the theme of healing in both testaments are reviewed, and a dialogue with studies that examine the dramatic nature of prophetic literature in general and Isaiah literature in particular is undertaken. In this way, a range of images is drawn, particularly highlighted by the proposed dialogic method, as elements in a drama of healing. Thus, in the conclusion of the study the images identified include: YHWH as a healer; YHWH as God, creator and ruler of history; the covenant initiated by God as a healing covenant; the blessing of an enhanced spirituality as the central theme of Isaiah's prophecy;

The Messiah as healer; the Israelite eschatological age as an age of healing.

The thesis also contributes to the shaping of a distinct literary approach in the analysis of prophetic texts. By appealing to various studies that theorise aspects of the literary analysis of biblical texts, this thesis advances a way of exegetical analysis that takes into account the dialogical character of the text. Although not a new method in biblical theology, the proposed dialogical understanding still brings new elements because it is applied specifically to the drama of healing. Consequently, we discover two distinct ways of portraying divine activity in Isaiah: First, we see God as a god who relates to man in a very personal way, interested in dialogue and interaction with the beings he created. Second, God appears as a merciful and at the same time sovereign god - a God who remains Sovereign even in the context of exile, used by Him to educate the people, and not to destroy them. Although, because of His sovereignty, YHWH punishes the sin of the people of Israel, because of His grace, these manifestations of divine wrath turn into redemptive actions. Thus, although God's justice manifests itself as judgment, made true in the exile of the people of Israel to Babylon, this experience ultimately proves to be beneficial. Beneficial for Israel because in exile this

people come to know YHWH as the only Lord and beneficial for the other nations because, due to the special destiny of the people of Israel as the Lord's Servant, they too will be healed.

The thesis presented is structured in seven distinct chapters as follows. In the first chapter the theme of healing is framed biblically, historically and theologically. The chapter presents the subject of healing in Old Testament and New Testament biblical literature, at various times throughout Christian history, and concludes with a discussion of contemporary theological approaches to healing. The second chapter is dedicated to the analysis of the isaianic text in the literature on this biblical writing. Starting from a more general perspective on Isaiah's prophecy, the discussion finally focuses on the pericope proposed for examination (Isa. 52: 13–53: 12), showing that the different interpretive approaches to this text, although rich in theological content, were not able to adequately highlight the healing message present in the book of the prophet Isaiah.

Chapters three and four are dedicated to a methodological discussion focused on the interpretation of the chosen text. First of all, the idea of analysing prophetic literature as dramatic literature is introduced. Second, the chapter introduces Bakhthian dialogism as a way of conceptualising

Isaiah's rhetoric and consequently as a way of expressing the concepts of Old Testament biblical theology. Thus, a fusion of Bakhthian dialogism with an analysis of the dramatic characteristics of the isaianic literature is achieved. This methodological exposition represents a significant contribution of the thesis presented to the field of theological knowledge in general and specifically to the modalities of theological analysis of Old Testament prophetic texts.

In chapters five and six the method described is used to make a dialogic-exegetical analysis of Isaiah's prophecy in general and then, in a detailed analysis, the dialogic contours of the healing drama presented in Isaiah 52:13–53:12. The interpretation of this pericope as a healing drama is a second significant contribution to the field of Isaiah research and, of course, to Old Testament theology in general.

Finally, chapter seven provides a synthesis of the commentary made up to this point, identifying the elements that create the universe of the isaianic imaginary of healing, starting from the particular aspects of the commentary provided and offering applied conclusions in order to outline a possible Old Testament theology of healing. This last chapter also offers a third major contribution to the field of study because it theologially theorises the biblical motive

of divine intervention for healing at the individual and community levels.

The present study proposes a dialogic model for doing biblical theology, as demonstrated in the Isaiah's healing tradition. As such, two specific methodological moves are needed. First, the book of Isaiah, as a context in which cases of healing dialogic drama appear, is treated as a "discursive universe." The consequence of this is that discussions on textual history and textual transmission are kept to a minimum; instead, the analysis focuses on the dialogic aspect of the text, and this with a special emphasis on the *dramatis personae* that interact in healing contexts. This method of reading the text is called in the thesis "dialogic drama", because it brings together the Bakhtinian dialogic methodology and the concept of "literary drama" which refers to the literary portrayal of the architecture of feelings. Thus, "dialogic drama" in this study refers to the analysis of the dialogic interaction, in the context of emotional action, between the characters in the text of Isaiah.

The conclusion of the thesis summarises first of all the findings regarding "healing" in the book of Isaiah in general and in the Suffering Servant Song in particular, and secondly it offers some implications resulting from the methodology used in the study. It is concluded that in the Isaianic tradition healing refers

to both spiritual and physical restoration, and these both on a personal and community level. Thus, in terms of physical healing, liberation includes restoration from disease, as well as political liberation at the community level. In terms of the spiritual dimension, healing includes restoring a covenant relationship with YHWH. Finally, in terms of methodological implications, the conclusion shows that reading the prophetic texts analysed as "dialogic drama" provides a methodological model with great potential for application, both in the analysis of other biblical texts and as an analytical model for other literary corpora similar to the biblical literature.