Jesus and the shamanic complex: First steps in utilising a social type model*

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ABSTRACT
The first steps are taken in exploring a shamanic model for dealing with the divergent gospel traditions. Besides a description of the shaman as an identifiable social type, this study explores a number of clues in the Jesus tradition which might support the hypothesis that the shamanic complex is a useful model for analysing Jesus' social type.

1 JESUS' SOCIAL TYPE AND THE QUEST FOR THE HISTORICAL JESUS

Borg (1987:25) identifies three streams in historical Jesus depictions: 'Attention is directed to what he [Jesus] said, and sometimes to what he did, but seldom is attention paid to what he was'. What Jesus was, historically speaking, Borg says is the key to understanding him as a historical figure. Within this stream of historical Jesus research the quest can be seen as the search for an answer to the following question:

What sort of man and what sort of career, in the society of first century Palestine, would have occasioned the beliefs, called into being the communities, and given rise to the practices, stories, and sayings that then appeared, of which selected reports and collections have come down to us? (Smith 1978:5–6).

In line with the stream of research which suggests that who Jesus was should be the point of departure in the quest for the historical Jesus, the present study was generated by current responses to the question as to which social type best captures Jesus as historical person.1 At least two trends can be identified which deal with his social type in quite different ways.

1 This is a revised version of a paper read at the Social scientific criticism of the New Testament group of the SBL in 1998, Orlando, Florida. Financial support by the University of South Africa is acknowledged. The ideas expressed here are, however, my own.

1 It is accepted that Jesus' social type is one of the entrance points to the cultural matrix of this historical person. A second entrance would be via an ethnographic examination of the sources and their possible narrators within the process and social dynamics of communication in antiquity. Research in this direction is concerned with historically and culturally responsible ways of conceptualising the origins, development and transmission of Jesus traditions. Clear signs of this approach can be seen in the studies of Botha on oral traditional literature (see 1991), on rumour research (see 1993) and on gossip research (see 1998) and that of Kelber

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The first trend can be described as the add-on solution. While Jesus is identified as belonging to a specific social type, features from other social types are added onto the picture. Davies (1995:21), for example, claims that 'Jesus as a spirit possessed healer, is the best modality through which to understand the historical Jesus'. However, along the way Jesus as prophet is added to the picture and in a later study he explicitly refers to Jesus as 'spirit possessed prophet/healer' (Davies 1996). Smith (1978) who describes Jesus primarily as a magician adds properties from several other social types, such as teacher, divine man and prophet. Many scholars admit that in addition to their identified social type, Jesus performed functions traditionally found outside that social type. Crossan's (1991:421) 'peasant Jewish Cynic' combines magic and meals, healer and sage. Funk's (1996:143, 253) 'teacher of wisdom, a sage' is also a 'minor miracle worker' while Sanders's (1985:239) 'eschatological prophet' also gains fame from miracles and teaching.

The second can be described as the combination trend where Jesus is linked to a large number of social types simultaneously. One researcher proposes that 'a combination of teacher, prophet, healer best captures historically his social identity or role' (Telford 1994:55) while another argues that Jesus was partly a 'sensitive poet, partly an apocalyptic prophet, partly a miracle-worker and exorcist, a charismatic leader and an extreme ethicist' (Theissen 1996:172). Not infrequently, Sanders (1985:239) says, 'one will read that he combined styles or types'. A major voice in this trend is Borg (see 1995:8–10) who identifies five types of religious figures known cross-culturally as well as within the history of Israel: the religious ecstatic, the healer, the wisdom teacher, the social prophet and the movement founder. Jesus did not conform to a single social type since he 'had characteristics of several different types of religious personalities' (Borg 1994:29). The implication is clear: Jesus combined five social types known in history and cross-culturally.

Did Jesus indeed combine the social types which, in the case of other historical figures, are distinct and separate? The question inevitably arises: Is there really no social type well established historically and cross-culturally which can account for the diverse functions ascribed to Jesus? Furthermore, is this second trend perhaps the remnant of an 'unique Jesus' —ideology? Can this (artificial) combination of social types in the life of Jesus be avoided? In other words, is there a social type which can account for the variety of legitimate and relevant traditions about Jesus? The search for a social type which can account for the variety of traditions and functions

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(1994) on modalities of communication in antiquity.

2 Borg initially identified only four social types (see 1987:16).

3 It should be noted that Borg admits that Jesus as a spirit person is foundational to everything else he was. Being a spirit-filled person (or charismatic holy man) is to him (1987:51, 71) 'the key for understanding the central dimensions of his ministry: as healer, sage, revitalization movement founder, and prophet' (see also Borg 1994:31).
ascribed to Jesus arises from these questions. The hypothesis of this study is that the shamanic complex offers a model of a social type or religious practitioner, who in a natural and regular way, combines the features and functions often attributed to Jesus.

As far as I know, a shamanic model has never before been proposed for describing Jesus’ social type or social personage. A study by Rousseau (1993) on Jesus as exorcist of a kind identifies three features in the Jesus tradition which correspond with shamanic traits: Jesus was accused by some friends of insanity (Mk 3:21), some blamed him of being possessed by an evil spirit (Mk 3:30) and the habit of withdrawal (Mk 1:12–13; Mt 4:11; Lk 4:1–13). I have come across two other scholars who refer to Jesus’ baptism and his subsequent wandering into the wilderness as typical of the beginning of a shaman’s career (see §3.2, below). In a study of mediator figures in Hekhalot literature, Davila (1994:788) remarks: ‘...the framework of shamanism as presented by anthropologists has proved useful in studying the Israelite prophets, and it may be worthwhile to apply it to the Jesus traditions’. However, none of these studies actually apply such a model to the Jesus traditions.

The aim of this study is not to offer a complete and well-argued case for Jesus as shaman but to bring together a number of insights and studies which point in this direction. Therefore, my aim is exploratory and experimental in suggesting that the shamanic complex might offer a valuable model for dealing with Jesus’ social type. It will be suggested that this model might account for the variety of traditions attributed to Jesus without the need of abandoning most of the (inauthentic) material which does not contribute to a predetermined social type. As will become clear, I am in this study less concerned about making the shaman label stick to Jesus as historical person than about accounting for the pattern or style of social type that is ascribed to him.

2 THE SHAMANIC COMPLEX AND THE SHAMAN AS SOCIAL TYPE

2.1 Towards a working definition of the shamanic complex

One of the challenges in cross-cultural interpretation is to find terms with a strong cross-cultural currency which allow a comparative stance. That is to say, a stance in which commonalities and differences can easily be dealt with since in order to speak comparatively some sort of ‘general language’ (Lambek 1989:37) is necessary. In order to illustrate that the shamanic model can be a useful tool for understanding Jesus’ social type, it is inter alia necessary to show that the terms shaman and shamanism

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4 Different terms, such as religious type or religious practitioner are also used by researchers in this field of research. Social type or social personage are, however, preferred because religion was embedded in other social institutions in Jesus’ day.
have such cross-cultural currency. The preconditions of such a definition is that it should demarcate the terrain without fixing the details of the landscape.

Therefore, instead of a narrow definition of a shaman, the shamanic complex will be developed as an integrated and complex cultural pattern for understanding social types in a variety of cultural systems.

2.2 Defining the shamanic complex

The term shaman is employed by anthropologists and scholars of comparative religion for a very wide range of ethnographic samples. However, despite the variety of definitions, some commonalities remain secure. They are, on the one hand, specific features (controlled altered states of consciousness [=ASC] on behalf of the community) and on the other hand the recurring presence of features and functions in fixed combinations. These commonalities brought Lewis (1986:84) to the insight that,

...all the features that have been distinguished as signifying separate phenomena associated with contrasting social formations (past or present) actually regularly occur together within a single cultural context....All these features, which others have seen as separate self-sustaining styles of religiosity, are in reality constituent elements in the composite shamanistic complex.

The shamanic complex therefore is a family of traditions which as a regularly occurring pattern in many cultural systems consists of a configuration of certain features (ASC experiences) and certain social functions (such as healing, mediating, prophecy, exorcism and spirit possession) which flow from these experiences. It is not so much the individual elements but the combination of a number of aspects which constitutes the shamanic complex as an identifiable phenomenon in many cultural settings. As a combination of regularly occurring features and functions it does not

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5 It is commonly claimed that the term shaman (from which shaman comes) originated from the Tungus people of Siberia, meaning something like 'one who is excited, moved, raised' (Walsh 1989:2; Lewis 1989:45). Others argue that the meaning of the original Tungus-Mongol word, shaman is 'to know' (see Ripinsky-Naxon 1993:69). There is, however, no certainty about the origin of this term in the Tungus language which is spoken by about 6% of the inhabitants of Siberia (see Thorpe 1993:19). The situation, as Reinhard (1976:14) points out, is that 'there is a Tungus word, its ultimate origin and meaning uncertain, associated with a Tungus phenomenon, its ultimate origin and original form uncertain' (see also Voigt 1984:14–15; Thorpe 1993:21–22). It is not even certain whether the modern term shaman is derived from the Tungus word. Some scholars propose that the modern European forms, for example, in French or German, come directly from the modern Persian word saman (see Voigt 1984:14; Grim 1983:15–16).

6 Whatever the origin of the term shaman, it has been widely adopted by anthropologists and scholars of comparative religion to refer to specific groups of religious practitioners in diverse cultures, including medicine men, witchdoctors, sorcerers, magicians, healers and seers (see Walsh 1989:2, Winkelman 1990:309; Gilberg 1984:21).
appear in this pattern amongst other religious specialists.7

This suggestion is in line with the argument of Eliade (see 1964:5-6) that the term shaman should be used in its strict and proper sense (as a culture-specific term) but it can also be extended to the numerous parallels in other cultural settings. Seen in this way the shamanic complex can serve as 'an explanatory context for investigation rather than as a definitive description of the phenomenon' (Grim 1983:11). According to this argument shamanism is constituted by a combination of elements which exist independently elsewhere but are integrated in this complex with a particular world-view and which validate specific techniques. As a general model it contains less specifics of particular cases but has the advantage of covering more cases which belong to the same pattern.

From this point of view a shaman is a person within a particular cultural system who successfully operates within the parameters of the shamanic complex; someone who combines controlled altered states of consciousness or non-ordinary psychic states with a variety of social function on behalf of the group or community.8

It should be realised that within the family of traditions,9 many religious specialists who have unique labels in their own cultures, belong to this complex. Therefore, it does not really matter whether the practitioner in this complex is called shaman or nganga, isangoma, angakoq, tielajia or yetama.10 It should not be unexpected that local terms are used for describing similar phenomena belonging to the complex. From this perspective one realises that it is but by historical accident that we are considering shamanism and not say ngangism, isangomaism or tielajiaism. Had the complex first been identified and studied in Southern Africa (or elsewhere), it might have been the case that one of the other concepts would have won the day (see Thorpe 1993:7). Given the historical development of the term, we 'should not be afraid to call shamans shamans' (Lewis 1984:10)—that is, if they conform to the shamanic complex or pattern.

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7 The classical shamanic study of Shirokogoroff which illustrates that ecstasy, possession, trance and the like are phases in the life of a shaman supports this viewpoint (see Lewis 1986:90-91). Furthermore, there are indeed many older definitions of shamanism which describe the shaman as a combined figure: priest, healer and prophet at the same time (see Voigt 1984:16, Pentikäinen 1984:127). In the words of Ripinsky-Naxon (1993:64): 'in the person of the shaman is embodied, all at once, the community's healer, the mystic, and the intellectual'.

8 A randomly chosen group of 42 cultures has, for example, shown that the element common in all cases was controlled ASC on behalf of the community (see Peters & Price-Williams 1980:408 n 3).

9 In calling it a family of traditions, Walsh (1989:25) brings to the fore the idea that there is variability among shamanic practitioners while the fixed pattern is maintained.

10 The nganga as engaged in a wide range of activities and functions is known in many Bantu languages (see Thorpe 1993:80–101; Schofflekers 1994:74) while the isingoma is known in the Zulu language (see Thorpe 1993:102–125). The Finnish counterpart is called the tielaja and the Mehinaku Indians call their shaman a yetama while the word among the Iglulik Eskimo is angakoq (see Ripinsky-Naxon 1993:72, 80).
2.2.1 The shamanic complex: a combination of certain features and functions in a regularly occurring pattern

It has been suggested that particular features and functions regularly occur together in the shamanic complex. Based on an overview of a number of broad definitions, the following features (experiences and techniques) and functions (social functions and activities) can be identified in studies which describe shamanism. Experiences include journeys, visions, possession, mediumistic and transformation experiences and techniques include ecstasy, drama, dreams and meditation. The functions ascribed to the shaman are: healer, mediator, diviner, interpreter of dreams, sacrificer, protector from spirits, psychopomps, retriever of souls and exorcist. Without suggesting that all elements of each category appear in every instance of shamanism, it seems clear that the combination of features and functions within recognisable world-views, constitutes what can be called the shamanic complex. Not only the selection of experiences and functions, but also their content and character are subject to the particular world-view.

To many scholars the shamanic journey remains the most important feature of this complex (see Gilberg 1984:23; Harner 1988:9; Walsh 1989:26; Ripinsky-Naxon 1993:92). It can be described as the shaman's experience of separation from the body, largely losing awareness of the body and environment and travelling as a free soul or spirit to one of the worlds in the specific shamanic cosmology—the upper, middle or the lower worlds (see Walsh 1993:748). The shamanic journey has many variations in cultures. Some ascend and others descend while others take a trip into a river or lake (see Ripinsky-Naxon 1993:94). The Eskimo shaman, for example, journeys to the depths of the sea in order to placate the angry goddess, Takanakapsaluk, who withholds animals after breaches of taboo (see Walsh 1989:27). In some cultural traditions, journeys are to the middle world, that is on earth and sometimes it is to the upper world. Journeys usually have the function of intervening with spirits or gods on behalf of human beings. Journeys to the upper world often start from mountain or treetops or from cliffs. The shaman may experience being transformed into a bird soaring to the upper world or climbing the world axis in the form of a tree, ladder or rainbow (see Walsh 1989:27).

In addition to journey states, another major shamanic altered state is the possession state (see Lewis 1989:49; Walsh 1993:744). Shamanic possession-states refer to 'states in which the shaman's consciousness is experienced as being taken over to varying degrees by an ego-alien entity, usually believed to be a spirit' (Walsh 1993:744). It should be realised that not all shamanic trances consist of the same degree of

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intensity (some are merely experienced as visions) and not all shamanic experiences can be regarded as equivalent (see Ripinsky-Naxon 1993:96–97). The shaman’s state of consciousness may vary perceptibly from journey to journey or from possession to possession (see Walsh 1993:745).

The spirits who possess a shaman, the worlds to which the shaman travels and the information brought forward by the shaman, are part and parcel of the belief system or cultural system of the specific community (see Peters & Price-Williams 1980:406). Similar to the variety of shamanic states of consciousness, shamans may induce these states by a variety of means including fasting, sleep deprivation, solitude, dancing, drumming, and drugs. Trance induction agents include reduction as well as an overload of sensory input and can even include ‘normal’ activities such as extensive running, hunger, thirst, sleep loss and temperature extremes (see Winkelman 1990:321; Ludwig 1968:70–75; Walsh 1993:744; Peters & Price-Williams 1980:399). Kalweit (1992:83–84) refers to research on the inducing power of fasting. During the Middle Ages, he points out, ‘winter means involuntary fasting and vitamin deficiency....During these times, people’s body chemistry turned ecstasies and visions into everyday occurrences’. The inspirational effect of sensory deprivation implied in the stereotyped mystical flight into the wilderness counts amongst one of the other common techniques of inducing a trance and has been well documented in laboratory experiments (see Lewis 1989:34).

When looking at the functions of the shaman it is clear that when engaged in activities on behalf of a group or community, they centre on healing and divination (see Winthrop 1991:256; Winkelman 1990:318; Voigt 1984:16). The function of guiding people’s souls to the hereafter in some instances, has a counterpart in the function of assisting people on their brief journey of life (see Ripinsky-Naxon 1993:96). The shaman seems to be a master of spirits with the implication that this inspired person incarnates spirits by becoming voluntarily possessed (see Lewis 1989:45, 49). All shamans, Lewis (see 1989:49) claims, are mediums. That is to say, they function as a ‘telephone exchange’ between humans and their gods. The content of their communication, like the realms of their flights and the images of their visions, is provided by the cultural tradition.

In order to be a meaningful category for identifying social types, it should be possible to distinguish the shaman from other religious practitioners. However, it has to be acknowledged that neither the historical identification of a specific individual as a shaman nor the distinction between a shaman and other religious specialist is easy. Given the variety of definitions of the shaman (and obviously of other religious specialists) it is to be expected that the boundaries between them will often be very fluid. From the perspective of the shamanic complex it is maintained that shamans are primarily defined by means of their involvement in altered states of consciousness on behalf of the community and by certain combinations of elements which do not appear in these configurations amongst other religious specialists.12 The chal-
lenge of the kind of historical identification suggested here would be to distinguish the shaman from other religious specialists in a particular cultural system.

2.2.2 Each instance of shamanism is adapted to a specific cultural system

While many of the features and functions associated with the shamanic complex have been identified, it needs to be stressed that none of these elements appear in actual instances of shamanism in a pure form. This is partly the result of the kind of definition that has been proposed but is also because shamans tend to have experiences consistent with their own world-view and cultural system. Ludwig (1968:76) points out that altered states of consciousness (including possession by demons, animals, the Holy Spirit or tribal spirits and mental states or trance states) 'all take on the flavour of the predominant cultural values, beliefs, and expectations'. The spirits which possess a shaman (or which s/he possesses) and the realms visited in a trance or journey are recognised by the community and are integrated parts of their belief system. It is 'impossible to abstract the shaman's trance from the cultural milieu', Peters and Price-Williams (1980:406) say. Within a specific society this kind of phenomenon is almost always stereotypical and different types of stereotypical behaviour can often be identified within the same society (see Wilson 1979:326–327). Individuals consciously or subconsciously learn from society the sort of stereotypical behaviour which is expected of them (see Wilson 1979:328; Bourguignon 1979:239–241). Walsh (1990:91) also points out that shamans are apt to find what they expect to see. altered states of consciousness in short, are open to different cultural controls and to various cultural interpretations. Since world-view and expectations can mould experiences, Walsh (1993:758) quite correctly asks the question, 'as to what extent technology or world-view is chicken or egg'.

An analysis of a specific shamanic complex should therefore include a study of the particular cultural context or world-view. As Grim (1983:19) says, any interpretation of shamanism must begin 'by situating the shaman in a particular cultural context'. In other words, together with the description of the phenomena themselves, goes the description of the cultural context or world-view.

It should furthermore be realised that, as Lewis (see 1989:44) says, shamanism, like other religious phenomena, is obviously subject to historical development and change. That is one more reason why the stereotypical behaviour or patterns in case-

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12 It always remains a question whether one should insist on a social type as a fixed role. Gilberg (see 1984:23) points out that often the social context determines a person's role at a specific time. For instance the same person at one moment may be called a shaman, the next a medicine man or a priest. I nevertheless ascribe to the notion that despite lacunae and gaps, certain sorts of patterns and certain sorts of relationships between those patterns do recur from society to society and within social types (see Craffert 1997:195). An awareness of the pendulum swing between role playing and fixed roles is already a first step in dealing with it.
specific instances of shamanism should only be utilised with caution when defining
the phenomenon (see Lewis 1989:45–47). The fact that similarities and com-
monalities are detected between patterns and instances does not necessarily justify a
transfer of specific features to all cases.

3 JESUS AND THE SHAMANIC COMPLEX

The kind of definition of shamanism adopted in this study favours the notion that it
is remade in different historical and cultural settings but with the maintenance of the
general pattern. Therefore, the shamanic complex refers to constellations of certain
features and functions which recur in specific cultural systems. Certain traits (fea-
tures such as altered states of consciousness induced by specific techniques) and
more than one of a set of specific functions (healing, mediation, prophecy and
divination) have to be present. In my view enough evidence points towards the
shamanic complex as a useful model for dealing with a fixed pattern of (religious)
specialisation in a variety of human societies. The shape it takes in a particular
cultural setting (like the Israelite culture of the first century) will obviously have to be
analysed.

In this section the shamanic complex will be used as a model or matrix for
exploring a number of clues in the Jesus traditions which might support the
hypothesis that the shamanic complex is a useful model for analysing Jesus’ social
type. I leave it to others to point out the differences and dissimilarities to the model.

Three preliminary remarks are, however, appropriate at this point. Firstly, given
the difficulty in identifying the general and individual aspects of shamanism, it is no
easy task for anthropologists to design a fieldwork programme on shamanism today
(see Voigt 1984:13). It is furthermore extremely difficult to find the necessary infor-
mation on such persons. A soul journey is by definition personal and private since
unless one tells people about it nobody else has access to one’s visions or journeys.
Not only are many of the aspects enclosed in secrecy, but a rather small group of
potential informants is involved in the ASC experiences of the shaman. Much of the
information obtained from informants outside the circle of the shaman is the pro-
duct of stereotypical presentations from within the cultural expectations.

It should be obvious that anyone committed to a culture-specific definition of shamanism,
would immediately object to this transfer of the model to the Jesus traditions. Even narrow
definitions with case-specific definitions of shamanism (in terms of narrow categories such as
ecstasy, trance or soul flights only), will not do.

One of the recent attempts include the study of African social types as shamans (see
Thorpe 1993).

See, for example, the study of Jones (1976:48) who got much of his information on the
Limbu shaman from an old man who never was a shaman himself. In fact, his knowledge was
challenged by the shaman since the deity had never come to the old man (see also Ripinsky-
Naxon 1993:21).
Secondly, it should be emphasised that descriptions of soul journeys or other ecstatic experiences are important to anthropologists, while people to whom it is common cultural practice are concerned with the divine insights, knowledge and mediation of power which follow such journeys. Therefore it is to be expected that the outcomes of such trips, if any, would be more prominent than the actual journeys.

Thirdly, it can hardly be overemphasised that the information about Jesus of Nazareth is extremely scarce and none of his 'biographers' were field anthropologists interested in either the detail of his experiences or in conveying the cultural information taken for granted by those sharing his cultural setting. Therefore, one should not expect complete ethnographic detail on the person or profile of Jesus.

Nevertheless, when the shamanic complex is taken as matrix, it is surprising how many features in the Jesus traditions point towards his involvement in such a complex and towards the possible fit between Jesus as historical figure and the role of the shaman as religious specialist in many cultures. It should be emphasised that none of these elements can be discussed in detail. They will merely be mentioned as possibilities for further investigation.

Since soul journeys are taken by many as the key in describing a shaman, I will start with the question whether Jesus undertook such journeys.

3.1 Jesus’ ascents to heaven—shamanic journeys?

As said, to many scholars, the shamanic journey (also known as cosmic travels, soul flights or soul journeys) lies at the heart of shamanism. Other religious specialists may enter altered states of consciousness, minister or heal, but it is the shaman alone who primarily engages in soul flights to the benefit of the community or group. Such journeys have a variety of functions—they journey in order to learn, to heal, to retrieve souls or to help.

Not all cosmic travelling can necessarily be described as shamanic journeys (see Hultkrantz 1984:30). Walsh (see 1989:29) refers, for example, to a kind of cosmic

16 Davies (see 1995:42) quite correctly remarks that we have perhaps one percent, more likely 0.001 percent, of the information available to us in the texts that an anthropologist has who has done fieldwork in a particular culture.

17 In the description of the shamanic complex preference is given to ASC (instead of soul journeys) as essential for defining shamanism. Soul journeys as a form of an ASC nevertheless remain one of the main indicators of this complex and one of the main features distinguishing the shaman from other social practitioners.

18 Walsh (see 1989:26) points towards three phases in such a journey: a period of preparation and purification, induction of the ASC and thirdly the actual journey. The initial phase may involve a period of isolation, fasting and celibacy or perhaps spending time alone in the wilderness or in a solitary hut. A variety of techniques may be used for inducing the trance and can include singing, dancing, drumming or drugs.
travelling that all people experience from time to time: travelling that occurs in dreams. Then there are other kinds of out-of-body experiences which are similar to such journeys but are not undertaken to the benefit of the community. As a general category, the idea of a soul journey in trance seems to be the covering concept while astral journeys are one subsection of soul journeys, that in the Hellenistic age have some specific functions and specific characteristics. Such journeys may be undertaken for a variety of reasons but are primarily to the benefit of the community.

In and around the first-century Palestine of Jesus, soul journeys or sky trips of a variety of kinds were well known in Israelite and Hellenistic circles (see Smith 1981: 410–415; Segal 1980:1353–1354). Had Jesus experienced such flights he must have told his companions about them (this also applies to the journeys and vision with his baptism) or they must have thought it fit to ascribe such journeys to him. Despite a lack of direct interest in descriptions of soul journeys, there are a number of indications that Jesus was indeed involved in such phenomena.

The first clue is that ascension to another world by means of a vision or an out-of-body journey, was common knowledge to the first Christians. The best known astral traveller in early Christianity is the author of Revelation (see e.g 1:10, 4:1) who claims that he saw an open sky, heard a voice inviting him into heaven and ascended by means of a spirit (see Malina 1995:25–46). Soul journeys are mentioned several times (see Rev 17:3 and 21:10). The apostle Paul claims that he knew a man who had gone up to the third heaven (2 Cor 12:2–4). Interpretations vary between identifying this man with Paul himself or with Jesus.

The strongest arguments in favour of the interpretation that Paul refers to Jesus is that if he could claim such a journey for himself he would have done it. Secondly, since he explicitly says that he will not boast about himself, but that he will boast about this man, indicates that it must be Jesus, the person whom he claims he will boast about in this letter and elsewhere (see Smith 1981:427). Since Paul often claims that he and Christ are one, it is not unusual that he claims to know this man 'in Christ'.

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19 Astral journeys, it seems to me, can be seen as a subsection of the general category of the shamanic journey. While Eskimo shamans typically journey to the depths of the sea, Israelite 'shamans' (astral prophets) typically travelled to heaven.

20 The most common interpretation of the story in 2 Cor 12:2–4 is that Paul is referring to his own journey to the third heaven (e.g Borg 1987:31).

21 The strongest arguments in favour of the interpretation that Paul refers to Jesus is that if he could claim such a journey for himself he would have done it. Secondly, since he explicitly says that he will not boast about himself, but that he will boast about this man, indicates that it must be Jesus, the person whom he claims he will boast about in this letter and elsewhere (see Smith 1981:427). Since Paul often claims that he and Christ are one, it is not unusual that he claims to know this man 'in Christ'.
Scholarly interpretations of references to Jesus' ascension to heaven usually do it by means of categories such as his pre-existence as a god. Smith (see 1981:421-424), however, points out that a large number of these references (e.g., Phil 2:5-11, 2 Cor 8:9, 1 Tim 3:16) make perfect sense when read in terms of one who has ascended to heaven but returned to be crucified. Such an interpretation finds support in the story about Enoch's ascension to heaven where he met God, became like God but came back to earth and on his way back was transformed again to the appearance of a man (I Enoch 71:11-16, II Enoch 9ff). Smith (1981:424) concludes that 'the use of the Enoch story as a model for Jesus' career implies that he had already ascended to heaven and became like God before the beginning of his public ministry'.

The third clue which indicates that Jesus undertook soul journeys comes from the suggestion that he was involved in astral prophecy. Astral prophecy, according to Malina (1995:19)

refers to those ancient narratives reporting the interaction of prophets and seers with star-related, celestial personages and the outcomes of that interaction. These narratives might describe both the initial circumstances of such interactions (i.e., visions, dreams, ecstasies and other altered states of consciousness), the interaction proper (what the prophet or seer hears and sees, i.e., alternative realities, the very secrets to be revealed), as well as the outcomes of the interactions (impact or meanings of celestial phenomena).

The story of Jesus as found in the gospels from beginning to end, Malina (see 1997:83) points out, tells of the impact of sky events and sky personages on the people inhabiting the land. Examples include Jesus' birth, death and resurrection. Together with Revelations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Enoch and other Israelite texts Jesus' so-called 'eschatological discourses' belong to the category of astral prophecies. In short, Jesus was remembered as having spoken in this way (see Malina 1997:85-86). The resemblances between these discourses and other Israelite astral documents are just too obvious to disregard. In his own words, Malina (1997:92) sums up the findings:

Jesus' final discourse in the Synoptics has the vocabulary and phraseology of first-century astronomy/astrology; its sequence of events follows Israelite tradition, his repeated reference to the cosmic personage known as the Son of Man and his highly focused concern on the fate of Jerusalem all point to astral prophecy.

Although it is not said that Jesus undertook a soul journey in order to obtain prophetic knowledge, it is highly plausible that someone so deeply entrenched in astral prophecy with its visions, sky trips and interaction with sky entities/personages, indeed undertook soul journeys. When looking at some of the fea-

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22 Malina's category of an astral prophet includes a number of elements which are discussed above as constituting the shamanic complex (such as dreams, visions, sky trips and revelations of various kinds).
In the Jesus tradition and the Book of Revelation, it is clear that both Jesus and John fit this pattern: John certainly did and Jesus probably undertook astral or soul flights (in ASCs) to the benefit of their communities.

3.2 Jesus' baptism: initiation as shaman?

The initiation of the shaman takes on various forms and follows along many different paths. For example, in Limbu tradition, one becomes a shaman as a result of possession by a deity (see Jones 1976:47; Eliade 1964:110ff). Against the common assumption that shamanism follows an acute illness in the to-be shaman, it is perhaps more correct to say that the person experiences a 'major life crisis' (Walsh 1993:752) which kick-starts the process of becoming a shaman. The shaman's vocation is, however, normally announced with hysteroid, ecstatic behaviour (see Lewis 1989:48).

Borg (1994:27) suggests that one of the most certain (and reasonable) facts we know about Jesus is that 'in his late twenties or around the age thirty, he left Nazareth and became a follower of a wilderness prophet named John'. In his discussion of Jesus as a person of spirit, Borg (1987:43) furthermore remarks that Jesus' baptism, followed by a testing in the wilderness, is strikingly similar to what is reported of charismatic figures cross-culturally—specifically shamans. Somewhat earlier Smith (see 1978:104-106) suggested that the stories about Jesus' wandering into the wilderness after his baptism (Mk 1:12ff par) resembled the session at the beginning of a shaman's career. A number of elements which characterise the stories regarding the start of Jesus' public career (as a shaman?) are worth considering in this regard: the figure of John the baptist (Jesus' teacher), Jesus' first otherworldly vision, possession by the spirit and the ordeal in the wilderness which included fasting and visions.

Known through a variety of early sources, John the baptist stood in the 'charismatic stream of Judaism' (Borg 1987:41). His style of dress, of the little information that has been preserved about him, is known. According to Mark (1:6) he wore a camel skin with a leather girdle; it is similar to the garment worn by the prophet Elijah (see 2 Kings 1:8). John is presented as a prophet and according to some traditions, regarded himself as the Elijah redivivus (see Theissen & Merz 1998:206).

Theissen and Merz (1998:212) refer to John as the teacher of Jesus and conclude their analysis with these words: 'one can say on the relationship between John the Baptist and Jesus that Jesus owes to his teacher basic features of his preaching and his understanding of himself. Not only did Jesus in all probability join John the Baptist (see Webb 1994:217–219), but it seems plausible that John was also Jesus' mentor (see Borg 1994:28). In John, Davies (1995:60) argues, Jesus had a model for the possibility of spirit possession (he uses the term spirit-inspiration).
Whether it is interpreted as a call or as the first in a series to follow, Jesus according to the traditions, experienced a vision during his baptism. According to some of the traditions, he sees the heavens open and a voice declares him to be son of God. According to Mark (1:10), Jesus' vision of the Spirit descending upon him was private while Luke (3:22) describes it as a public event and adds an auditory vision where a voice declared Jesus' identity to the crowd. According to Matthew (3:16) and John (1:32) it was John the Baptist (and others) who saw the Spirit descending like a dove.

The spirit descended upon Jesus in the form of a dove (Lk 3:22) which can be interpreted as spirit possession. In line with this argument Borg (see 1987:46) claims that it was Jesus' reputation as a man of spirit (spirit possessed person) which drew the crowds to him while Davies (1995:59) also sees Jesus' baptism as 'his initial spirit-possessIon experience'.

The vision of the descent of the spirit was followed immediately be another series of trance experiences. It is said that Jesus was led into the wilderness by the spirit (Mk 1:12–13, Lk 4:1f, Mt 4:1–11) and that he had nothing to eat. A prolonged stay in the wilderness without food and in the company of wild animals is very typical of shamanic experiences. Furthermore, it has already been said that fasting and sleep deprivation can easily trigger trance experiences. The combination of spirit possession, interaction with a heavenly being (Satan in the Israelite tradition) and visionary experiences are commonly associated with fasting in solitude.

While these trance experiences are often described as visions, it is worth considering whether the second and third so-called temptations do not refer to middle-world soul flights. Guided by Satan (an astral agent in the Israelite traditions), Jesus travelled to the temple and to a high mountain.

In summary, the baptism stories contain several elements analogous not only to shamanic initiation, but to the shamanic complex in general: spirit possession, visions, soul flights (?) and an ordeal in the wilderness without food and in the company of wild animals.

If I read the clues correctly, many more aspects of Jesus' life stand in the tradition of the shamanic complex: he was a person often associated with visions.

3.3 The transfiguration vision—a shamanic vision?

Although the transfiguration of Jesus as reported in the three synoptic gospels (Lk 9:28–36 par) is, according to Pilch (see 1995:58), not an instance of a shamanic trance or journey, he nevertheless utilises a shamanic model to interpret the gospel data. According to him Jesus experienced a trance which included a vision of two ancestors and the three disciples experienced a trance or waking vision in which Jesus was conversing with two ancestor figures—all with either shining faces or shining clothing. If one accepts the point that this was indeed an instance of a double
trance experience, then Jesus' trance experience can indeed be taken as indicative of shamanic experiences.

Three elements in the story as reported are very typical of inducing trance. The party went up a mountain in solitude (according to all three accounts) and Jesus went into a serious prayer session (according to Luke's account). Pilch (see 1995:61) mentions the third point: the episode preceding this event was about the disciples' nagging about Jesus' true identity ('Who do the people say I am?'). A trance experience could be induced by all or any of these conditions.

Obviously this was no shamanic journey but it can be seen as part of the shamanic complex where along with astral journeys one often finds other trance or possession experiences. Given the other instances of either visions or trance experiences ascribed to Jesus of Nazareth, I take it that the transfiguration story adds another piece of evidence to the picture. It confirms that Jesus was remembered as a type of person experiencing that kind of phenomena (or at least as with the other stories, that his followers attributed to him that kind of phenomena).

Besides the visions already mentioned (at his baptism and the transfiguration), the synoptic gospels report some other visions of Jesus: 'I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven' (Lk 10:18) as well as the instance when, while in agony before his arrest, Jesus was comforted by an angelic vision (Lk 22:43). Again the conditions were conducive for a vision: in agony over his situation, Jesus went up the Mount of Olives and prayed in solitude. In that condition he experienced the visionary company of a heavenly being (another astral agent in the Israelite traditions).

3.4 Jesus as spirit possessed person?

There can be no doubt that shamanism and (spirit) possession are inextricably related (see Lewis 1989:8; Eliade 1961:155). Spirit possession refers to the invasion of an individual by a spirit (or entity) and is a cultural evaluation of a person's condition (see Lewis 1989:40). According to the description mentioned above, shamanic spirit possession refers to the experience of an ego-alien entity taking over the shaman's consciousness.

Is there any evidence that Jesus experienced spirit possession?

Jesus's baptism as (possibly) the initial spirit possession experience has already been mentioned above. A large number of gospel traditions deal with the question of

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23 See Hanson (1980:1415–1419) for examples of other, in his terms, double dream-visions. His examples are called waking visions by Pilch (1995:58).

24 From a different angle Smith (see 1980:43) argues that the transfiguration story indeed refers to the kind of event that could happen in that world: Jesus took three disciples up a mountain for an initiation ceremony which led through hypnosis to a vision of him and two other figures.

25 Although Mark and Matthew do not mention the angelic vision, Mark (14:36) again uses
Jesus’ identity specifically as regards the source of his power. In most cases the issue is not whether Jesus was possessed but by whom (see Mk 8:27–29 pat). Supporters ascribe to Jesus the spirit of Elijah or John or the spirit of God while opponents accuse him of being possessed by the ruler of the demons (see Mk 3:22). Davies (see 1995:151ff) not only discusses these instances (including evidence from the gospels of John and Thomas) but goes further in arguing that several of the Johannine style sayings (which are usually considered as inauthentic) should be seen as sayings of a spirit possessed Jesus. If Davies (see 1995:99) is correct in maintaining that these sayings were the sayings of Jesus as the Spirit of God, in other words, in an altered state of consciousness where his ego was replaced by an alter ego, the Spirit of God, then it is to be expected that he functioned as a medium. And, as Walsh (see 1990:92) indicates, mediumship or channelling is common among shamans.

Walsh (see 1990:92) points out that the spirit may assist the shaman in any of four ways and given the cultural variety, many more alternatives can be identified. They are with journeys, to provide strengths and abilities, teach and possess the shaman. Not only were these aspects present amongst Jesus first followers, but were also ascribed to him. For example, in Mark 13:11 Jesus is reported to have said that when the disciples have to speak, the spirit will speak through them. It seems as if spirit possession, and actions ascribed to Jesus while in a state of spirit possession is another area worth considering in this project.

3.5 Jesus’ prayers and meditation: shamanic trance techniques?

Solitary prayer for long hours, sometimes even all night, is often ascribed to Jesus in the gospels (e.g. Mk 1:35, 6:46, Lk 5:16, 6:12, 9:18, 28–29, 11:1). Borg (see 1987:45) furthermore points out that Jesus’ use of Abba in addressing God might be an indication of the intensity of his spiritual experience. This term was used in Jewish charismatic traditions contemporary with Jesus (see Vermes 1973:210; Dunn 1975: 21–26; Safrai 1994:6–7). Are these perhaps indications of the source of Jesus’ healing, teaching and exorcistic activities? Are there possible connections between the healing, teaching and prophetic functions and the often experienced altered states of consciousness of Jesus?

3.6 Shamanic functions: healing, controlling spirits and mediation

This is not the place for a thorough description of all the functions associated with the shamanic complex. It has already been mentioned that, according to some researchers, the main powers of the shaman are connected with healing and divination while others see the ability to master spirits (e.g. in exorcism) as the central identify-the term Abba in Jesus’ prayer. See further below.
ing feature of the shaman's functions (see Lewis 1986:88). In a world-view where spirit entities are ever present and powerful in controlling good and bad fortune, 'ordinary people are largely helpless victims of these spirits' (Walsh 1990:90). The shaman's functions include relief from everyday calamities or distress (see Eliade 1964:181–184). The shaman can placate, control or exorcise spirits. One of the other functions fulfilled by the spirit interaction of the shaman is teaching while mediation between humans and the divine realm is common practice. Besides having a close relationship with animals, the shaman's intervention is often sought when game (or fish) becomes scarce (compare, e.g. Lk 5:4–6). A significant feature of the shamanic complex is that these functions all belong to the complex in a regular and natural way and cannot be divorced from the ASC experiences.

It is impossible in this study to deal with all the aspects in the Jesus traditions which might be related to the shamanic complex. A few of the clues which need further analysis might be mentioned.

Several of the main functions ascribed to the shaman are well attested in the Jesus traditions. New Testament scholars are fully aware that no fact about Jesus of Nazareth is so widely and repeatedly attested in the gospels as the fact that he was a healer. They also know that the gospel traditions repeatedly portray him as a prophet (e.g. Lk 7:16, Mt 21:11), that he was renowned as an exorcist (e.g. Mk 1:23–28, 5:1–20, 9:25) and that many traces of a teacher or sage can be identified (see e.g. Funk 1996:143ff). Clues which are not as easily identifiable may include, besides the reading of solar signs (astral prophecy), the stories about the control of the elements to the advantage of the community. Control of elements and interaction with animals are integral to the shamanic complex. Stories which are often relegated to the fringes of the Jesus tradition include the so-called nature miracles.²⁶ It might be interesting to investigate these traditions in the light of the shamanic complex as well as those which describe Jesus' special relationship to animals.²⁷

The variety of functions ascribed to Jesus of Nazareth crystallises in the many social types identified by scholars: healer, sage, prophet, teacher and the like. If seen as belonging to the shamanic complex it is possible to start looking for the relationship between these functions and the way they are linked to the altered states of consciousness features. It is interesting that the interconnectedness of Jesus' shamanic functions are indeed picked up in scholarly circles. Vermes (see 1973:89), for example

²⁶ The nature miracles do not necessarily form a unified whole. Included are the cursing of the fig tree (Mk 11), the 'gift miracles' (see Theissen & Merz 1998:294–295) which refer to the multiplication of the loaves, the miraculous fishing trip (Lk 5) and the miracle with the wine at Cana (Jn 2). In addition one may think about the stilling of the storm (Mk 4) and the walking on the water (Mk 6).

²⁷ In the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew (see Cullmann 1991:462) domestic animals worship Jesus while wild animals are his companions.
argues on the basis of the sayings attributed to the disciples on the road to Emmaus, that the terms 'prophet' and 'miracle-worker' were used synonymously by Jesus and his followers.

The variety of functions ascribed to Jesus provide only indirect clues for the employment of the shamanic model. More important is the potential of this model for dealing with all these functions in a meaningful way.

It has been said that according to Borg, the most crucial fact about Jesus is that he was a spirit person. The question is whether the features of the shamanic complex identified in the Jesus traditions can be described as having this same role. The suggestion coming from the shamanic model is that the functions usually flow from the shamanic features (especially from the ASC experiences). In a general remark about altered states of consciousness Ludwig (1968:88) points out:

Intense prayer, passive meditation, revelatory and prophetic states, mystical and trans-cendental experiences, religious conversion, and divination states have served man [and woman] by opening new realms or religious experience, reaffirming moral values, resolving emotional conflicts, and open by enabling him [and her] to cope better with the human predicament and the world about him [and her].

It is possible that moral teaching, healing powers, prophetic speech and the like resulted from shamanic states of consciousness. Is it too far-fetched to look for connecting links between the variety of functions ascribed to Jesus in the traditions and the possible shamanic features (especially ASC experiences) identified above?

Along this line of thinking the suggestion of Davies (see 1995:115ff) with regard to Jesus' understanding of the Kingdom of God is very interesting. He suggests that the Kingdom of God is a form of experience—an altered state of consciousness experience related to Jesus' function as a healer. The kingdom of God is an alternative mode of being to the rule of Satan. Amongst others, this suggestion might be supported by Jesus' remark that in casting out demons, the kingdom of God is upon you (Mt 12:28).

4 CONCLUDING REMARKS

In acknowledging that a variety of religious practitioners from many different cultural settings all fit into the broad pattern of the shaman, it has been argued that the shaman is recreated each time according to a fixed recipe but flavoured with unique cultural ingredients. The shamanic complex, according to this view, represents a fixed pattern of features and functions in a variety of cultural settings. It furthermore allows a variety of characteristics of the religious specialist to be held together in a coherent whole.

Once sensitised to the scripts of the shamanic complex, this model has been used for identifying a number of clues in the Jesus traditions with it. It has been suggested that the shamanic complex offers a potential model for dealing with Jesus as social type and historical figure in his context. A number of important aspects should
accompany a thorough analysis of the clues identified above. A correspondence between a first-century world-view and the shamanic world-view needs to be established while an investigation of the shamanic complex as category for dealing with other Israelite traditions seems inevitable. Based on the argument that it is more likely that Jesus’ followers continued the practices and customs which were part of their shared experiences, an analysis of shamanic traits in other early Christian documents can obviously shed some light on the hypothesis. Equally important would be an investigation into those traits in the tradition which do not fit the model. Even though it has been argued that shamanism is recreated each time in a new cultural setting, it does not mean that each and every religious personage can be accommodated by the model. It might be that someone like Jesus of Nazareth as historical person stood somewhere at an intersection between social types.

A final question is whether the shamanic model is substantially different from the competing models for dealing with Jesus’ social type. While it should be obvious that the suggestion of the shamanic complex has many affinities with Vermes’s holy man, Borg’s spirit person and Davies’s spirit possessed prophet/healer, it should also be apparent that the shaman as social type differs from these. None of these social types covers the same pattern or contains the same combination of features and functions associated with the shamanic complex. The shamanic complex brings together the various altered states of consciousness experiences (spirit possession, visions, trances) with a combination of social functions which are regularly ascribed

28 Shamanic models have already been applied to the study of ancient Israelite prophets (see Michaelsen 1989; Wilson 1979 and for the later hekhalot literature (see Davila 1994).

29 In connecting Jesus with the stream of Israelite prophets and holy men, Vermes (see 1973:69, 79) paints Jesus as a Galilean Hasid but without succeeding in incorporating all the traditions attributed to Jesus in this picture. Jesus’s prophetic functions do not flow organically from his social type as holy man.

30 In describing Jesus as a spirit person, Borg comes very close to associating Jesus with the shamanic complex. Not only in the baptism stories, but also in saying that such persons often experience journeys and operate as mediators of the sacred, Borg, however, identifies a social type without a recognised identity in ethnographic studies (see Borg 1994:32-33). A shaman is such a spirit person but one who also combines the functions Borg ascribes to other social types such as healers, sages and prophets. This is the single largest problem with his argument: Jesus belongs to a variety of social types identified in history and in cross-cultural studies.

31 There are many points of correspondence between the shamanic complex and Davies’s (see 1996:25; 1995) notion of Jesus as a spirit possessed prophet/healer. The fact that one can disagree with several positions taken by him in his view of Jesus as a healer does not take away the affinity with other elements, such as the ASC experiences identified in Jesus’ life. It should be noted that his category (healer/prophet) corresponds to Winkelman’s category of the medium, which clearly belongs to the ‘shamanic healer complex’ (Winkelman 1990:313, 332). Within the shamanic complex, however (unlike Davies’s reconstruction), it is much more strongly emphasised that the functions conducted by the practitioners in this social type are bound together by the features which generate them.
to Jesus. The neglect of some of these aspects means that central elements attested
in the life of Jesus are blurred or neglected because the particular social type model
does not highlight them. With the shamanic model many of Jesus' ascribed activities
can be seen as interconnected to a basic pattern.

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