

“HEALING STEPS”: JESUS’ DIONYSIAC TOUR IN LUKE

By

Katherine Veach Dyer

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Professor Amy-Jill Levine

Professor Dennis R. MacDonald

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## INTRODUCTION

In both redaction and use of special material, Luke presents Jesus as a new and improved Dionysus. Luke's correlation of the two divinities is an apologia designed to reassure Christians and potential converts that Jesus and his followers did not possess the Bacchic traits that were often found objectionable in the Roman world. Two uniquely Lukan passages—8:1-3 and 18:35-19:10—evoke the wine god, and they serve to bracket the “itinerary”<sup>1</sup> section of the Gospel, a passage in which Jesus mimics Dionysus by acting as a wandering missionary. Luke 8:1-3 portrays Jesus as beginning his missionary journey followed by a group among whom a trio of women is particularly prominent. The itinerary concludes in Luke 18:35-19:10, a detailed encounter between Jesus and Zacchaeus the tax collector which is modeled on the most well-known Dionysus drama, Euripides's *Bacchae*. Reading the itinerary in light of these Bacchic bookends moves its traditional starting point from 9:51 to 8:1, and it proposes Euripides's *Bacchae* as a source for Luke's Gospel.

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 9:51-19:27 is traditionally defined as the Lukan “travel narrative” or “itinerary.” However, some scholars disagree with this distinction. C.F. Evans refers to these verses simply as the “central section” in “The Central Section of St. Luke's Gospel,” *Studies in the Gospels*, ed. D.E. Nineham (Oxford: Blackwell, 1967), 41. Simon J. Kistemaker, in “The Structure of Luke's Gospel,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 25/1 (March 1982), 39, disputes the traditional title and proposes that Luke should properly be considered to be “three main sections with introductory chapters and concluding chapters” (1-2 and 22-24, respectively) and notes that the three main segments are Jesus' Galilean ministry (3:1-9:50), the ministry outside of Galilee (9:51-19:27) and the ministry in Jerusalem (19:28-21:38).

## CHAPTER I

### JESUS AND DIONYSUS

#### *Dionysiac myth and cult in the Lukan period*

Though the rites of Dionysus were quite popular in the world of classical Greece, they changed when introduced to the Roman world. Albert Henrichs writes, “The Hellenistic and Roman Dionysus was benign, pastoral and peaceful, a recipient of cult and a divine example of a relaxed lifestyle who offered physical and mental escape from the burdens of the day and the ills of progressive urbanization.”<sup>2</sup> He points to the Dionysus ode<sup>3</sup> in Sophocles’ *Antigone* as evoking this healing, helpful god,<sup>4</sup> the version which was the most popular deity in the Attic demes from 500 BCE to 200 CE.<sup>5</sup>

Despite the wine god’s popularity in Greece, Rome was often wary of foreign rites, and the Roman Senate banned Bacchic rites in 186 BCE. Livy records the Bacchanalian scandal which led to this prohibition, and his account of the rites and their banishment contains several details are similar to later condemnations of Christianity. Immediately pointing out the foreign aspect of the cult, he writes that a “low-born Greek” (*Graecus ignobilis*) was the one who originally imported the mysteries to Etruria.<sup>6</sup> These nocturnal rites spread “like a pestilential disease” (*contagione morbi*)<sup>7</sup> because of the attractions of their wine and feasting (*additae uoluptates religioni uini et*

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<sup>2</sup> Albert Henrichs, “Between Country and City: Cultic Dimensions of Dionysus in Athens and Attica,” in *Cabinet of the Muses*, ed. M. Griffith and D.J. Mastrorarde (Scholars Press, 1990), 271.

<sup>3</sup> Sophocles, *Antigone* 1115-1152

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 265.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 261.

<sup>6</sup> Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita*, 39.8

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* 39.9

*epularum, quo plurimum animi illicerentur*).<sup>8</sup> Livy then accuses the followers of nightly mixtures of men and women, a lack of decorum and respect for age and position, forging seals and making false statements, and even poisoning and murders. Citing the various instances of lust and treachery, the Roman senate banned the rites in Italy. Describing the problematic nature of the rites of Dionysus, Shelly Matthews writes, “For many authors, the Bacchic rites epitomize the immorality and subversiveness they loathe.”<sup>9</sup>

A little more than a century later, around 50 BCE, Cicero proposed legislation banning sacrifice by women at night.<sup>10</sup> He acknowledges the potential damage to the rites of Dionysus and the Eleusinian mysteries and claims that his proposed law is not only for the benefit of Rome, but also for the good of all nations (*Quid ergo aget Iacchus Eumolpidaeque vestri et augusta illa mysteria, si quidem sacra nocturna tollimus? Non enim populo Romano sed omnibus bonis firmisque populis leges damus.*)<sup>11</sup> He explains that his proposed prohibition is designed to suppress the potential reckless abandon that nocturnal rites could encourage.<sup>12</sup> To bolster his case and to keep from seeming “too severe” (*ne nos duriores forte videamur*)<sup>13</sup>, he offers a precedent, claiming that Diagondas of Thebes once abolished all nocturnal rites.<sup>14</sup> Matthews reads his argument as an indication of the variety of opinions of women’s participation in Bacchic rites: “Cicero is aware that his proposal to restrict women’s involvement in

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid. 39.8

<sup>9</sup> Matthews, 75.

<sup>10</sup> Cicero, *de Legibus* 2.21

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 2.35

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 2.36: *Qua licentia Romae data quidnam egisset ille qui in sacrificium cogitatum libidinem intulit, quo ne imprudenciam quidem oculorum adici fas fuit?*

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 2.37

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

such rites would be contested by many of his peers in Rome and especially by educated readers outside of the Roman capital.”<sup>15</sup> Cicero’s dialogue highlights a seeming ambivalence to Dionysiac rites in the Roman world; while he, himself a traditionalist, is afraid of the consequences of women’s involvement in nocturnal rites, dissenting opinions obviously exist.

Philo, writing in the early first century, seems to possess a positive view of Bacchic rites. In a favorable discussion of a Jewish monastic community, the Therapeutrics, he compares their quest for a glimpse of God to the actions of Dionysiac devotees. He writes that the Therapeutics are “behaving like so many revelers in bacchanalian or corybantian mysteries, until they see the object which they have been earnestly desiring.”<sup>16</sup> He again compares the Therapeutics to devotees of Dionysus, writing, “Then, when each chorus of the men and each chorus of the women has feasted separately by itself, like persons in the bacchanalian revels, drinking the pure wine of the love of God...”<sup>17</sup> In these descriptions, he does not give evidence for a universal suspicion of Bacchic rites, instead presenting them as analogous to other, favorably viewed religious expressions.

Thus, while Nilsson writes that “[w]e know almost nothing of the attitude of the different social classes to the Bacchic mysteries of the Roman age,”<sup>18</sup> it seems clear that they were a well-known, yet perhaps contentious, presence in that society.

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<sup>15</sup> Matthews, 79.

<sup>16</sup> Philo of Alexandria, *De Vita Contemplativa* 12 (trans. C.D. Yonge (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993).

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>18</sup> Martin P. Nilsson, “The Bacchic Mysteries of the Roman Age,” *Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 46, No. 4 (Oct. 1953), 194.

### ***Dionysus in Acts***

Scholars have previously discussed the Dionysiac presence in Acts, which is particularly tied to Euripides' *Bacchae*. Otto Weinreich argues that Acts is directly dependent on the text of the *Bacchae*,<sup>19</sup> and other scholars have highlighted similarities between the two works. Dennis R. MacDonald<sup>20</sup> and Matthews<sup>21</sup> both propose that the character of Lydia as well as Paul's encounter with the mantic slave girl in Acts 16:11-40 are inspired by the tragedy. Additionally, Acts 24:16, which says, "it is hard for you to kick against the goads" (πρός κέντρα λακτίζειν) evokes *Bacchae* 795, which refers to "a kick against the goads" (πρός κέντρα λακτίζοιμι). In both texts, the phrase appears in the context of theomachy, as Paul fights Christ and Pentheus fights Dionysus. Acts and the *Bacchae* also share scenes in which an earthquake shakes a prison and breaks the shackles of a prisoner held unjustly for his religious beliefs.<sup>22</sup> If Luke utilized Dionysiac material in Acts, it is probable that he also did so in his Gospel, but this possibility is heretofore unexplored. To examine the Dionysiac material in Luke is to add to scholarship by highlighting the continuity of the theme through the whole of the Lukan corpus.

### ***Dionysus in non-Lukan Christian writings***

Luke was not alone in linking Jesus and Dionysus. Another New Testament example of a connection is found in John 2:1-10, the wine miracle at Cana, and scholars

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<sup>19</sup> Otto Weinreich, *Gebet und Wunder* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1968).

<sup>20</sup> Dennis R. MacDonald, "Lydia and her Sisters as Lukan Fictions," in *A Feminist Companion to the Acts of the Apostles*, ed. Amy-Jill Levine with Marianne Blickenstaff (London: T&T Clark International, 2004), 106.

<sup>21</sup> Shelly Matthews, *First Converts: Rich Pagan Women and the Rhetoric of Mission in Early Judaism and Christianity* (Contraversions: Jews and Other Differences; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 82-92.

<sup>22</sup> Acts 16:26, *Bacchae* 585-625

have highlighted Dionysiac tendencies in John.<sup>23</sup> The Cana miracle echoes the Dionysiac wine miracles recorded by Pausanias.<sup>24</sup> 3 Maccabees, likely composed in Alexandria in the early- to mid-first century, has also been observed to share themes and attributes with the *Bacchae*.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, patristic evidence shows that comparisons of Jesus and Dionysus date to the early years of Christianity.

*Justin Martyr, pagan parallels and apologia*

Justin Martyr, writing shortly after Luke in the early second century, demonstrates a Christian problem with conflation of pagan cults. He freely admits that Christianity has many parallels in Greco-Roman myth and literature, but he argues that Christianity is nevertheless superior.

And if we assert that the Word of God was born of God in a peculiar manner, different from ordinary generation, let this, as said above, be no ordinary thing to you, who say that Mercury is the angelic word of God. But if anyone objects that he was crucified, in this also he is on a par with those reputed sons of Jupiter of yours, who suffered as we have now enumerated. For their sufferings and death are recorded to have been not all alike but diverse; so that not even by the peculiarity of his sufferings does he seem to be inferior to them; but, on the contrary, as we promised in the preceding part of this discourse, we will now prove him superior—or rather have already proved him to be so—the superior is revealed by his actions.<sup>26</sup>

Here, Justin willingly embraces parallels in Greco-Roman myth, urging his audience to

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<sup>23</sup> Ryan Carhart, “The Gospel of John and Euripides’ *Bacchae*: An Intertextual Study,” unpublished M.A. thesis from Claremont Graduate University; presented at 2007 SBL Annual Meeting. See also Peter Wick, “Jesus gegen Dionysos? Ein Beitrag zur Kontextualisierung des Johannesevangeliums,” *Biblica* 85 (2, 2004), 179-198. Wick argues that this miracle is designed to demonstrate Jesus’ superiority to Dionysus.

<sup>24</sup> Pausanias, *Desc. Gr.* 6.26.1-2. This passage records that the priests of Dionysus in Elea set empty, sealed pots in the sanctuary of Dionysus during the Thyia, then seal the temple doors. The next day, the doors are opened and the pots are found to be full. It also asserts that the Andrians claim that at their feast of Dionysus, wine flows abundantly from the god’s sanctuary.

<sup>25</sup> J.R.C. Cousland, “Dionysus Theomachos? Echoes of the *Bacchae* in 3 Maccabees,” *Biblia* 82 (2001), 539-548; John B. Weaver, *Plots of Epiphany: Prison-escapes in the Acts of the Apostles* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2004), 79-82.

<sup>26</sup> Justin Martyr, *Apology I*, XX; translation from *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 1: Apostolic Fathers, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (2<sup>nd</sup> edition; Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1988).

see Jesus in familiar terms yet asserting Jesus' superiority. He goes on to construct an argument that demonstrates that Christianity is thoroughly enmeshed in Greco-Roman ideas and stories. In Chapter XXIII, Justin outlines his points: First, that only Christian doctrines are true—not pagan stories<sup>27</sup>; second, that Jesus Christ is the incarnate son of God<sup>28</sup>; and finally, that before the birth of Christ, demons helped pagan poets and religious figures to anticipate Christ's actions and attributes, thus explaining many of the parallels between Christianity and Greco-Roman cult.<sup>29</sup> He reiterates comparisons in XXIV, noting, "Though we say things similar to what the Greeks say, we only are hated on account of the name of Christ."<sup>30</sup> Along with other sons of Zeus/Jupiter,<sup>31</sup> Bacchus is one of the divinities Justin specifically mentions in comparison to Jesus. His list of similarities between Dionysus and Jesus is telling; it provides an early second-century understanding of the story of Dionysus. The attributes he chooses to highlight are that Dionysus was sired by Jupiter and born to Semele; that he discovered wine; that he was torn into pieces, died, and rose again; and that he ascended into the heavens. Furthermore, Justin compares the use of wine in the Christian and Dionysiac cults, claiming that the introduction of wine into the pagan mysteries was an imitation of biblical prophecy.<sup>32</sup> In his apologetics, Justin constantly and consistently addresses the issue of pagan parallels to Christianity, demonstrating its importance. Furthermore, he demonstrates a Christian willingness to highlight parallels with paganism, choosing to concede similarities and use them to demonstrate the superiority of Christianity.

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., XXIV-XXIX

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., XXX-LIII

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., LIV-LXVIII; cf. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, LXIX, which makes the same claim

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., XXIV

<sup>31</sup> Namely, Herakles, Asclepius and Perseus

<sup>32</sup> Justin Martyr, *Trypho*, LXIX

*Origen and Celsus, pagan parallels and apologia*

Christians were still being accused of mimicking paganism by the time of Origen's writing in the first half of the third century. In *Contra Celsum*, he responds to critiques of Christianity by the pagan Celsus. Celsus's text, *True Doctrine*, dates to around the year 170 CE, easily within a century of the composition of Luke; Origen's response to it came a few decades later.<sup>33</sup> *Contra Celsum* records criticisms of Christianity that are also evident in Justin Martyr's writings. Some scholars see such a similarity that they believe that Celsus was writing a direct response to Justin.<sup>34</sup>

One of the major themes that emerges from *Contra Celsum* is that Christianity was considered by the Romans to be a foreign cult or superstition. Celsus compares Christians to devotees of foreign deities Cybele, Mithras and Sabazios<sup>35</sup> and alludes to Christian practice as like the "superstitions" of Egypt.<sup>36</sup> He also makes a direct connection between Christianity and the followers of Dionysus, comparing Christians to "those in the Bacchic mysteries who introduce phantoms and terrors."<sup>37</sup>

Luke's creation of a Christian apologia using Dionysiac allusions came during a time period in which opinions about "foreign" religions varied. His carefully crafted itinerary plays on common comparisons of Jesus to Dionysus, and it argues that Jesus was superior to Dionysus. This tactic was an attempt to cultivate success in the Roman world in two ways: First, it addressed common concerns about Christianity, dismissing the arguments of those who thought of Jesus as analogous to Dionysus and his religious

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<sup>33</sup> Robert Louis Wilken, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 94-95.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

<sup>35</sup> *Contra Celsum* 1.9

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* 3.17

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* 4.10

message as potentially harmful. Second, it spoke to those who were sympathetic to Dionysiac rites, calling to mind familiar figures but showing Jesus and his followers to supercede their pagan counterparts.

### ***Methodology***

To support the case for Luke's evocation of Dionysus, I shall utilize MacDonald's criteria for determining mimesis, or an author's intentional evocation of other texts. To strengthen the argument for a text's dependence on an antetext, he proposes the following six criteria:

1. *accessibility*—Was the proposed antetext widely circulated and/or influential at the time of the writing of the text?
2. *analogy*—Did other ancient authors also imitate the proposed antetext?
3. *density*—Do a number of similarities between the two works exist?
4. *sequencing*—Do the parallels appear in the same order?
5. *distinctive traits*—Are “mimetic flags” such as significant names, words, phrases, literary contexts and/or motifs, present?
6. *interpretability*—Does the imitation serve to affirm the antetext's message or to transvalue it?<sup>38</sup>

Methodological problems arise, however, when the antecedent material is present in a variety of texts, oral traditions and general culture. Thus, I will apply MacDonald's six criteria to the texts, inscriptions and art concerned with the myth and cult of Dionysus, but I will add a seventh criterion which underscores the idea of distinctive traits: universality.

7. *universality*: Does the distinctive trait appear in a significant number of diverse sources?

If a trait can be seen as typical to the myth and/or cult of Dionysus, it can be posited to be general knowledge, and the author of Luke would likely have had access to it.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Dennis R. MacDonald, *Does the New Testament Imitate Homer? Four Cases from the Acts of the Apostles* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 3-15.

## *Accessibility*

MacDonald's first and most important criterion for proving a text's evocation of an antetext (or, in the case here, general knowledge) is accessibility. It is unquestionable that Luke would have had access to Dionysiac myths and even literature. The myth and cult of Dionysus pervaded the entire Roman Empire; examples are found in literature, art, and the inscriptions of cult records. Attestations to Dionysus as a wine-god and his association with women followers (known as maenads or bacchantes) are found as early as Homer, with references in both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.<sup>40</sup> Writing in the early first century CE, Plutarch records that Alexander's mother Olympias was a maenad.<sup>41</sup> He also writes about Mark Antony's assumption of the characteristics of Dionysus, describing Antony's entrance into Ephesus, where "women arrayed like Bacchanals, and men and boys like Satyrs and Pans, led the way before him, and the city was full of ivy and thyrsus-wands and harps and pipes and flutes, the people hailing him as Dionysus Carnivorous and Savage" (γυναῖκας μὲν εἰς Βάκχας, ἄνδρες δὲ καὶ παῖδες εἰς Σατύρους καὶ Πᾶνας ἤγοῦντο διεσκευασμένοι, κιττοῦ δὲ καὶ θύρσων καὶ φαληρίων καὶ συρίγγων καὶ αὐλῶν ἢ πόλις ἦν πλέα, Διόνυσον αὐτὸν

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<sup>39</sup> In Samuel Sandmel's address delivered at the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature and Exegesis on 27 December 1961 ("Parallelomania," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 81, No. 1 (Mar. 1962), 1-13), he warned of the dangers of hasty comparisons between texts that remove the works from their contexts. He writes, "Detailed study is the criterion, and the detailed study ought to respect the context and not be limited to juxtaposing mere excerpts. Two passages may sound the same in splendid isolation from their context, but when seen in context reflect difference rather than similarity" (2). He also notes that even true parallels may be of no great significance (4). In this work, I have attempted to avoid "parallelomania" by proving that Luke's apologia is similar in its argument to the apologias found in Justin Martyr and Origen. Luke is not comparing Jesus to Dionysus lightly; he is responding to existing comparisons and hoping to counter their anti-Christian claims with Gospel evidence that Jesus was superior to the wine god.

<sup>40</sup> See, e.g., *Iliad* 6.130ff, 14.325 (though his name is not mentioned, Otto believes that this is a reference to Dionysus), 22.461 (Andromache is compared to a maenad); in *Odyssey* 24.74, Dionysus is present to present Thetis with a gift.

<sup>41</sup> Plutarch, *Vita Alexander*, 2.7-9

ἀνακαλουμένων Χαριδότην καὶ Μειλίχιον).<sup>42</sup> Plutarch further notes that Antony was called the “new Dionysus” (Διόνυσος νέος).<sup>43</sup> Tacitus, also writing in the early first century, records that during the reign of Claudius,<sup>44</sup> the empress Messalina hosted an elaborate faux Bacchic orgy complete with ritual dress, dancing and even a partygoer’s ascent into a tree in a mime of Pentheus.<sup>45</sup>

Moreover, the Greek drama of the fifth to third centuries BCE, which remained influential for centuries, reflects an emphasis on Dionysiac myth. The myth of the Theban Dionysus and Pentheus is famously attested in Euripides’s *Bacchae*, but tales of Dionysus existed in other lost dramatic works. Aeschylus composed two Dionysiac tetralogies; Xenocles composed a *βάκχαι* in 415 BCE; Sophocles’s son, Iophon, wrote a *βάκχαι ἢ Πενθεύς*; and Chaeremon composed a *Διόνυσος*. Dionysus’s mother, Semele, was the subject of a handful of attested plays: the *Σεμέλη* of Carcinus, the *Σεμέλη* of Diogenes, and the *Σεμέλη ἢ Ὑδροφόροι* of Aeschylus.<sup>46</sup> Oranje defines as “Dionysus dramas” those plays that address the introduction of the god and his cult to new lands and finds approximately 28 examples.<sup>47</sup>

In terms of material culture, Dionysus, typically accompanied by his maenads and characterized by dress, hairstyle and association with certain animals and plants, was a popular figure on many vase paintings. In fifth-century Athens, Dionysus was the most popular god depicted on vases; he appears on more than 900 surviving pieces.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Plutarch, *Vita Antony* 24.3

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.5

<sup>44</sup> 41-54 CE

<sup>45</sup> Tacitus, *Annales* 11.31

<sup>46</sup> E.R. Dodds, “Introduction,” *Euripides Bacchae* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960), xxviii.

<sup>47</sup> Hans Oranje, *Euripides’ Bacchae: The Play and Its Audience* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1984), 124-125. On these pages, Oranje gives an extensive list of the purported plays and the references to them.

<sup>48</sup> Thomas H. Carpenter, *Dionysiac Imagery in Fifth-Century Athens* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 1.

Carpenter, who claims that “painted vases are by far the richest source of Dionysiac imagery from fifth-century Athens,”<sup>49</sup> goes on to discuss the various and diverse scenes in which images of the god—variously depicted as a youth, an effeminate fop, and a dignified bearded man—<sup>50</sup> can be found. Though the interpretation of its scenes varies, the “Villa of the Mysteries” that survived the 79 CE eruption of Vesuvius contains frescoes that seem to depict initiation into the rites of Dionysus,<sup>51</sup> demonstrating the presence of the rites in the Empire.

The time of the composition of the Luke’s gospel—late first or early second century<sup>52</sup>—would have been ripe for allusions to Bacchic myth and literature; as Henrichs notes, “The second century A.D. was an age which consciously imitated earlier Greek antiquity and worshiped its cultural relics.”<sup>53</sup> It would have been quite fashionable to remember the “golden age” of antiquity and resurrect its stories and personalities. Luke thus had the means, motive and opportunity to use Dionysus as a model for Jesus in his gospel.

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 119.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 120-122.

<sup>51</sup> For more information, see Karl Lehmann, “Ignorance and Search in the Villa of the Mysteries,” *Journal of Roman Studies* Vol. 52, Pts. 1 and 2 (1962), 62-68 and Richard Seford, “Dionysiac Drama and the Dionysiac Mysteries,” *Classical Quarterly* 31 (1981), 252-275.

<sup>52</sup> As with the rest of the Gospels, the dating of Luke is uncertain. Most scholars argue for a post-70 dating. Bovon says that it is “fairly certain” that the gospel was composed between 80 and 90 CE (9), and Tyson argues that Luke dates to about 120-125 CE, during the Marcionite controversy (Joseph B. Tyson, *Marcion and Luke-Acts: A Defining Struggle* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2006), 80-83). Richard I. Pervo, *Dating Acts* (Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge Press, 2006), argues convincingly that Luke-Acts should be definitively dated between 110-130. Johnson observes that Luke’s omission of references to Paul’s letters “argues for an earlier rather than a later date,” as it is “far more likely for Paul’s letters to be ignored before their collection and canonization than after” (2), but he does not pinpoint a likely date. This argument’s relevance to the dating of Luke rests on the assumption that Luke was composed before Acts.

<sup>53</sup> Albert Henrichs, “Greek Maenadism from Olympias to Messalina,” *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, Vol. 82 (1978), 126.

### *Jesus and Dionysus: Post-Lukan connections*

Authors continued to exploit the connections between Jesus and Dionysus after the composition of Luke, and perhaps this choice was even influenced by the Gospel itself. Jensen notes a Hellenistic shift in art from the bearded, manly Dionysus to the effeminate, youthful figure.<sup>54</sup> She and other scholars of ancient Christian art argue that early depictions of Jesus Christ are visually similar to depictions of Dionysus: both divine figures have feminine attributes, such as loose, flowing hair and shaven faces.<sup>55</sup> The *Bacchae* mentions the loose, flowing locks of Dionysus numerous times,<sup>56</sup> claiming that he has “long, perfumed blonde curls on his head” (ξανθοῖσι βοστρύχοισιν εὐοσμῶν κόμην)<sup>57</sup> and attesting their distinctiveness as a trait of the god. Mathews writes of these effeminate, long-haired figures that “in letting his hair down Christ took on an aura of divinity that set him apart from the disciples and onlookers who are represented with him.”<sup>58</sup> That aura of divinity created by Christian artists rested on a comparison to Dionysus.

In the centuries after Luke’s composition, the Gospel itself seems to have inspired comparisons of *Dionysus* to *Jesus*. The *Dionysaica* of Nonnus, a fourth- or fifth-century CE Dionysus epic, appears to have taken its inspiration for the birth of Dionysus directly from Luke’s nativity story. Nonnus, whom scholars suggest was a

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<sup>54</sup> Robin M. Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art* (London: Routledge, 2000), 125.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 124-128. See also Thomas F. Mathews, *The Clash of Gods: A Reinterpretation of Early Christian Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 127-128.

<sup>56</sup> *Bacchae* 151, 235, 240, 456, 493

<sup>57</sup> *Bacchae* 235

<sup>58</sup> Mathews, 127.

Christian bishop, also composed a paraphrase of the Gospel of John,<sup>59</sup> which demonstrates his knowledge of and access to Christian Gospels.

In *Dionysiaca*, Zeus announces the birth and role of Dionysus to Semele post-coitus. Though the Lukan messenger bringing the news, Gabriel, is less carnal, the message formula in Luke 1:26-39 is very similar. Both annunciations begin with a statement of the woman's favor in eyes of a god, and both describe the greatness that the male child will possess.

*Dionysiaca* VII.354, 367-368

μείζονα δὲ βροτέης μὴ δίζεο μέτρα γενέθλης.

...

Ὀλβίη, ὅττι θεοῖσι καὶ ἀνδράσι χάριμα λοχεύσεις  
υἷέα κυσαμένη βροτέης ἐπίληθον ἀνίης.

“Don’t seek anyone measured better among mortals than your child.

...

Blessed one, you shall bring forth joys to gods and men,  
for the son you conceive erases from memory the sorrows of mortals.”

Luke 1:28, 30-33

καὶ εἰσελθὼν πρὸς αὐτὴν εἶπεν. χαῖρε, κεχαριτωμένη, ὁ κύριος μετὰ σου.

...

καὶ εἶπεν ὁ ἄγγελος αὐτῇ, μὴ φοβοῦ, Μαριάμ, εὗρες γὰρ χάριν παρὰ τῷ θεῷ.  
καὶ ἰδοὺ συλλήμψῃ ἐν γαστρὶ καὶ τέξῃ υἱὸν καὶ καλέσεις τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ  
Ἰησοῦν. οὗτος ἔσται μέγας καὶ υἱὸς ὑψίστου κληθήσεται καὶ δώσει αὐτῷ  
κύριος ὁ θεὸς τὸν θρόνον Δαυὶδ τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτοῦ. καὶ βασιλεύσει ἐπὶ τὸν  
οἶκον Ἰακώβ εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας καὶ τῆς βασιλείας αὐτοῦ οὐκ ἔσται τέλος.

“And going in, he said to her, ‘Rejoice, favored one, the Lord is with you.

...

And the angel said to her, ‘Don’t fear, Mary, you have found favor with the  
Lord.

Look, you will conceive in your womb and will give birth to a son and you will  
name him Jesus. He will be great, and he will be called Son of the Most High,

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<sup>59</sup> “General Introduction,” *Dionysiaca*, trans. W.H.D. Rouse (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1940), vii.

and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will rule over the house of Jacob into the ages, and to his domain there will be no end.”

Both texts share the common theme of a god conceiving in a mortal woman a son who will be “great” (μέγας in Luke and its comparative form, μείζονα, in Nonnus) and who will hold some sort of authority. This annunciation to the mother of her divine conception, as well as the specific prediction of the child’s future, is unlike the nativity stories of other Greco-Roman gods and heroes.<sup>60</sup>

Another distinctive trait shared by Luke’s birth narrative and Nonnus’s *Dionysaica* is the idea of a child leaping *in utero* to recognize a religious figure or rite. Luke records that upon hearing Mary’s greeting, John leaps in Elizabeth’s womb, a response to an aural stimulus. Luke uses the verb ἔσκιρτησεν, from σκιρτάω (“to spring, leap, bound”<sup>61</sup>), to denote this action (1:41 and 1:44).

In the *Dionysaica*, the pregnant Semele frolics in Bacchic fashion, dancing and making animal noises, and the unborn Dionysus dances, too. Nonnus places a special emphasis on the sentience of the fetus, calling Dionysus “sensible, though yet unborn” (παῖς ἔχέφρων...ἔνδομούχοισι)<sup>62</sup> and affirming that he is an “understanding baby”

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<sup>60</sup> *Iliad* 19.102-105 does include a prediction by Zeus about the birth of Herakles: “Today the goddess of birth pangs and labor will bring to light a human child, a man-child born of the stock of men who spring from *my* blood, one who will lord it over all who dwell around him” (trans. Fagles). However, this prediction by Zeus cuts out the mention of Herakles’s mother, Alcmene, completely. Other mothers of powerful men were also informed of miraculous births; for example, Augustus’ mother Atia conceived him after attending a midnight service at the Temple of Apollo. She fell asleep in her litter, was impregnated by the god in the form of a snake, and was given a birthmark in the form of a serpent (Suetonius, *Augustus* 94). While pregnant, Pericles’ mother, Agariste, dreamed that she gave birth to a lion (Herodotus, *Histories* 6. 131. 2). Olympias, the mother of Alexander the Great, dreamed that her womb was struck by a thunderbolt (Plutarch, *Vita Alexander* 2.3). However, while these mothers of famous men often received signs about their children, Semele and the Lukan Mary alone remain the women directly informed while awake about their sons’ births and futures.

<sup>61</sup> LSJ, “σκιρτάω”

<sup>62</sup> Nonnus, *Dionysaica* VIII.28-29

(νοερὸν βρέφος).<sup>63</sup> Dionysus's dance *in utero* is described with the verb συνεσκίρτησε. The joyful actions of the unborn Dionysus are a response to the aural stimulus of herdsman's pipes,<sup>64</sup> and they serve as a connection to Luke's nativity story.

By using Luke as a model for his Dionysiac nativity story, Nonnus is recognizing and exploiting parallels between Jesus and Dionysus, just as earlier authors—including Luke—did. With such awareness of the similarities between Jesus and Dionysus, Luke's choice to highlight parallels between the two is not unique or even surprising.

### ***Jesus and Dionysus: Birth and parentage***

In the Lukan tale of his divine conception, Jesus shares his nativity with Dionysus. According to the opening speech of the *Bacchae*,<sup>65</sup> Dionysus is the son of Zeus and a mortal princess of Thebes, Semele. His anger burns against his mother's sisters, who insist that he is a bastard whose conception was covered up by a fantastic story;<sup>66</sup> Dionysus readily admits that it is for their disbelief in the nature of his father that he has driven his mothers' sisters mad.<sup>67</sup>

Similarly, Luke focuses on the divine parentage of Jesus. The angel Gabriel announces to Mary, "He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David" (οὗτος ἔσται μέγας καὶ υἱὸς ὑψίστου κληθήσεται καὶ δώσει αὐτῷ κύριος ὁ θεὸς τὸν θρόνον Δαυὶδ τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτοῦ, 1:32). Here, the angel focuses not only on Jesus' future greatness, but

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<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, VIII.32

<sup>64</sup> *Dionysaica* VIII.29-30

<sup>65</sup> *Bacchae* 1-63.

<sup>66</sup> *Bacchae* 26-34.

<sup>67</sup> *Bacchae* 33-42

also on his recognition as the “Son of the Most High.” Gabriel restates his prediction of the recognition of Jesus in 2:35, stating again, “...he will be called Son of God” (κληθήσεται υἱός θεοῦ). Gabriel’s prophecy is proven true, as Jesus is referred to as “Son of God” four times in the Gospel,<sup>68</sup> and a voice from heaven addresses him as “my son” twice.<sup>69</sup> Those who recognize him as “son of God” are supernatural beings who presumably have a full understanding of Jesus’ role in the universe: God (at Jesus’ baptism, 3:22; at the transfiguration, 9:35), the devil (at the temptation, 4:3, 4:9) and the demon called Legion (in Gerasa, 8:28). Luke also takes pains to relate Jesus’ genealogy back through Adam directly to God (3:38).

It is exactly this type of recognition that Dionysus seeks when he enters Thebes in the *Bacchae*. In his opening monologue,<sup>70</sup> Dionysus mentions his role as the son of Zeus three times.<sup>71</sup> The very first line of the play—indeed its second and third words—presses this point: ἦκω Διὸς παῖς τῆνδε Θηβαίων χθόνα (“I have come, the son of Zeus, to this Theban place”). Throughout the rest of the play, Dionysus’s status as a child of Zeus is mentioned twelve more times.<sup>72</sup> Demonstrating a burning preoccupation with recognition, Dionysus is often the one who declares his father’s identity. In explaining to Pentheus why he has brought his rituals to Greece, he says, “Dionysus sent me—son of Zeus” (Διόνυσος ἡμᾶς εἰσέβησ’ , ὁ τοῦ Διός).<sup>73</sup> His emphasis on his divine parentage is also heavily concentrated in the *deus ex machina* scene, where Dionysus

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<sup>68</sup> Luke 3:38, 4:3, 4:9, 8:28

<sup>69</sup> Luke 3:22, 9:35

<sup>70</sup> i.e., 1-63

<sup>71</sup> *Bacchae* 1, 28 and 42

<sup>72</sup> *Bacchae* 84 (chorus); 366 (Teiresias); 417 (chorus); 466 (Dionysus); 550-551 (chorus); 581 (Dionysus); 601 (chorus); 725 (chorus); 859, 1340-1341, 1343 and 1349 (Dionysus). This recognition is attributed to the only characters in the play who are depicted as understanding the importance of Dionysus’ journey in Thebes: Teiresias, Dionysus himself and the chorus.

<sup>73</sup> *Bacchae* 466

appears as a god and explains the fates of the characters. At the end of this speech, he punctuates it with an appeal to authority: “I say these things. I, Dionysus, born from no mortal father, but from Zeus” (ταῦτ’ οὐχὶ θνητοῦ πατρὸς ἔκγεγώς λέγω Διόνυσος, ἀλλὰ Ζηνός).<sup>74</sup>

In the *Bacchae*, the divine parentage of Dionysus is openly doubted by both Agave’s sisters and Pentheus. While the chorus and Teiresias offer their belief in the identity of the god’s father, it is Dionysus himself who typically declares that he is the son of Zeus. However, in Luke, Jesus is recognized as the son of God *by God*, as well as by other supernatural entities. Luke gives more reliable sources for Jesus’ parentage than Euripides does; moreover, Jesus himself does not point out his status repeatedly, as Dionysus does. Dionysus doth protest too much, and while the Lukan Jesus may share characteristics with him, he is the superior being whose status as the son of God is attested by authoritative voices.

### ***Jesus and Dionysus: Wine, wandering and women***

In popular perception, Dionysus is the “god of wine.” This description brings to the modern mind images of an indulgent reveler passing around cups brimming with intoxicating liquid. However, Padel points out the anachronism of the “god of” formula, noting, “Greek gods were ‘many-named’: invested in many things at once.”<sup>75</sup> In order to evoke Dionysus, one must not necessarily mention wine. The *Bacchae* uses “οἶνος” only eleven times, and two of those instances are simply references to color.<sup>76</sup> Two more are false accusations of licentiousness by Pentheus, and one is a response to these

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<sup>74</sup> *Bacchae* 1340-1341

<sup>75</sup> Ruth Padel, *Whom Gods Destroy: Elements of Greek and Tragic Madness* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 29.

<sup>76</sup> *Bacchae* 235, 439

accusations.<sup>77</sup> Though wine is not eliminated from the Dionysiac rites in the *Bacchae*, it is not itself a central focus. Rather, it is Dionysus’s gift—through wine—of relief from suffering that is important. The Chorus praises Dionysus for his gift of wine, “the only cure for troubles” (οὐδ’ ἔστ’ ἄλλο φάρμακον πόνων)<sup>78</sup> which Dionysus “gives equally to rich and poor alike” (ἴσαν δ’ ἔς τε τὸν ὄλβιον τὸν τε χείρονα δῶκ’ ἔχειν οἴνου τέρψιν ἄλυπον).<sup>79</sup>

Luke does not overly emphasize wine, but Jesus and Dionysus share the traits of offering to humans the gift of relief from struggle. Jesus declares, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor” (4:18-19). Later, when recounting his activities to John the Baptist’s messengers, he says, “Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news brought to them” (7:22). Jesus, like Dionysus, brings as a gift to humans the cure for troubles. Furthermore, in Luke’s apologia, Jesus can provide *better* gifts. While wine may erase the troubles of daily life, it is a temporary fix. Luke’s Jesus, however, offers permanence. As Gabriel predicts, “He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and to his kingdom there will be no end” (1:33).

Both Jesus and Dionysus are wandering missionaries. The first verse of the pericope in Luke 8:1-3 depicts Jesus as a missionary who goes through “cities and

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<sup>77</sup> *Bacchae* 221, 262; 850

<sup>78</sup> *Bacchae* 283

<sup>79</sup> *Bacchae* 421-423

villages” (πόλιν καὶ κῶμην) “bearing the message and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God” (κηρύσσων καὶ εὐαγγελιζόμενος τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ). Likewise, Dionysus is portrayed as a wandering missionary of his holy rites. He describes the previous stops on his missionary journey in the prologue of the *Bacchae*, explaining that he began in Lydia, then went through Phrygia, Persia, Bactria, Media, Arabia and Asia<sup>80</sup> before arriving in Thebes, his “first Greek city” (ἐς τήνδε πρῶτον ἦλθον Ἑλλήνων πόλιν).<sup>81</sup> He does not plan to stop in Thebes, but will journey on:

ἐς δ' ἄλλην χθόνα,  
τᾶνθένδε θέμενος εὖ, μεταστήσω πόδα,  
δεικνύς ἑμαυτόν

...  
“Once I have arranged things well, I will change my steps and show myself in another place.”<sup>82</sup>

Another example of Dionysus’s wandering is found in the final stasimon of Sophocles’s *Antigone* (1115-1152). Here, the chorus claims that they have seen him in several places, thus highlighting his transience. They beseech the god to help the people of Thebes, who “lie in the iron grip of plague”<sup>83</sup> (ἔχεται πᾶνδαμος πόλις ἐπὶ νόσου).<sup>84</sup> The chorus then asks the god to bring his “healing steps” (καθαρσίω ποδὶ)<sup>85</sup> and acknowledges that Dionysus is the son of Zeus (παῖ Διὸς γένεθλον).<sup>86</sup> This parallel does not necessarily mean that Luke based his story of Jesus and the demoniac on the description of Dionysus in *Antigone*. However, the Jesus of the Lukan itinerary shares

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<sup>80</sup> *Bacchae* 13-19

<sup>81</sup> *Bacchae* 20

<sup>82</sup> *Bacchae* 48-50

<sup>83</sup> Sophocles, *Antigone*, in *The Three Theban Plays*, trans. Robert Fagles (New York: Viking Penguin, 1984).

<sup>84</sup> Sophocles, *Antigone* 1140-1141

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 1144

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 1149

the trait of wandering and healing. In 8:26-39, Jesus crosses into the Decapolis city of Gerasa. He is immediately recognized as “Son of the Most High God” (υἱε τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ὑψίστου) by a demon (8:28). He then works a miracle, casting the demons from the man, and departs. Here, Jesus is not only recognized as a healer (8:36), but also feared and rejected (8:37), just as Dionysus is rejected by Pentheus in the *Bacchae*.

Luke’s comparison of Jesus and Dionysus is most striking in his account of the women who accompany the adult Jesus on his travels. These female followers of Jesus share traits—such as an emphasis on trios and rich naming—with Dionysiac maenads. However, the Christian maenads eliminate any potentially objectionable traits of the Dionysiac maenads, trading destruction for provision and wildness for calm.

In myth, literature and art, Dionysus is depicted as surrounded by his band of maenads, the women he has driven to divine madness. This topos was unusual in the world of Greco-Roman religion, for divinities typically were accompanied by attendants of the same gender.<sup>87</sup> Maenads were distinctively Dionysiac, and they were an active part of both cult and myth. These women “...display startling symptoms of Dionysiac seizure: they toss back their heads and expose their throats in forceful convulsion; they roll their eyes; they shout like animals, their mouths open and foaming; they trample the ground and stampede through the woods as if engaged in a wild chase; and in the final

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<sup>87</sup> Walter F. Otto, *Dionysus: Myth and Cult* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1973), 175: “Whereas all other divinities are accompanied by attendants who are of the same sex as they, women make up the intimate surroundings and retinue of Dionysus.” To claim that *all* other divinities were accompanied by same-sex attendants is erroneous. See, for example, the self-castrating priests of Cybele; however, their tendency to alter their gender through castration and the wearing of women’s clothing does give them a more ambiguous gender.

climax of their fit, they turn into savage beasts, killing goats, fawns and cattle and devouring their raw flesh.”<sup>88</sup>

These mythic maenads also had a peaceful and orderly side. In the first messenger speech of the *Bacchae*, the ἄγγελος reports that he has seen the women in a nurturing and sensible manner:

εἰκῆ βαλοῦσαι σωφρόνως, οὐχ ὡς σὺ φῆς  
ῶνωμένας κρατῆρι καὶ λωτοῦ ψόφω  
θηρᾶν καθ’ ὕλην Κύπριν ἠρημωμένας.<sup>89</sup>

...  
“They had let themselves go, in a sensible way,  
not as you said, sir, intoxicated by wine and flute  
not running off by themselves in the woods for sex.”<sup>90</sup>

The messenger then relates the wonders he has seen: the maenads belted their fawnskins with snakes; they tenderly nursed gazelles and wolf cubs; they could strike their *thyrsos* on the ground and bring forth water or wine; if they dug into the ground with their fingers and a well of milk would come up; and honey spouted from their *thyrsos*.<sup>91</sup>

Plutarch’s enlightening account of maenadic behavior in *Mulieres virtutis* (“The Bravery of Women”), describes the women as enjoying a special place outside their normative roles. He records that a band of divinely maddened Delphic Thyiads wandered into a city in Phocis and fell into a deep sleep, not yet having regained their proper reasoning after their Bacchic revels. The Phocian women, whose country was at war with Delphi, formed a protective circle around the foreign maenads and silently

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<sup>88</sup> Henrichs, “Maenadism,” 122.

<sup>89</sup> *Bacchae* 686-688.

<sup>90</sup> translation from Paul Woodruff, *Euripides’ Bacchae* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1999), 28-29.

<sup>91</sup> *Bacchae* 695-711.

guarded them from enemy soldiers and the city's men. Once the maenads awakened, the Phocian women escorted them across the border safely.<sup>92</sup> The actions of the maenads—wandering away from their city without male supervision—demonstrate that they were not expected to behave within the normal limits of society. But it is the actions of the Phocian women that Plutarch commends. The purpose of his volume, written to his friend Clea (herself a priestess of Dionysus<sup>93</sup>), is to highlight the fact that men and women have the same capacity for valor.<sup>94</sup>

Opinion about the maenadic role in actual Dionysiac cultic activity varies. Henrichs both recognizes the problems in using the *Bacchae* as a source for cultic behavior at the time of its writing and points out that “the *Bacchae* itself...must be considered a potential source of inspiration for later maenadic cult.”<sup>95</sup> Epigraphical sources for Dionysiac cult vary, but in sacrifices and cult practice, women seemed to take on a large role. According to an Erchian calendar from the fourth century,<sup>96</sup> certain women played a prominent role in the joint sacrifices for Dionysus and his mother, Semele; after the sacrifices, these women were entitled to receive the all of the sacrificial meat.<sup>97</sup> And while acting in the role of a maenad was an important part of cult, women were not restricted to *only* this role: “Being a maenad was a periodic and temporary occupation which did not exclude taking an active part in other forms of

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<sup>92</sup> Plutarch, *Moralia*, “Mulieres virtutis” 13.

<sup>93</sup> Plutarch, *Moralia*, “De Iside et Osiride” 35

<sup>94</sup> “Mulieres virtutis” 1

<sup>95</sup> Henrichs, “Maenadism,” 122.

<sup>96</sup> Henrichs, “Between Country and City,” 263.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 263-264. Henrichs quotes fragments from Erchia Δ 33-40, which says that the goat is “to be handed over to the women” (παραδό(σιμος) γυν<α>ιξί) and the skin of the goat to the priestess (λερέαι τὸ δέρμα) and from Erchia A 44-51, which echoes the same procedure.

Dionysiac cult.”<sup>98</sup> For example, a Milesian woman named Alkmeonis is recorded as having been both a leader of local maenads and a public priestess of Dionysus in the third century BCE.<sup>99</sup>

Henrichs highlights the differing terms for maenads and leaders of a group; *συνάγειν συναγωγή* and *συναγωγεύς* “were used technically in inscriptions in connection with either the foundation or the regular meetings of professional or religious clubs.”<sup>100</sup> Presumably, the women in charge would be responsible for organization and perhaps coordinating and offering sacrifices, while the maenads’ primary purpose was to worship the god. In all instances of Dionysiac myth and cult, women played significant roles.

### ***Jesus and Dionysus: Death and resurrection***

Another distinctive trait shared by Jesus and Dionysus is that both were said to have died and resurrected. Dionysus Zagreus was the dying and rising god; his myth relates that Hera had the god torn to pieces by the Titans.<sup>101</sup> Plutarch records that the Greeks eventually identified the Egyptian god Osiris with Dionysus.<sup>102</sup> He points out the many similarities in the gods’ religious rites, as well as that the myth of Dionysus’ dismemberment by the Titans agrees with the stories of the revivification and regeneration of Osiris.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Henrichs, “Maenadism,” 134.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 134 n 41.

<sup>101</sup> Otto, 191-192.

<sup>102</sup> Plutarch, *Moralia*, “De Iside et Osiride” 13, 28, 34-37

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 35

Plutarch also mentions that the citizens of Delphi believe that the remains of Dionysus rest by the oracle there.<sup>104</sup> Pseudo-Clement, writing in the late second or early third centuries, mentions the fact that the Thebans claim that the grave of Dionysus is in Thebes and argues that the grave of Dionysus means that he could never have resurrected, as Jesus did.<sup>105</sup> In *Contra Celsum*, Origen mentions the Dionysiac myths that state that the god was torn to pieces, resurrected and returned to heaven, then argues for the superiority of Jesus' story,<sup>106</sup> again admitting parallels but demonstrating that even in death, Jesus surpasses the gods of the Greco-Roman pantheon.

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 35

<sup>105</sup> Pseudo-Clement, Homily V, 23

<sup>106</sup> Origen, *Contra Celsum* 42

## CHAPTER II

### LUKE 8:1-3: CHRISTIAN MAENADS AND THE BEGINNING OF THE ITINERARY

Luke's strategy of acknowledging pagan parallels to the stories of Jesus begins in 8:1-3. This brief passage is unique to the Third Gospel. Examining its style and wording, Fitzmyer claims that the entire passage is a wholly Lukan composition.<sup>107</sup> Luke 8:1 begins a series of accounts of Jesus' travels that ends with his triumphal entry into Jerusalem in 19:28. Darrell L. Bock locates in chapters 8 and 9 a "small, uniquely Lukan unit (8:1-9:50)" that "introduces a period of Jesus' ministry where he is constantly on the move."<sup>108</sup> Bovon finds three literary units in Luke: Jesus' activity in Galilee (4:14-9:50), his travel to Jerusalem (9:51-19:27) and his activities in Jerusalem (19:28-24:53).<sup>109</sup> It is better, however, to begin the itinerary section of Luke with 8:1. The earlier chapters of the Gospel are concerned with the very foundations of Jesus' ministry: his first sermon (4:14-30), his first demonic exorcism (4:31-37), his first physical healing (4:38-42), his calling of disciples (5:1-11) and his choosing of the Twelve (6:12-16), the beginnings of conflicts with the Pharisees (6:1-11), his first interaction with Romans (7:1-10) and his first resurrection of an individual (7:11-17).

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<sup>107</sup> Joseph Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke X-XXIV* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1985), 695. Hans Conzelmann, on the other hand, connects 8:1-3 with Mk 15:40, claiming that there is no need for a new source here (*The Theology of St. Luke*, trans. Geoffrey Buswell (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1960), 47.

<sup>108</sup> Bock, 711.

<sup>109</sup> Bovon, 2.

Jesus' activities in chapters 4-7 are a microcosm of the rest of his ministry, a dress rehearsal before he takes his show on the road. With the models for the rest of Jesus' ministry in place, Luke begins Jesus' missionary journey in 8:1: "Soon afterwards he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God" (Καὶ ἐγένετο ἐν τῷ καθεξῆς καὶ αὐτός διώδευσεν κατὰ πόλιν καὶ κώμην κηρύσσων καὶ εὐαγγελιζόμενος τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ). The "soon afterward" signals a new portion of the text in which Jesus, accompanied by the Twelve and others, begins the journey that culminates in Jerusalem.

Because of its depiction of women as agents early in Jesus' ministry, this pericope is often seen as demonstrating Luke's positive view of women.<sup>110</sup> Cadbury writes, "With women, [as opposed to slaves], Luke apparently shows a keen sympathy and understanding, though by no means in the way of any feminist revolt."<sup>111</sup> Danker is a bit more enthusiastic about Jesus' progressiveness: "Nonconformist that he was, Jesus refused to permit tradition to endorse second-class status for women."<sup>112</sup> However, while these women are visibly present in Luke, they are silent. De Boer notes that while the women of 8:1-3 actively support Jesus' ministry, they are given no individual voices.<sup>113</sup> But their actions—they provide for Jesus and the group out of their own means (διηκόνουθιν αὐτοῖς ἐκ τῶν ὑπαρχόντων αὐταῖς, 8:3)—speak for them and attest their helpfulness, and their distinguishing details evoke Dionysiac maenads.

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<sup>110</sup> e.g., Fred B. Craddock writes, "Luke's favorable reports about women began with Elizabeth and Mary and will continue throughout Acts..." (*Luke*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Westminster John Knox Press, 1991)), 107.

<sup>111</sup> Henry J. Cadbury, *The Making of Luke-Acts* (Macmillan, 1927), 263.

<sup>112</sup> Frederick W. Danker, *Luke* (Proclamation Commentary; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), 172.

<sup>113</sup> Esther A. de Boer, "The Lukan Mary Magdalene and Other Women Following Jesus," *Feminist Companion to Luke*, 149-151.

Scholars generally contend that Luke mentions “some women” (γυναῖκές τινες, 8:2) early in Jesus’ travels so that they would be established as companions of Jesus and would thus be credible witnesses to the resurrection.<sup>114</sup> Luke 23:55 refers to “the women who had come with him from Galilee” who “saw the tomb and how his body was laid” (ἐθεσάντο τὸ μνημεῖον καὶ ὡς ἐτέθη τὸ σῶμα αὐτοῦ); then, Mary Magdalene and Joanna go to the tomb and find it empty (24:10).<sup>115</sup> However, Mary Magdalene, Joanna and Susanna are given an important role far earlier in Luke’s Gospel. Luke gives the reader more than just their names—he offers clues about their lives prior to becoming followers of Jesus. Here is what is known about the women:

1. Their names are “Mary called Magdalene” (Μαρία καλουμένη Μαγδαληνή, 8:3); Joanna (Ἰωάννα, 8:2) and Susanna (Σουσάννα, 8:3)
2. Seven demons had been cast from Mary Magdalene (ἅφ’ ἐς δαιμόνια ἕπτα ἐξεληλύθει, 8:2)
3. They have been healed of evil spirits and sicknesses (τεθεραπευμένοι ἀπὸ πνευμάτων πονηρῶν καὶ ἀσθενειῶν, 8:2)
4. Joanna is the “wife of Chouza, administrator of Herod” (γυνὴ Χουζᾶ, ἐπιτρόπου Ἡρώδου, 8:3)
5. There were others with them (ἕτεροι πολλαί, 8:3)
6. They provided for Jesus, the disciples and possibly other women<sup>116</sup> out of their means (διηκόνουν αὐτοῖς ἐκ τῶν ὑπαρχόντων, 8:3)

<sup>114</sup> Witherington, 135-138; de Boer, 153; I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke* (The New International Greek Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978), 315; Johnson, *Gospel*, 132-134.

<sup>115</sup> Though Mary Magdalene and Joanna are mentioned at the tomb, Susanna is not named again. However, she may be included among “the other women with them” (αἱ λοιπαὶ σὺν αὐταῖς) in 24:10.

<sup>116</sup> There is a singular textual variant present for the plural αὐτοῖς in 8:2. Though the general consensus is to go with the *lectio difficilior* plural, Carla Ricci argues for a singular reading—that the women provided only for Jesus—on the basis that the αὐτοῖς is a scribal harmonization (Ricci, *Maria di Magdala e le molte altre: Donne sul cammino di Gesù*, Naples: D’Auria, 1991, qtd. in Robert Karris, “Women and Discipleship in Luke,” *Feminist Companion*, 29). Karris agrees. Additionally, a reading of “them” would allow the women to have provided for the female followers of Jesus, not just the leader, the twelve and other male disciples.

### *The trio of ministering women*

Luke casts the trio of Mary, Joanna and Susanna as Christian maenads, modeled on the maenads who followed Dionysus. The number, social status, names and actions of the women in 8:1-3 serve to depict them as Christian maenads.

Dionysus is particularly associated with groups of *three* women who are usually sisters. In some stories, these women are his nurses (τιθήνας), present from his birth; more often, they are women who have refused his rites and have been struck with divine madness as punishment. Henrichs disagrees with Dodds that there is a universal triplet of maenads in charge of cultic bands,<sup>117</sup> but both agree that trios of women are a topos in Dionysiac myth.

*Iliad* 6.130ff describes the maenads as “nursing mothers of mad Dionysus” (μαινομένιο Διωνύσοιο τιθήνας) and are chased down the slopes of Mt. Nysa while protecting the god from harm at the hands of Lycurgus. *Homeric Hymn* 26, traditionally attributed to Homer but from no later than the fifth century BCE,<sup>118</sup> calls these nurses “nymphs” who both nurtured Dionysus as a toddler and followed him as an adult: “The nymphs followed him and he led the way as the boundless forest echoed with din” (αὶ δὲ ἄμ’ ἔποντο Νύμφαι, ὃ δ’ ἔξηγεῖτο, Βρόμος δ’ ἔχεν ἄσπετον ὕλην).<sup>119</sup> Maenadic

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<sup>117</sup> Henrichs, “Maenadism,” 138 n. 50. In his note to *Bacchae* 680, Dodds writes: “In historical times, there were three official θιάσοι of ‘maenads’ at Thebes, as may be inferred from an inscription... This triple organization is attested also for Rhodes, and was probably universal; as at Thebes it is reflected in the story of the three mad princesses, its first leaders, so at Orchomenos Dionysus maddens the *three* daughters of Minyas, at Argos the *three* daughters of Proteus” (162).

<sup>118</sup> *Homeric Hymn* 26, “To Dionysus,” trans. Apostolos N. Athanassakis in *The Homeric Hymns*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), xv: “[W]e do not know who composed them or when and where they were composed... we are therefore dealing with literary documents of great antiquity.”

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

trios appear outside of myth. A Hellenistic inscription from Magnesia recounts a Delphic oracle that instructs the Magnesians to import the rites of Dionysus by bringing in three maenads from Thebes. An addition to the inscription states that the rites were successfully imported by maenads named Kosko, Baubo and Thettale.<sup>120</sup>

Most maenadic trios are divinely maddened. Associated with the Theban Dionysus myth represented in the *Bacchae* are the three daughters of Kadmos—Agaue, Ino and Autonoe. They were sisters of Semele, who was killed by Zeus’s divine radiance before she could give birth to Dionysus. It is to them that Dionysus angrily refers in *Bacchae* 26-27:

ἐπεὶ μ’ ἀδελφαὶ μητρόσ, ἅς ἤκιστα χρῆν,  
Διόνυσον οὐκ ἔφασκον ἐκφῦναι Διός,

...

“...my mother’s sisters, who should have known better,  
said Dionysus was no son of Zeus...”

As punishment for their skepticism, Dionysus drives the women mad. They go to the slopes of Mt. Tmolus, where each leads a band of maenads (θιάσος).<sup>121</sup> Lenai (*Ληνάι*),<sup>122</sup> one of the *Idylls* of third century BCE poet Theocritus, tells the Theban Dionysus myth with an emphasis on the trio of maenads. The short poem, which closely follows Euripides’ version, emphasizes the theme of three, using *τρῆς* twice in the second line of the text (first to describe the number of sisters and second to describe the number of bands of maenads they lead), and again in line 6 (for the number of altars set up to Semele).<sup>123</sup> Ovid tells the tale of the three daughters of Minyas who refused to

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<sup>120</sup> Henrichs, “Maenadism,” 123-124. He posits the date of the maenads’ importation of the rites at sometime between 278 and 250 BCE.

<sup>121</sup> e.g., *Bacchae* 1088

<sup>122</sup> An alternate title for the poem is *Bacchae* (βάκχαι)

<sup>123</sup> Theocritus, *Lenai*. In Christophe Cusset, *Les Bacchantes de Theocrite: Texte, Corps et Morceaux* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2001).

accept the god's divine origin and elected to stay home and weave rather than participate in his rites:

*At non Alcithoe Minyeias orgia censet accipienda dei, sed adhuc temeraria  
Bacchum progeniem negat esse Iovis sociasque sorores impietatis habet.*<sup>124</sup>

...  
And Alcithoe of Minyas does not consent to accepting the rites of the god,  
and in fact denies Bacchus to be the son of Jove;  
her thoughtless sisters are her partners in impiety.

This trio are turned into bats for their irreverence. Similarly, Hesiod relates the story of the daughters of Proteus, who refuse to worship Dionysus and are then driven mad.<sup>125</sup> Though the myths differ, their basic premise is the same: three women refuse to accept the divinity and rites of Dionysus and are punished with madness as a result. Luke, however, turns this convention around by creating a trio of maenads that is not described as mad.

### ***Significant names***

Evocative names are a common trait of maenads. Most commentators remark that the names of the women of 8:1-3 are, with the exception of “Mary,” surprising. Bovon simply notes, “The name Joanna is rare,” and calls Susanna “a rare personal name.”<sup>126</sup> The uncommonness of these names may indicate that Luke wished for his readers to pay particular attention to them, as unusual or suggestive names were often associated with maenads.

There is a marked emphasis on the names of maenads in ancient culture. The names of the three Theban maenads imported to Magnesia—Kosko, Baubo and

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<sup>124</sup> Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 4.1.1-3

<sup>125</sup> Hesiod frag. 27, referenced in Otto, 172-173.

<sup>126</sup> Bovon, 301

Thettale—have puzzled scholars. Though Henrichs claims that “scholars have invested [the names of historical maenads] with a religious significance to which they are hardly entitled,”<sup>127</sup> he admits that maenads represented in literature, inscription and art often have unusual names that are somehow linked to their religious function: “The satyrs, nymph, or maenads of the Bacchic thiasus on Greek vases of the sixth and fifth centuries BC are often identified by highly suggestive names which evoke various associations with vegetation, animals, dances, sex, or other aspects of the Dionysiac experience.”<sup>128</sup> He also notes that names of maenads in poetry are often “suggestive and colorful,” citing Eurynome (“to broaden, spread out,” which can be interpreted as sexually suggestive or in the sense of clearing a space for dancing<sup>129</sup>), Helikonias (“dweller on Helikon,” a hill in Boeotia and the home of the Muses), Glauke (“with gleaming eyes”) and Xanthippe (“blonde”), as well as the “downright Dionysiac” Euanthe (“blooming, flowered”), Choreia (“dance”) and Porphyris (“purple,” “purple-clad”), which evoke actions and colors associated with the god. In the case of Baubo, Kosko and Thettale, Henrichs suggests multiple possibilities of the origin of each name, ultimately deciding that real maenadic names were not always provocative.<sup>130</sup>

In 8:1-3, a passage where “here as elsewhere the redactor’s contribution is decisive,”<sup>131</sup> Luke may be attempting to use striking naming to create a trio of Christian maenads. He has the historically attested Mary Magdalene, but he must add two more female followers. The rare names of Joanna and Susanna could easily be a Lukan creation; they are unusual, and they even sound similar. Moreover, Luke has earlier

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<sup>127</sup> Henrichs, “Maenadism,” 130.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>129</sup> Definitions for names are taken from LSJ

<sup>130</sup> Henrichs, “Maenadism,” 131

<sup>131</sup> Bovon, 299.

used the name “Avva” in his unique section about the prophetess of that name (2:36). That there are three rare “-avva” names exclusively found in one gospel is quite striking and points to this nomenclature having a purpose.

The Hebrew חַנָּה (*Hannah*) means “grace”; Anna is its Latinized form and the version used in the LXX. The Hannah of the Old Testament shares a distinctive trait with the maenads of the *Bacchae*: she is falsely accused of being drunk while participating in religious rites. While praying in the temple, Hannah moves her lips silently. Thinking she is drunk, the priest Eli says, “How long will you make a drunken spectacle of yourself? Put away your wine” (1 Samuel 1:14). She responds that she is not drunk and explains that she was merely deep in prayer because she was troubled (1:15-16). Eli then responds favorably to her and tells her to go in peace and have her petition granted by God (1:17). Like the maenads in the *Bacchae* who are falsely accused by Pentheus of drunkenness in their rites—and then vindicated by the messenger—<sup>132</sup> Hannah is perceived as being intoxicated while worshipping. At the root of two of the three names in Luke 8:1-3 is a woman whose religious experience is characterized in terms similar to those employed in the *Bacchae*.

The meanings behind “Joanna” and “Susanna” illustrate their function as Christian maenads. Σουσάννα, the Greek form of the Hebrew שׁוֹשַׁנָּה (*Shoshanna*), means “lily.” That a maenad would have a name relating to vegetation is predictable, and here, it could even foreshadow Jesus’ mention of lilies in 12:27. Another possibility for the derivation of Susanna is the Persian city of Σοῦσα. If Luke wished to portray Jesus’ women followers as foreign, after the fashion of Dionysiac maenads,

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<sup>132</sup> *Bacchae* 220-221, 814; the women are vindicated by the messenger in 850, who tells Pentheus that they are not drunk as Pentheus claimed

highlighting a Persian city as the provenance of Susanna would certainly accomplish this intent by depicting her as a foreigner from the East.

Luke also could have looked to the LXX for a story that further suggested Susanna as a Christian maenad. Susanna appears in Chapter 13 of the Greek version of Daniel as a righteous woman falsely accused of adultery. Her story is set outdoors, where two elders hide in the bushes to watch her bathe.<sup>133</sup> Once the garden doors are shut and she is alone, they emerge and tell her to have sex with them or they will testify that she was caught in adultery with a young man.<sup>134</sup> She refuses and is brought to trial. During her trial, Daniel rises to her defense and traps the elders by questioning them separately about under what kind of tree they saw Susanna and her lover.<sup>135</sup> The elders disagree, and Susanna is vindicated.<sup>136</sup>

This story shares distinctive traits with the *Bacchae*. In the play, Pentheus assumes that the women are fornicating in the wilderness and hides in a tree to watch their rituals.<sup>137</sup> In reality, the maenads are *not* engaging in sexual acts,<sup>138</sup> and he is discovered, shaken down from the tree and killed for his irreverence.<sup>139</sup> In both stories, trees play a large role. Daniel even puns on the names of the trees reported in the elders' evidence, saying that the first elder's answer of "a mastic tree" (σχίνον) will result in his being cut in two (σχίσει).<sup>140</sup> The second elder's answer of "an evergreen oak" (πρῖνον)

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<sup>133</sup> Susanna 16, 18

<sup>134</sup> Susanna 20-21

<sup>135</sup> Susanna 54-59

<sup>136</sup> Susanna 61

<sup>137</sup> *Bacchae* 810-816

<sup>138</sup> *Bacchae* 687-688 emphasizes that the women were in their right minds, calm and not engaging in sexual acts.

<sup>139</sup> *Bacchae* 1111-1136

<sup>140</sup> Susanna 55

will result in his being split in two (καταπρῖση).<sup>141</sup> Trees form both the cover for Pentheus and the elders and the means of their destruction. Moreover, the women at the centers of each story are vindicated from accusations of sexual misconduct, and Susanna even acts similar to a maenad by crying out “with a loud voice” (ἀνεβόησεν δὲ φωνῇ μεγάλῃ).<sup>142</sup> Luke’s placement of a “Susanna” in his maenadic trio evokes the LXX story of the righteous Susanna as well as the *Bacchae*, and both narratives serve to affirm that the women following Jesus behave properly.

Ἰωάννα<sup>143</sup> is a name even more explicitly Dionysiac. After the Lukan convention of “-αννα” is eliminated, the remainder of the name is Ἰω. This ecstatic syllable is the ritual maenadic exclamation of joy and is unambiguously associated with the following and worshiping of the god. It is a routine cry of the chorus of maenads in the *Bacchae*,<sup>144</sup> and the Ἰω as a loud cry ties together Joanna and the LXX Susanna, who cries out loudly at her trial.

Even if Luke did not round out his trio of Christian maenads by creating names based on his knowledge of Dionysiac nomenclature, it is still quite plausible that he was using significant names modeled on classical texts and ideas. MacDonald has isolated a number of names he deems significant in the Gospels, and particularly in Luke; for example, he connects the Kleopas (“all renown”) of Luke 24:18 with Homer’s Eurykleia (“renown far and wide”), and he sees Zecharias, Elizabeth, and Symeon as

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<sup>141</sup> Susanna 59

<sup>142</sup> Susanna 42

<sup>143</sup> Richard Bauckham, *Gospel Women: Studies of the Named Women in the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Press, 2002), 165-186, argues that the Lukan “Joanna” is simply the Hebraic form of the “Junia” called an apostle in Romans 16:7, but Joanna’s use as a maenadic name makes more sense in the context of the itinerary.

<sup>144</sup> e.g., *Bacchae* 576ff

meaningful.<sup>145</sup> Another example of a significant name in a particularly Dionysiac context is Zacchaeus, as seen below.

### ***Royal women***

Another characteristic of 8:1-3 that ties the women to the maenads is the mention of Joanna's husband Chouza, an administrator of Herod (8:3). Scholars offer insights to Chouza's actual occupation,<sup>146</sup> his role as a potential Lukan source,<sup>147</sup> and the effect on Joanna's status of a connection to Herod.<sup>148</sup> First and foremost, however, the linking of Joanna to an ἐπίτροπος—"one to whom a charge is given, an administrator," a "trustee"<sup>149</sup>—recalls the *Bacchae*.

The word ἐπίτροπος was a somewhat vague term in the Roman Empire, and its typical translation, "procurator," is not much more concrete.<sup>150</sup> Based on evidence from Josephus, who was writing at about the same time as Luke, it could mean something as simple as a guardian, as in a caretaker of a child<sup>151</sup>; more commonly, it connotes a significant amount of power. Josephus refers to Pontius Pilate as the ἐπίτροπος of Judaea,<sup>152</sup> and when he tells of part of Judaea becoming a province, he notes that

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<sup>145</sup> Dennis Ronald MacDonald, *Christianizing Homer: The Odyssey, Plato, and the Acts of Andrew* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 3–33. He further sees a trend in significant names in early Christian literature, noting their presence in Mark, Acts, the Acts of Andrew and the Acts of John (e-mail from the author; 18 February 2008).

<sup>146</sup> Bovon, 301 n24. Bovon understands Joanna's husband to be a Roman governor or functionary.

<sup>147</sup> Marshall, 317. Marshall proposes that this couple is the source for "the special knowledge of Herod and his court reflected in Luke."

<sup>148</sup> de Boer, 146. De Boer claims that Joanna's relationship to the house of Herod "gives Joanna a dubious status comparable to that of a tax collector."

<sup>149</sup> LSJ, "ἐπίτροπος"

<sup>150</sup> William Smith, "procurator," in *A Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities* (London: John Murray, 1875): "the person who has the management of any business committed to him by another... a steward in a family... an officer in the provinces belonging to the Caesar, who attended to the duties discharged by the quaestor in the other provinces"

<sup>151</sup> Josephus, *Bellum Iudaium* 1.41.1: "Trypho the tyrant, the guardian of the son of Antiochus..."

(Τρύφων γάρ ὁ τύραννος, ἐπίτροπος μὲν ὄντων τοῦ Ἀντιόχου παιδός)

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.169.1

“Coponius, a Roman equestrian, was sent quickly as procurator (ἐπίτροπος), having the power of life and death put into his hands by Caesar” (ἐπίτροπος τῆς ἱπικῆς παρὰ Ῥωμαίοις τάξεως Κωπόνιος πέμπεται μέχρι τοῦ κτείνειν λαβὼν παρὰ Καίσαρος ἐξουσίαν).<sup>153</sup> The “power of life and death” assigned to Coponius demonstrates that an ἐπίτροπος was not necessarily a low-level functionary, but could be a person to whom much power was granted. Josephus also mentions ἐπίτροποι as being involved in Titus’ meeting about whether or not to destroy the temple in Jerusalem<sup>154</sup>; their summons to this meeting speaks to a high level of authority. His title does not shed any particular light on Chouza’s role in Herod’s court, but based on Josephus’s use of the word in times contemporary to Luke, he was likely powerful and influential, ranking only a step or two below Herod.

In the *Bacchae*, Agaue, Ino and Autonoe were the royal women of Thebes who were struck with madness and driven into the wilderness. Their madness was a punishment designed for Pentheus, the acting regent of Thebes<sup>155</sup> who refused to allow Dionysus to bring his rites into the city. In Luke, Herod imprisons Jesus’ associate, John (3:19); in 13:31, Pharisees warn Jesus that Herod wants *him* dead. Similarly, Pentheus declares his desire to see Dionysus killed:

παύσω κτυποῦντα θύρσον ἀνασείοντά τε  
κόμας, τράχηλον σώματος χωρὶς τεμών.

...

“I’ll put a stop to him rattling his thyrsus and shaking his hair,  
once I cut his head from his body.”<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 2.117.2

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 6.238.3

<sup>155</sup> In *Bacchae* 43-44, Dionysus explains that Kadmos, while still living, has given his rights as king to his grandson, Pentheus: “Κάδμος μὲν οὖν γέρας τε καὶ τυραννίδα Πενθεῖ δίδωσι θυγατρὸς ἔκπεφθότι”

<sup>156</sup> *Bacchae* 240-241

In Luke, as in the *Bacchae*, local rulers oppose the new religious rites, but the women associated with them follow the new religious figure. Again, Jesus is portrayed as superior to Dionysus. While the women of the *Bacchae* are forcibly possessed by the god, with Agaue even killing her own son as a result of her madness, Jesus' female followers in 8:1-3 willingly accompany him, demonstrating their commitment to him and his cause by "providing for them out of their own means" (8:3).

### ***Lukan possession and divine madness***

Having provided details that associate the women of 8:1-3 with a maenadic trio, Luke then sets them over against their pagan counterparts. The foremost characteristic of maenads was their divine madness. The idea that Dionysus inspires madness is expressed in Plato's *Phaedrus*, where Socrates attributes one of the four types of madness—madness centering on prophecy, ecstasy and relief from everyday toils—to Dionysus.<sup>157</sup> Euripides' symptoms of divine madness are frenzied motion and/or dancing;<sup>158</sup> crying out to the god;<sup>159</sup> supernatural strength which allows the women to tear apart animals with their bare hands;<sup>160</sup> violent tendencies;<sup>161</sup> and foaming mouths, twisted faces and rolling eyes.<sup>162</sup>

Though the beginning of the messenger speech in *Bacchae* 678-711 depicts the women as calm and sober, their behavior quickly changes. The messenger reports that they "spun into a Bacchic dance, shaking the thyrsus and crying 'Iacchus' to the

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<sup>157</sup> Plato, *Phaedrus* 244-245

<sup>158</sup> *Bacchae* 724

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> *Bacchae* 735-747

<sup>161</sup> *Bacchae* 737-764, 1088-1136

<sup>162</sup> *Bacchae* 1122

thunderborn child of Zeus, all with one mouth.”<sup>163</sup> When men attempt to capture them, then maenads go on a bloody rampage, tearing apart cows and bulls,<sup>164</sup> destroying and looting towns,<sup>165</sup> stealing children,<sup>166</sup> and routing the men who came to defend their villages.<sup>167</sup> Later in the play, as Pentheus makes futile pleas for his mother to recognize and not kill him, Euripides writes,

ἦ δ' ἄφρον' ἐξεῖσα καὶ δοαστρῶφους  
κῶρας ἐλίσσουσ', οὐ φρονοῦσ' ἄ χρῆ φρονεῖν,  
ἔκ Βακχίου κατείχεται, οὐδ' ἐπειθέ νιν.

...  
“She was foaming at the mouth, face twisted, eyes rolling, not thinking as she ought to think. She was possessed by Bacchus and did not believe him.”<sup>168</sup>

That Euripides describes Agaue in this manner right before she kills her own son is important. While other descriptions of the bacchantes in the play demonstrate that these women certainly act unusual, the description of Agaue in 1122-1124 is visually striking and terrifying in its picture of the consequences of Dionysiac possession.

Luke’s descriptions of the symptoms of demonic possession are remarkably similar to Euripidean descriptions of the divine madness inflicted by Dionysus. Luke 8:26-39, the longest and most detailed pericope about demonic possession, demonstrates this connection. The account of the demoniac among the tombs is found in all three Synoptics. However, since Matthew did not serve as a Lukan source and severely shortens the story, eliminating nearly all of the symptoms of possession,<sup>169</sup> the details of only Mark 5:1-20 and Luke 8:26-39 are relevant.

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<sup>163</sup> *Bacchae* 724-726

<sup>164</sup> *Bacchae* 737-747

<sup>165</sup> *Bacchae* 754

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>167</sup> *Bacchae* 758-764

<sup>168</sup> *Bacchae* 1122-1124; trans. Woodruff.

<sup>169</sup> Mt 8:28-34

Luke clarifies that the man has demons (ἐχὼν δαιμόνια, 8:26)—not, as in Mark, that he has an “unclean spirit” (πνεύματι ἄκαθάρτῳ, 5:2). Moreover, he specifies that the man is “from the city” (ἐκ τῆς πόλεως, Luke 8:26). While this may have been a clarification to explain the destination of the herdsmen who later tell the story there,<sup>170</sup> this phrase has more significance. A typical trait of those struck with divine possession is their removal from civilization; in the *Bacchae*, the maenads are driven from their homes and “goaded outdoors” to live on the mountain, out of their minds and sitting on “roofless rocks.”<sup>171</sup> Luke’s Gerasene demoniac is not an autochthonous monster who has been in the tombs for his entire existence. He—like the Theban women—was driven from civilization, stung with madness. The theme of madness-inspired exile is picked up again in 8:29, which relates more of the man’s symptoms of possession: the demon had repeatedly seized him, he was kept under guard, he broke the chains and restraints put on him, and he was driven by the demon into the wilds. The detail that the man broke his bonds recalls the superhuman strength displayed by the maenads in *Bacchae* 737-747. Particularly of interest is the phrase “ἤλαύνετο ὑπὸ τοῦ δαιμονίου εἰς τὰς ἐρήμους” (“he was [continually] driven by the demon into the deserted places,” 8:29). The imperfect of ἐλαύνω used here emphasizes that the demon *repeatedly* drove him into remote places, removing him even more from civilization.

Luke adds another unique detail that separates the demoniac from society—he has not worn any clothes “for a long time” (8:27). Proper attire is one of the hallmarks of participation in society, and both the Gerasene demoniac and Dionysiac maenads remove these markers of conformity. While maenads do not wander around naked, they

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<sup>170</sup> Mk 5:14//Lk 8:34

<sup>171</sup> *Bacchae* 33-38

loosen their hair and wear garments of fawnskin (sometimes belted with serpents) and adorn themselves with plants and vegetation.<sup>172</sup> Like a Dionysiac maenad, the Gerasene man of the tombs is possessed by a madness that drives him from civilization and removes its conventional clothing. A reading of the Gerasene demoniac as having symptoms of Dionysiac possession is supported by Luke’s omission of Mark’s detail that the man struck himself with stones (κατακόπτων ἑαυτὸν λίθοις, Mark 5:5). This detail sounds dissonant when read in the context of the divine madness of Dionysus, so Luke removed it. A further connection between the Gerasene demoniac and Dionysiac maenads is Luke’s use of the word “σωφρονοῦντα” to describe the healed man. This word is the adjectival form of σωφροσύνη (“soundness of mind, moderation, discretion, self-control, temperance, chastity”).<sup>173</sup> Euripides uses this word to describe the maenads when they have *not* been whipped into a frenzy by Dionysus: the messenger reports that the women had “let themselves go modestly” (εἰκῆ βαλοῦσαι σωφρόνως).<sup>174</sup> However, the messenger reports that the maenads soon change their behavior to wildness and violence.<sup>175</sup> The use of σωφροσύνη to describe their behavior *before* the Bacchic dances and resulting violence highlights the severity of the appalling change in their actions; Luke uses the word to do the exact opposite. Contrasting the Gerasene man’s previous behavior, it demonstrates the complete restoration and proper actions of the former demoniac. Additionally, though Mark and Luke both record Jesus’ refusal to have the man follow him,<sup>176</sup> this emphasis on the man’s restoration to his community completes

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<sup>172</sup> *Bacchae* 695-711, *inter alia*

<sup>173</sup> LSJ, σωφροσύνη

<sup>174</sup> *Bacchae* 686

<sup>175</sup> *Bacchae* 723ff

<sup>176</sup> Mk 5:19-20//Lk 8:38-39

the reversal of his divine possession. Whereas the possession had before isolated him from his home, his freedom from that possession restores him there. This temporary sojourn in the clutches of madness is similar to the periodic possessions of historical maenads, who would briefly participate in the god's rites, then return to their homes and lives.<sup>177</sup>

In 9:37-43a, Luke gives another account of demonic possession. Here, the author redacts a number of Markan details in order to align the symptoms of demonic possession with *Dionysiac* possession. All three Synoptics tell the story of a boy possessed by a spirit that plagues him with symptoms that sound, to the modern ear, like epilepsy (Matthew 17:14-21//Mark 9:14-29//Luke 9:37-43a). Mark describes the boy as having “a spirit without speech” (πνεῦμα ἄλαλον, 9:17). This spirit seizes the boy (καταλάβη) and throws him down (ῥήσσει), and he foams at the mouth (ἀφρίζει), grinds his teeth (τρίζει τοὺς ὀδόντας) and goes rigid (ξηραίνεται, 9:18). Mark also notes that the boy is often thrown into the fire and the water (9:22).

Matthew diagnoses the boy's affliction, noting that “he has moon-sickness and suffers terribly” (σεληνιαζεται καὶ κακῶς πάσχει, 17:15). This “moon sickness” was

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<sup>177</sup> As the example of Alkmeonis mentioned previously attests, maenadism was a temporary commitment. The end of the *Bacchae*, however, is more tragic, with Kadmos, Agave and the rest of the royal family exiled from Thebes and each other. Here, the return to family nicely plays on both myth and history: it shows possession as short-lived, but only when Jesus intervenes. Again acting over-against Dionysus, Jesus does not scatter and exile the formerly possessed persons, but reunites them with their families and homes.

the ancient term for epilepsy,<sup>178</sup> and Matthew, like Mark, notes that the boy's disease causes him to fall into fire and water, endangering his life.<sup>179</sup>

Luke's account is reminiscent of epilepsy, but he changes a number of Mark's details. First, while Mark describes the spirit as "without speech" (πνεῦμα ἄλαλον, 9:17), Luke assures the reader that when the spirit seizes him, "he suddenly cries out" (ἐξαίφνης κράζει, 9:39). Here, Luke chooses to give the possession more Dionysiac qualities by calling to mind the loud shouts of divinely possessed maenads.<sup>180</sup> Against Mark and Matthew, Luke makes no mention of the boy falling down or being cast into the fire and water. Instead, Luke points out that as the boy cries out, the demon "tears him until he foams, and shatters him, and will scarcely leave him" (σπαράσσει αὐτὸν μετὰ ἀφροῦ καὶ μὲν γιγίσι ἀποχωρεῖ ἀπ' αὐτοῦ συντριβὴν αὐτόν, 9:39). Luke also eliminates Mark's description of the healing that left the boy "like a corpse" (which implies a recumbent state) after the unclean spirit came out (Mark 9:26). It seems that the author of Luke intended the reader to imagine that the boy kept his feet during the attacks, crying out and convulsing but *not* being dashed to the ground. As in 8:26-39, Luke is again concerned with the reuniting of the demon-possessed individual to society. Luke 9:42 notes that Jesus rebukes the spirit, heals the boy and gives him back to his father. Just like the Gerasene demoniac, the boy rejoins society. Both of these heavily redacted Lukan accounts of possession share symptoms with the Dionysiac possession of the *Bacchae*. In these accounts, Jesus demonstrates his superiority to

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<sup>178</sup> Folklore attributed "moon sickness" to displeasing Selene, the moon, but there were early dissensions to this. Hippocrates refutes the notion that epilepsy has anything to do with divine possession in his c. 400 BCE treatise, "On the Sacred Disease." Therefore, its folkloric connection with the moon goddess likely did not motivate its inclusion in Matthew's account.

<sup>179</sup> Mt 17:15

<sup>180</sup> *Bacchae* 25, 151, 157 and 1154. In these occurrences, the maenads describe their shouting or are commanded by Dionysus to shout loudly in his honor.

supernatural forces. Furthermore, because the symptoms of possession are modeled after those of Dionysiac madness, Jesus is depicted as more powerful than Dionysus. While Dionysus drives people from society, causing them to act violently, foam at the mouth, and shed their conventional clothing, the Lukan Jesus restores the Gerasene demoniac to his “right mind” (“σωφρονοῦντα,” 8:35) and the possessed boy to his father (9:42).

It is in this context of divine madness that the reader of Luke is to understand the formerly possessed women of 8:1-3. In contrast to the frenzied maenads of Dionysus, the women of 8:1-3 are completely sane. The first description Luke gives of these women is that “they had been healed of evil spirits and sicknesses” (αὐὶ ἦσαν τεθεραπευμένοι ἀπὸ πνευμάτων πονηρῶν καὶ ἀσθενειῶν, 8:2). Mary Magdalene, in particular, has had seven demons cast from her (8:2). Though the women following Jesus in 8:1-3 evoke maenads in their number, names and history of possession, they have none of the disturbing qualities that of Dionysiac women. They presumably once had these qualities, but Jesus healed them and brought them to their right minds. Rather than plundering and destroying, like their Bacchic counterparts, the women of 8:1-3 “provided for them out of their means” (διηκόνουν αὐτοῖς ἐκ τῶν ὑπαρχόντων αὐταῖς, 8:3).

Luke 8:1-3 tacitly acknowledges that any women following Jesus, a Dionysus-like figure, would have likely been compared to maenads. However, this pericope shows that Jesus’ followers possess no harmful maenadic traits. Rather, as anti-maenads, they quietly and sanely follow Jesus and provide for him and his followers.

### CHAPTER III

#### LUKE 18:35-19:10: THE JERICHO EXCHANGE, THE BACCHAE AND THE END OF THE ITINERARY

While the women of 8:1-3 introduce Jesus' missionary journey and characterize him as a better Dionysus, the Jericho pericope of 18:35-19:10 concludes this journey. And while the women evoke Dionysiac connections through Luke's use of themes culled from the *Bacchae* and universal Bacchic themes, the story of Zacchaeus is expressly modeled on the entire course of action of Euripides' *Bacchae*.

Luke's Zacchaeus pericope is often read simply as "a whimsically charming story"<sup>181</sup> with unique and vivid details, such as the sycamore tree, Zacchaeus's stature and the *hapax legomenon* of ἀρχιτελώνης in 19:2. Some attention has been given to whether the pericope emphasizes salvation or vindication,<sup>182</sup> but as Loewe rightly notes, commentators typically give this story "short shrift, clarifying this or that detail before

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<sup>181</sup> William P. Loewe, "Towards an Interpretation of Luke 19:1-10," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 36.03 (1974), 321.

<sup>182</sup> This question arises from the problematic present tense of δίδωμι and ποδιδωμι in 19:8—does Zacchaeus currently make a practice of giving to the poor and making restitution to those he [accidentally?] defrauds, or is he making a promise based on an encounter with Jesus and his subsequent conversion? Traditionally, the passage has been read as one of conversion, but a more recent reading is that of Zacchaeus' vindication by Jesus to a grumbling crowd, and support for this has increased in recent years. Joseph A. Fitzmyer proposes the story as one of vindication, translating the verbs in 19:8 in the present tense; he notes that Zacchaeus does not beg Jesus for mercy, and Jesus makes no reference to Zacchaeus' faith, repentance or conversion (1220-1221). In addition to this, a variety of renderings of the present tense in 19:8 have been offered, including taking the verbs as present progressive (Johnson, 285-286) and Green (671-672); present resolve (Bock, 1520 and J.M. Creed (*The Gospel According to St. Luke* (London: Macmillan and Co. Limited, 1930), 231). Scholars favoring a reading of the story as one of conversion include the following: Bock; John Nolland, *The World Biblical Commentary: Luke 18:35-24:53* (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1993); Conzelmann; Dennis Hamm ("Luke 19:8 Once Again: Does Zacchaeus Defend or Resolve?," *Journal of Biblical Literature* Vol. 107, No. 3 (1988), 431-437); Tannehill; and Creed. Scholars favoring an interpretation of vindication include the following: Luke Timothy Johnson; Green; Richard C. White ("Vindication for Zacchaeus?" in *Expository Times*, Vol. 91 (1979), 21; and D.A.S. Ravens ("Zacchaeus: The Final Part of a Lukan Triptych?" in *JSNT* 41 (1991), 19-32).

generalizing its meaning.”<sup>183</sup> Such narrow focus dismembers the narrative and misses its holistic message. If read within the context of Greek tragedy, this “charming” story further serves to construe Jesus as a new, better Dionysus.

It is plausible that Luke would have known the *Bacchae*. The influence of Euripides extended throughout antiquity, and he “is more quoted by subsequent writers than any other Greek tragedian.”<sup>184</sup> Nineteen of his plays have survived, as opposed to a mere seven each of Aeschylus and Sophocles.<sup>185</sup> The *Bacchae* appears to have been well-known during the Roman Empire, for one manuscript of the play itself comes from what appears to be a school textbook from that time.<sup>186</sup> Plutarch’s *Life of Crassus* discusses a recitation of the play at an Armenian dinner party and assumes that the audience knows the plot.<sup>187</sup>

### ***The characters and structure of the Jericho Exchange and the Bacchae***

The first clue to the Dionysiac connection is in the story’s characters. Modern chapter divisions sever the Zacchaeus story from the account of the blind man outside of Jericho, but these two pericopae in Luke 18:35-19:10, which I call the Jericho Exchange, make up a single narrative. This narrative is a retelling of Euripides’ *Bacchae* that mimics the play in both structure and content. However, for Luke, Jesus—not Dionysus—is the ideal divinity and Zacchaeus is the ideal disciple.

To see the Jericho Exchange as a parallel to the *Bacchae*, one must begin the story not with Zacchaeus the tax collector in Luke 19:1, but with the unnamed blind

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<sup>183</sup> Loewe, 321.

<sup>184</sup> Gilbert Murray, *Euripides and His Age* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1913), 11.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>186</sup> E.R. Dodds, *Euripides’ Bacchae* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, second edition, 1963), li.

<sup>187</sup> Plutarch, *Vita Crassus* 33.1-4; this is the banquet of the Armenian king Hyrodes, who has Crassus’s head tossed in to the banquet as appropriate lines from *Bacchae* are quoted

beggar outside of the city gates in Luke 18:35. This beginning, in which the god is outside the gates, calls to mind the opening scene of the *Bacchae*. Dionysus opens the play with the emphatic declaration ἦκω, “I have come.” The god has come to Thebes after bringing his rites from Lydia to Asia. Now, in Greece, he plans to initiate the city.<sup>188</sup> While Dionysus is still outside the Theban walls, Teiresias, the blind seer, and Kadmos, the former king of Thebes, recognize the god and wish to participate in his rites.<sup>189</sup> They even dress up as maenads and prepare to praise him. However, when Dionysus attempts to bring his religion inside the city gates, Pentheus, the young ruler, refuses to allow him to do so. Unable to recognize the god, he sees merely a human—and an annoying, corrupting one at that—<sup>190</sup> and even goes so far as to persecute him and his followers.<sup>191</sup> To punish Pentheus for this impiety, Dionysus dresses him as a woman and lures him to the woodlands with promises of seeing the maenads participating in their rituals. Once there, an eager Pentheus climbs a tree for a better view. Dionysus then orders the maenads to pay Pentheus back for his irreverence, and they shake him down from the tree and dismember him.<sup>192</sup>

In the Jericho Exchange, Jesus comes to Jericho on his way to Jerusalem. Before entering the city, he encounters a blind beggar who understands his true nature and hails him as the “Son of David” (18:38). He heals the blind man, who follows him, praising God and prompting those who saw the miracle to do the same (18:42-43). Jesus then enters Jericho. Like the emphatic ἦκω of *Bacchae* 1, which emphasizes Dionysus’ purpose and presence, Luke 19:1 emphasizes Jesus’ presence in Jericho by employing

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<sup>188</sup> *Bacchae* 14-19.

<sup>189</sup> *Bacchae* 170-209.

<sup>190</sup> *Bacchae* 501, *inter alia*.

<sup>191</sup> *Bacchae* 433-450.

<sup>192</sup> *Bacchae* 1057-1137.

the tautological “Καί εἰσελθὼν διήρχετο τὴν Ἱερικὴν” (literally, “and going in, he passed through Jericho”). Once inside the city, Jesus encounters a local official: Zacchaeus, the ἀρχιτελώνης, or chief tax collector (19:2). Zacchaeus climbs a tree for a better look at Jesus, and Jesus notices him and tells him to come down, claiming that he must stay at Zacchaeus’s house that day (19:5). Zacchaeus obeys, hastening down the tree and receiving Jesus with joy (ὑπεδέξατο αὐτὸν χαίρων, 19:7-8). Jesus then says that salvation has come to Zacchaeus’s house that day and announces “the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost” (19:9-10).

These two accounts have similar structures. The divine figure approaches a town, but before entering, a blind man recognizes his true nature and power. The divine figure then encounters a local leader, who responds to the divine figure’s presence. The divine figure then demonstrates that the local leader’s future is determined by his response.

### ***Luke’s literary choices and the Bacchae***

A reading of the Jericho Exchange as a retelling of the *Bacchae* explains some of Luke’s literary choices. For example, although the story of the blind man outside of Jericho occurs in all three Synoptics, only Luke’s account places the encounter *before* Jesus enters Jericho: both Mark 10:46-52 and Matthew 20:29-34 (with a Matthean doubling of the blind man) have Jesus interact with the blind man or men as he is *leaving* Jericho. Modeling his Jericho narrative on the *Bacchae*, Luke shifts Jesus’ encounter with the blind man. Second, the connection may explain Luke’s omission of Mark’s identification of the blind man as “Bartimaeus...the son of Timaeus” (Mark 10:46). It is possible that Luke removed this information because he thought it

unnecessary, but by leaving the beggar unnamed, he allows the reader more readily to recognize the parallel with Teiresias. Third, Luke changes the blind man's reference to Jesus as "ραββουβί" (Mark 10:51) to "κύριε" (Luke 18:41). Though it does not necessarily signal divinity, and although Luke typically drops Aramaicisms, the recognition of Jesus as "lord" rather than as "teacher" allows a higher christological reading and a closer parallel to the *Bacchae*.<sup>193</sup>

Some of the unique aspects of the Zacchaeus pericope are also nicely explained by Luke's mimesis of the *Bacchae*. Luke 19:2 refers to Zacchaeus as an ἄρχιτελώνης, commonly translated as "chief tax collector." This word is a *hapax legomenon* in all of Greek literature. Although Luke elsewhere writes of tax collectors, only Zacchaeus receives the power-denoting prefix ἄρχι-. This emphasis on power and leadership constructs Zacchaeus as a powerful figure in his city, just as Pentheus is a powerful figure in Thebes.

### ***Significant names***

Yet another comparison between the figures of Zacchaeus and Pentheus is wordplay present in their names. The potential significance of the naming of Joanna and Susanna has been discussed above, and Luke—based on the *Bacchae*'s model—uses naming to further develop his characters and message.

Pentheus's name is derived from πένθος, "grief," and two figures in the *Bacchae* recognize this significance and respond to the play on words. Teiresias puns to Kadmos, "Oh, Kadmos, that Pentheus will not bring grief to your house!" (Πενθεύς δ'

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<sup>193</sup> Neither Dionysus nor Pentheus is referred to as κύριος in the *Bacchae*; the term applied to both is ἄναξ. Perhaps this comes from the connotation of ἄναξ as "denoting the relation of master to slave" (LSJ, "ἄναξ"). As acting king of Thebes, Pentheus is addressed as such by his actual soldiers. The term ἄναξ often was applied to Greek gods; thus its frequent use in the chorus's address of Dionysus.

ὄπως μὴ πένθος εἰσοίσει δόμοις τοῖς σοῖσι, Κάδμε).<sup>194</sup> Later, when Pentheus and Dionysus are arguing about the acceptance of the Dionysaic rites into Thebes, the god asks Pentheus who he is, and Pentheus gives him his name. Dionysus responds, “Misfortune is around you with that name!” (ἐνδθστυχῆσαι τοῦνομ’ ἐπιτήδειος εἶ).<sup>195</sup> Segal reads even deeper meaning into the name, noting that other homonymic words further characterize the ruler, as his refusal to obey (πεῖγν in the middle) leads to his πάσχω (“suffering”) and eventually to his πένθος.<sup>196</sup> Segal understands this theme of significant naming as a topos of Greek tragedy, noting an “advanced, if not explicit, semiotic consciousness” in character names and citing Pentheus as one of his examples.<sup>197</sup>

Luke’s choice of Zacchaeus’s name is purposeful and communicative, as well. Many commentators observe the tautological “ὄνόματι καλούμενος” of 19:2 (which occurs nowhere else in Luke-Acts<sup>198</sup>), noting that perhaps the idiom is meant to draw attention to Zacchaeus’ name.<sup>199</sup> Ravens argues that the Zacchaeus story is part of a Lukan triptych of name-important pericopae (along with Simon the Pharisee, whose name means “hearing,” and Lazarus the beggar, which means “God has helped”), where the names occur a number of times to emphasize their importance to the story, and the

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<sup>194</sup> *Bacchae* 367-368.

<sup>195</sup> *Bacchae* 508.

<sup>196</sup> Charles Segal, *Dionysiac Poetics and Euripides’ Bacchae* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982), 252-253.

<sup>197</sup> Charles Segal, *Interpreting Greek Tragedy: Myth, Poetry, Text*. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986), 51.

<sup>198</sup> Fitzmyer, 904.

<sup>199</sup> e.g. Nolland, 904; and Ravens. MacDonald (“Lydia and Her Sisters as Lukan Fictions”) has argued that the Lydia of Acts is a fictional character whose name was created to create her as a Christian maenad, demonstrating the author of Luke-Acts’ tendency to use the literary tactic of symbolic naming. However, other commentators do not find the etymology of Zacchaeus’ name to be of any importance to the story, such as Fitzmyer (904) and Creed, who writes, “Luke nowhere uses names with a symbolic purpose” (230).

meaning of the names informs the reader's knowledge of—and response to—the character. He concludes, “The threefold pattern suggests that, when he thought it would reinforce a particular point in a story, Luke used a name which symbolized that point.”<sup>200</sup> The point, in this pericope, would seem to suggest either that Zacchaeus, meaning “innocent,” was blameless in view of the crowd's charges against him or that he was innocent after receiving the salvation Jesus offered him.

More importantly to the case of a literary modeling on the *Bacchae*, however, is that Luke was familiar with naming wordplay in the tragedy and likely used it.<sup>201</sup> Just as Pentheus's name stands out in the *Bacchae* from beginning to end, commented on by both Teiresias and Dionysus and foreshadowing his character's outcome, so does Zacchaeus' name appear at both ends of the pericope, foreshadowing his eventual proclamation as being saved. Furthermore, analyzing Zacchaeus's name simply based on the letters that compose it offers a salient parallel to the *Bacchae*. In Greek, Zacchaeus is rendered Ζακχαῖος, while the Greek for a Dionysiac reveler is βᾰκχεῖος (masculine) or Βακχιάς (feminine). The lettering is similar, and the “z” and “b” sounds are linguistically interchangeable. Zacchaeus's name in Greek is practically identical to the title of the Euripidean play on which the Jericho Exchange is modeled.<sup>202</sup> Perhaps in this way Luke was further offering clues to his literary intent.

### ***“True seeing”***

Luke and Euripides also share some central themes and messages in their narratives. The most pervasive literary motif shared by the Jericho Exchange and the

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<sup>200</sup> Ravens, 31.

<sup>201</sup> Luke's use of wordplay could also come from the Old Testament, another rich source for it.

<sup>202</sup> Thanks to Dennis MacDonald for this insight, shared in a conversation in November 2007.

*Bacchae* is the emphasis on seeing correctly. In the *Bacchae*, the problem between Pentheus and Dionysus comes from that fact that Pentheus refuses to recognize Dionysus as a god, a result of his failure to see things “as he should.”<sup>203</sup> The play itself emphasizes right seeing, with Dionysus telling Pentheus in 924 that he now sees things “as he should.” Vernant notes of the *Bacchae*, “No other text so insistently, almost obsessively, repeats such a plethora of words signifying seeing and visibility.”<sup>204</sup> Dionysus has come to Thebes manifested as a human, and there, he allows those who should see him to “truly see.”<sup>205</sup> There is a “clarity of vision that comes through the Bacchic experience”<sup>206</sup> which allows those initiated into Dionysus’ mysteries to properly see. In the play, Pentheus only “truly” sees when the Dionysiac madness is inflicted upon him; he may be seeing double, but he is seeing more correctly in terms of Dionysus.<sup>207</sup> The emphasis on seeing and seeking also appears in the Jericho Exchange. Zacchaeus “sought to see who Jesus was” (ἐζήτηει ἰδεῖν τὸν Ἰησοῦν τίς ἐστίν, 19:3); and even Jesus came “to seek and to save the lost” (ζητῆσαι καὶ σῶσαι τὸ ἀπολωλός, 19:10).

Dennis Hamm reads in the whole Gospel of Luke a distinct emphasis on “true seeing,”<sup>208</sup> noting that “when Luke presents Jesus either as an enabler or as object of physical seeing, he does so in a way that symbolizes the deeper seeing which is the faith

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<sup>203</sup> Hans Oranje, *Euripides’ Bacchae: The Play and Its Audience* (Leiden, Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1984), 36-37.

<sup>204</sup> Jean-Pierre Vernant, “The Masked Dionysus in Euripides’ *Bacchae*,” in *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece*, Jean-Pierre Vernant and Pierre Vidal-Naquet (New York: Zone Books, 1988), 393.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*, 391-392.

<sup>206</sup> *Euripides’ Bacchae*, trans. Paul Woodruff (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1999), xli.

<sup>207</sup> Ruth Padel. *Whom Gods Destroy: Elements of Greek and Tragic Madness* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 80-81.

<sup>208</sup> For more on Luke’s emphasis on sight and seeing, see Stephen D. Moore, *Mark and Luke in Poststructural Perspectives: Jesus Begins to Write* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 87-143; see especially 120-124 and 131-143.

that perceives Jesus' true identity and acts upon it."<sup>209</sup> To illustrate this, Hamm appeals to the story of the blind beggar outside of Jericho as an example of "true seeing" without physical seeing. In this pericope, the blind beggar heralds Jesus as the "Son of David," a messianic title and the only Lukan use of this confession.<sup>210</sup> This points to the importance of "true seeing" in the Jericho Exchange, for it says, "Sight is a matter of the heart, not just of the eyes."<sup>211</sup> This same sentiment is illustrated repeatedly in the *Bacchae*. For example, when Pentheus is questioning Dionysus about the rites of the god, Dionysus says that the god is very near to him. Pentheus incredulously responds, "Then where is he? He has not appeared to my eyes" (καὶ ποῦ ἴσθιν; οὐ γὰρ φανεροῦς ὄμμασίν γ' ἔμοιζ).<sup>212</sup> The irony is that the god is standing right in front of him. Dionysus shows that Pentheus's seeing is wrong by saying, "He is with me. You cannot see him because of your impiety" (παρ' ἐμοί· σὺ δ' ἀσεβῆς αὐτὸς ὧν οὐκ εἶσορᾷς).<sup>213</sup>

### ***The Jericho Exchange as a transvaluation of the Bacchae***

Luke's redaction of Mark, his structuring of Jesus' experiences in Jericho, and even his word choices point to a conscious effort to model this narrative after Euripides' *Bacchae*. Once the convergences are seen, then the distinctions become arresting. Both accounts concern hospitality and acceptance, and both relate the reaction of a ruling figure to an approaching divinity. But Pentheus, the bad model, rejects the rites of Dionysus, while Zacchaeus, the good model, welcomes Jesus joyfully. Fittingly, the

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<sup>209</sup> Dennis Hamm, "Sight to the Blind: Vision as Metaphor in Luke," *Biblia* 67.4 (1986), 457.

<sup>210</sup> Bock, 1507-1508.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, 1512.

<sup>212</sup> *Bacchae* 500.

<sup>213</sup> *Bacchae* 502.

outcomes of Pentheus and Zacchaeus are suited to their behaviors. Both men climb trees to see the goings-on surrounding the new religious figure. At Dionysus's command, Pentheus is shaken down from his perch by the maenads, who rip him to pieces when he hits the ground.<sup>214</sup> Conversely, at Jesus's command, Zaccheus obediently comes down from the tree and receives Jesus' salvation pronouncement: "Today, salvation has come to this house" (19:9). The good model of acceptance is affirmed by salvation, while the bad model is brought to destruction.

Just as Zacchaeus is contrasted with Pentheus as the correct model of acceptance of a divine representative, Jesus is defined over against Dionysus as a better divinity. At the beginning of the *Bacchae*, Dionysus makes it clear that he has come to Thebes expressly to be recognized as the god that he is.<sup>215</sup> The Jesus of the Jericho Exchange, however, has not come to be recognized and worshipped; has come "to seek and save the lost" (ἔλθεν γὰρ ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ζητῆσαι καὶ σῶσαι τὸ ἀπολωλός, 19:10). This epitome of Jesus' mission—a mission focused on others—is the opposite of Dionysus's glory-seeking, selfish quest. Instead of the self-seeking destroyer of the *Bacchae*, Luke provides his reader with a selfless savior. Instead of a powerful figure refusing to admit a divinity and his rites into the city, he shows the reader a city official welcoming Jesus joyfully into his very home. To an audience familiar with Euripides' *Bacchae*, these contrasts would have been sharp and meaningful.

The Jericho Exchange also underscores one of Luke's major theological themes. Tannehill understands Jesus' role in Luke to be to establish a messianic kingdom for Israel as well as communicate the universality of God's saving purpose. He sees the

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<sup>214</sup> *Bacchae* 1109-1136

<sup>215</sup> *Bacchae* 42 and 61

rejection of Jesus as an important part of God's eventually realized plan and writes, "Ironically, God is able to integrate this rejection into God's purpose, overruling human intentions and expectations...[the disciples] begin to change only when they are enlightened by the risen Christ, who explains from Scripture how God works in a resistant world."<sup>216</sup> While Dionysus *forces* even those who resist him to submit to his religious rites, Jesus *asks* and *welcomes*. Even Luke's account of Jesus' actions in the temple is sterilized in comparison to the other Gospel versions. Luke trims Mark's version for length and eliminates the overturning of the moneychangers' tables and pigeon sellers' seats, as well as the prohibition of anyone to carry anything through the temple (Mark 11:15-17//Luke 19:45-46).<sup>217</sup> And even when Jesus suffers the ultimate rejection—crucifixion—he demonstrates how God works through rejection. There is no forceful conversion after the Dionysiac fashion, but rather an invitation to all, both Jew and Gentile.

### *Conclusion*

Luke's itinerary, which tells of Jesus' wandering missionary activities during his ministry, opens and closes with scenes that directly evoke Dionysus. The pericope of the ministering women in 8:1-3 and the Jericho Exchange in 18:35-19:10 serve to emphasize Jesus' similarities to the Greco-Roman god. By acknowledging the connections between Jesus and Dionysus that many had already observed, then demonstrating how Jesus is a better, Luke composed an apologetic Gospel designed to forestall criticisms of Christianity as well as to serve as a missionary document. Based

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<sup>216</sup> Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts, Vol. I* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 9.

<sup>217</sup> Matthew 21:12-13 eliminates the prohibition of carrying anything through the temple but keeps the other actions, while John 2:13-17 portrays an even more violent scene, with Jesus making a whip of cords and using it to drive them out.

on the evidence of Jesus-Dionysus comparisons in the writings of Justin Martyr, Celsus, Origen and Nonnus, this practice was not unique to Luke. Notably, while other myths of the god were certainly available at the time of Luke's composition, the Gospel's version of Dionysiac traits corresponds exactly to those found in Euripides' *Bacchae*. Based on the use of the *Bacchae* in Acts, the evidence for its employment in Luke establishes the Euripidean tragedy as a valid source for the composition of the Gospel.

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