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# The Death of Tragedy: The Form of God in Paul's *Carmen Christi* and Euripides' Bacchae

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# The Death of Tragedy: The Form of God in Euripides's *Bacchae* and Paul's *Carmen Christi*

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Abstract

Scholarship on Phil 2:6–11 has long wrestled with the question of “interpretive staging.” While acknowledging that Jewish sapiential and apocalyptic literature as well as Roman apotheosis narratives provide important matrices for the hymn, the following study pinpoints a third backdrop against which Paul's dramatic christology would have been heard in Philippi:

Euripidean tragedy. Echoes of Dionysus's opening monologue from Euripides's *Bacchae* in the *carmen Christi* suggest that Roman hearers of Paul's letter likely understood Christ's kenotic *metamorphosis* as a species of Dionysian revelation. This interpretive recognition accomplishes a new integration of the hymn's Jewish and imperial-cultic transcripts. Jesus's Bacchic portraiture supports a theology of Christ's pre-existence, while simultaneously establishing him as a Dionysian antithesis to the imperial Apollonian *kyrios Caesar*. These Dionysian echoes also elevate the status of slaves and women, and suggest that "the tragic" remains modally present within the otherwise comic *fabula* of the Christ myth.

Perhaps, after all, there is something wrong with the popular conception of Monotheism as being opposed to the mythical; perhaps Monotheism contains room, after all, on a deeper plane, for the development of mythical lore.

~Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* <sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

At the end of his *Life of Marcus Licinius Crassus*, Plutarch relates the death of this Roman ruler in a way that rivals, in its grisly details, Mark's account of the death of John the Baptist. Unhappy with his territory in Syria, Crassus had, in 53 BCE, crossed the Euphrates only to lose his son Publius in battle with the Parthians. Soon thereafter, he perished at the hands of Pomaxathres. Relieved of its body, Crassus's head was sent to Armenia where the Parthian king Orodes and the Armenian king Artavasdes, newly allied through the marriage of their living children, were enjoying a production of Euripides's *Bacchae*. When Crassus's head was announced at the door, one of the players, Jason of Tralles, in an act of macabre improvisational genius, yielded his part of Pentheus to Crassus, and assuming the role of Agave, leader of the Asian *Bacchae*, grabbed the general's head and continued the play with these lines:

φέρομεν ἐξ ὄρεος  
ἔλκα νεότομον ἐπὶ μέλαθρα  
μακάριον θήραμα.  
We bring from the mountain  
A tendril fresh cut to the palace,  
A wonderful prey. <sup>2</sup>

The audience was delighted. But when Jason *in persona Agauēs* took dramatic credit for slaying Pentheus-Crassus, Pomaxathres, who had actually killed him, left his seat in the audience, took the head from Jason, and delivered the line himself. "With such a farce," writes Plutarch, "the expedition of Crassus is said to have closed, just like a tragedy." <sup>3</sup>

I begin this Dionysian reading of Paul's Philippians hymn with Plutarch's "tragedy" of Crassus for two reasons. First, it demonstrates that in the first century of the Common Era, the *Bacchae* of Euripides continued to be read and performed in Greek in the eastern provinces. According to Plutarch, the Kings of Parthia and Armenia had learned Greek for this purpose, and Artavasdes the Armenian is even said to have composed tragedies, orations, and histories in Greek. <sup>4</sup> As such, it seems reasonable to imagine that at least some early readers of Philippians might have heard in Paul's hymn echoes of Euripides's tragic verse. Second, Plutarch's tale recognizes the anti-tyrannical, anti-Roman, and, to take a cue from Friedrich Nietzsche, anti-Apollonian political potential that bristles energetically through this particular tragedy. This, too, I will suggest, finds resonance in the counter-imperial christology of Paul's Philippians hymn.

The thesis that I will advance in this article is that Euripides's *Bacchae* represents a critical part of the cultural and religious matrix of early readers of Philippians—both in Philippi and in Rome. Paul's Christ would have appeared to many as a Dionysian figure, appropriating elements of his pagan counterpart, while simultaneously subverting or recasting them. Ancient readers and hearers of Philippians would thus be engaged in what Edward Said called "contrapuntal reading," attending, as Matthew Larsen summarizes, "to both adoption of imperial perspective as well as resistance." <sup>5</sup>

The general importance of the *Bacchae* in Greek education, as well as the play's popularity in the Roman period, even among the ἀπαίδευτοι, secures its place as an intertext for a variety of Greek discourses during the

first century.<sup>6</sup> My detection of its echoes in the Pauline letters stands within an already deep footprint in the secondary literature. Studies by John Moles, Richard Seaford, John Weaver, Doohee Lee, and Courtney Friesen make convincing cases for the influence of Euripides's *Bacchae* on divine, apostolic, and especially Pauline portraiture in Luke-Acts.<sup>7</sup> In Pauline studies, Stanley Stowers has suggested a connection between Medean monologue and the lament of Romans 7; Friesen has investigated tragic echoes in 1 Corinthians; and Ulrich Müller and Samuel Vollenweider have charted “mythic” and “epiphanic” echoes in the *carmen Christi*, pointing especially to the *Bacchae*.<sup>8</sup> This article draws on, significantly expands, and challenges various lines of argumentation in these studies—concluding finally that Paul is not only a tragic but also a comic thinker (in a broadly Aristotelian sense).<sup>9</sup>

Space does not permit me to review the endless welter of literature on Phil 2:6–11.<sup>10</sup> This study does, however, presuppose a number of decisions about the *carmen Christi*, which are worth acknowledging here before advancing my main argument.

First, as regards the authorship of the hymn, I accept what is perhaps the older but still majority position that the hymn has a prehistory in Jewish-Christian worship.<sup>11</sup> This Jewish-Christian matrix remains the primary backdrop for understanding the hymn's christology—particularly its allusion to Isaiah 45.<sup>12</sup> This does not, however, absolve Paul of responsibility for the contents of the hymn,<sup>13</sup> nor does it preclude his role in reshaping those contents to accord with his own christological and pastoral concerns.<sup>14</sup> Conceding an apocalyptic Jewish substratum for the hymn, moreover, does not necessitate a rejection of pagan metamorphic resonances at either the Pauline or pre-Pauline level of the hymn's semantics—a point recently demonstrated by Vollenweider.<sup>15</sup> Rather, given that the Jewish matrix of the hymn may point to either Christ's preexistence or not, my analysis here adopts Euripides's *Bacchae* as a secondary lens and uses Paul's Roman reception to develop a new criterion for negotiating the various “Jewish” readings of the hymn.<sup>16</sup>

Second, I agree that Paul's Gospel (and Philippians in particular) provides a political challenge or alternative to the Roman imperial *ordo*.<sup>17</sup> It may be inaccurate to call this “anti-imperial,” and in light of Rom 13:1–7, John Barclay is certainly right to curb the excesses of this view when applied in an undifferentiated fashion to all of Paul's letters.<sup>18</sup> But the objection that anti-Roman intertexts are not as explicitly marked as scriptural allusions here and elsewhere in the Pauline corpus simply does not grapple with the realities of literary resistance. In posing his alternative “gospel,” Paul surely had to use a hidden transcript.<sup>19</sup> This is especially true of Philippians, which Hans Dieter Betz has recently reasserted is Paul's last letter, written from a Roman prison under the gaze of “the whole *praetorium*”—a context which Betz suggests should affect one's hermeneutical approach to the entire letter.<sup>20</sup> If not anti-imperial, then the letter is contra- or para-imperial.<sup>21</sup>

Third, any attempt to rehabilitate “myth” as a category in christology has to wrestle with the legacy of Rudolf Bultmann.<sup>22</sup> I shall have more to say about this later on; at present, I only note that by speaking of a mythic christology in the Philippians hymn, I by no means adopt Bultmann's conclusion that christological “myths” are merely projections of early Christian communal faith experience.<sup>23</sup>

Finally, while appreciating the seminal brilliance of Nietzsche's rendering of Apollo and Dionysius as antipodal signs of rational order and inspired disorder, critics have long since recognized Nietzsche's unwarranted dependence on romantic categories and abandoned all hope that the strong form of his theory can “stand up to scrutiny.”<sup>24</sup> Recently, however, classicist Fiachra Mac Góráin has argued that within the mythic landscape of Augustan politics, Dionysus did in fact represent an anti-Octavianic figure, who had to be either resisted or assimilated.<sup>25</sup> My cautious retrieval of a Nietzschean optic follows Mac Góráin's lead.

One of the insights of Mac Góráin's work is to suggest that Nietzsche “informs the ‘intertextual unconscious’ of the modern critical imaginary.”<sup>26</sup> The current study asks whether Euripides might have formed part of Paul's first-century intertextual unconscious and whether Paul offers, in Phil 2:6–11, an intentional allusion to the *Bacchae*. Such a possibility becomes more plausible if scholars like Peter Oakes are correct that Paul has “heavily reformulated” his traditional material here—perhaps particularly, the language of μορφή.<sup>27</sup> Or, if this strong version of my thesis is deemed implausible, this study simultaneously asks how familiarity with the *Bacchae* would at least have conditioned the hearing of Paul's letter in Roman Philippi, as well as its potential “over-hearing” by Paul's friends and captors in Nero's Rome.<sup>28</sup> As I will argue, the net effect of this Euripidean intertext is non-negligible: it suggests 1) a pre-existence christology, 2) a para-imperial Christ, 3) an elevated place

for slaves and women in Paul's *ekklesia*, and 4) the superficially kindred but ultimately incommensurate theological grammars of tragic and Christian *fabulae*.

## The Form of God in Euripides's *Bacchae* and the *Carmen Christi*

Although the entirety of Phil 2:6–11 ultimately warrants an intertextual analysis,<sup>29</sup> I will focus here primarily on the first half of the hymn, Phil 2:6–8, which narrates the *kenosis* of Jesus. Crucial to this narrative is Jesus's “taking” the μορφή of a slave, despite “being” already in the μορφή of God. The precise meaning of these two “forms” remains a matter of dispute. Those looking primarily to the hymn's Jewish-Christian prehistory typically suggest one of three options: first, the μορφή may refer to God's  $\psi\lambda\zeta\omicron$  or  $\tau\eta\mu\eta$ , with roots in biblical and apocalyptic speculations about God's body.<sup>30</sup> This tradition would later develop into mystical measurements of God's body, known as the *Shi'ur Qomah*.<sup>31</sup> Alternatively, the μορφή may refer to God's εἰκών as a pre-existent hypostasis, similar to the Johannine and Philonic *Logos*, and may be broadly situated in the sapiential tradition. A third Jewish reading understands the μορφή to refer to God's εἰκών in a secondary adamic sense: Jesus was created, like Adam, “after the image of God.”<sup>32</sup> While the first two options present an “early, high christology,” the third adamic variant, in some assessments, falls short of offering a theology of pre-existence.

The debate over this passage has typically turned on the question of interpretive staging: against which backdrop ought the hymn's language of μορφή be heard? Taking a Hellenistic Jewish backdrop as a given here, along with a number of scholars, I pose a correlated question: what happens when a Bacchic mask is superimposed upon the Jewish Christ by an ancient reader, the hymn's composer(s), or Paul himself? In answering this question, Dionysus's prologue in the beginning of Euripides's *Bacchae* serves as a critical intertext, which would have been heard by some of Philippians' recipients:

“Ἦκω Διὸς παῖς τήνδε Θηβαίαν χθόνα  
Διόνυσος, ὃν τίκει ποθ' ἠ Κάδμου κόρη  
Σεμέλη λοχευθεῖσ' ἀστραπηφόρῳ πυρί·  
μορφὴν δ' ἀμίψας ἐκ θεοῦ βροτησίαν  
πάρεμι Δίρκης νάμαθ' Ἰσμηνοῦ θ' ὕδωρ.”<sup>33</sup>  
I have come to this Theban land, a child of Zeus,  
Dionysus, whom Cadmus's *korē* brought forth once,  
Semele, prodded by firebearing lightning.  
My form I've altered, from God to mortal,  
my *parousia* here by the streams of Dirce and Ismenus's waters.

Although gods often introduce Euripides's plays,<sup>34</sup> Dionysus's direct address to the audience at the outset of the *Bacchae* is unique. As E. R. Dodds remarks, unlike Euripides's “other prologizing gods,” Dionysus “will not vanish . . . but will mingle unrecognized, *in human form*, with the actors in the human drama.”<sup>35</sup> None of these other gods, moreover, explicitly takes on human form and risks suffering. Apollo in particular is keen to get off stage before the dramatic action begins, lest he risk the contagion of human death.<sup>36</sup>

Looking closely at Dionysus's prologue, we find many narrative dynamics also present in a lengthier form in Paul's prose hymn and compressed into poetic formulation. The critical line

μορφὴν δ' ἀμίψ | ας: ἐκ θεοῦ | βροτησίαν

echoes succinctly the exchange of μορφαί narrated in Phil 2:6–8, with “God” and “mortal” syntactically juxtaposed in the second and third feet of the iambic trimeter and set off by a penthemimeral caesura. These poetics of condescension are present in the first line of prologue as well:

“Ἦκω Διὸς | παῖς: τήνδε Θη | βαίαν χθόνα.

Here, the narrative of vertical descent is visually framed by the poles of Διὸς and χθόνα in the first and third feet. This, too, structurally echoes the narrative of descent present in Phil 2:6–8.

These verses are not the only ones in the prologue in which Dionysus speaks to the audience of exchanging forms. Euripides has Dionysus reiterate this at the close of the prologue, to make plain his revelatory purposes:

ὧ ν οὔνεκ' εἶδος θνητὸν ἀλλάξας ἔχω  
μορφὴν τ' ἐμὴν μετέβαλον εἰς ἀνδρὸς φύσιν.  
For these ends I took shape here as a mortal  
and my own form exchanged for human nature.<sup>37</sup>

This second reference to Dionysus's exchange of forms supplements the economic theology of the earlier passage. Like the Philippians hymn, which amplifies μορφή with τὰ ἴσα εἶναι, ὁμοίωμα, and σχήμα,<sup>38</sup> Euripides here supplies two synonyms for μορφή, εἶδος and φύσις, which deepen the philosophical potential of his text for later recipients. As in line 5, so here in line 54, μορφή occupies a primary syntactic position, in a way that especially mirrors the poetics of Phil 2:7bc:

μορφὴν δ' ἀμείψας ἐκ θεοῦ βροτησίαν (*Bacch.* 5)  
μορφὴν τ' ἐμὴν μετέβαλον εἰς ἀνδρὸς φύσιν (*Bacch.* 54)  
μορφὴν δούλου λάβων ἐν ὁμοιώματι ἀνθρώπων[-ου] γενόμενος (Phil 2:7bc)<sup>39</sup>

There are thus strong similarities between Paul's Christ and Euripides's Dionysus.<sup>40</sup> The repetition of the thematics of a divine exchange of forms in the *Bacchae* and their significant lexical, structural, and narrative overlap with the story of divine *kenosis* in Phil 2:6–8 make the detection of an echo of this text almost inevitable to anyone familiar with Euripides's tragedy—and open the question of whether the original author(s) of the hymn or Paul himself consciously alluded to the *Bacchae*.<sup>41</sup> Cogent as I find this reading to be, however, I am aware that not all will be immediately convinced. Before I turn to the implications of this Dionysian intertext for the christology of Philippians, it is worth raising and responding to two potential objections to hearing echoes of the *Bacchae* in this letter of Paul.

First, supposing one grants that some version of a metamorphic myth is present in the *carmen Christi*, does this necessarily mean that the Dionysus of the *Bacchae* is in view? Might not the hymn, or Paul's modification of it, simply advert to the more general phenomenon of divine form exchange in popular mythology, without necessarily pointing to a particular pagan deity? This seems to be the view of Müller and Vollenweider—although both highlight the Bacchic echoes—and it is one which merits consideration.<sup>42</sup> To my mind, the likelihood of a particularly Dionysian echo remains more probable for a number of reasons. The first is the literary case made above. Second, one might suggest that metamorphic myths are seldom known so abstractly—in the manner of academic folklorists—but usually have some concrete referent (such as Zeus and Hermes in Acts 14:12). If one is comparing Jesus to a particular Greco-Roman deity, one must ask who other than Dionysus readily suggests himself as a better parallel to the “new God” Jesus. Euripides, moreover, was frequently read and performed in the Hellenistic and Roman eras: his writings are better represented in the manuscript evidence than any other tragedian (ranking third in an Egyptian papyri “census” only after Homer and Demosthenes).<sup>43</sup> His plays were likewise more “accessible” linguistically than the other classical tragedians, and they had a prominent place in Greek education at the first two stages.<sup>44</sup> As a result, the *Bacchae* was translated at least twice into Latin and arguably became the metamorphic myth par excellence, such that it influenced other form-exchange narratives (including Horace's Mercury), as Latin tragedians engaged in a “creative deployment” of Euripides.<sup>45</sup>

Shoring up the probability that readers would hear a Bacchic intertext in Phil 2 is the fact that the God of the Jews had for some time, perhaps most prominently in the political propaganda of Pompey,<sup>46</sup> been identified with Dionysus. It thus remains plausible that even Paul or the Jewish author of the hymn borrowed the *interpretatio Romana* of Judaism as a Dionysiac religion and made a particular application of that tradition to Jesus called Messiah. This consideration, however, raises a second potential objection: would the Dionysiac interpretation of Judaism itself be strong enough to suggest a Dionysian Christ *without* any explicit echo of the *Bacchae*? Might a Dionysiac—but not a Euripidean—christology have been intended by the Hellenistic Jewish authors of the hymn? While this remains a possibility,<sup>47</sup> the prominence of the *Bacchae* in both educational and popular contexts, in

conjunction with the particular metamorphic description of Dionysus in Euripides's opening lines (and their similarity to the *carmen Christi*), suggests that an intertextual rather than a merely interreligious comparison between Christ and Dionysus is at play.

## The Metaphysics of Myth and Early High Christology

What follows from the recognition of this Euripidean intertext is a fourfold contribution to the reception of Pauline thought. The first pertains to the hymn's christology. When the Euripidean intertext is registered, the evidence begins to tilt clearly in favor of a christology of pre-existence. If one registers the echo of Dionysus's exchange of (divine) form for human nature in *Bacch.* 55, Christ's existence in the form of God (ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ ὑπάρχων) signifies that his own nature is divine prior to *kenosis*. Being (ὑπάρχων) in the form of God, Christ then “becomes” (γενόμενος) in human likeness.<sup>48</sup> Christ, like Dionysus, is in the words of Euripides's choral ode, παῖδα θεὸν θεοῦ.<sup>49</sup>

Other aspects of Christ's Euripidean portraiture in the Philippians hymn would have shored up this theological implication. Not only does Dionysus introduce himself explicitly as a son of god, born of a woman,<sup>50</sup> but the whole purpose of his taking on a human nature is to unveil his divinity,<sup>51</sup> to reveal his name,<sup>52</sup> and to ensure his right worship as a god among the people of Thebes.<sup>53</sup> Christ too, as a “new God” in human history, was not immediately recognized by all, and Paul's hearers would have detected in this intertextual connection a similar pattern of economic *katabasis* in the service of revealing a divine identity. Such convergences continue in the second part of the hymn, where the Christ of Philippians, like the Euripidean Dionysus, is revealed as a cosmic rather than a local lord.<sup>54</sup> Even Christ's τὸ ὄνομα τὸ ὑπὲρ πάντων ὄνομα echoes and surpasses Dionysus's famous Sophoclean epithet: πολυώνυμε.<sup>55</sup>

The question looming over this analysis is how seriously Euripides and his Roman recipients treated Dionysus's taking a human nature. Are the metaphysics of myth in Greco-Roman religion deep enough to support a high christological reading of the hymn? Or would an allusion to or echo of Euripides's prologue weaken the historical force of Christ's *exemplum*, reducing his divinity to a pious fiction<sup>56</sup> and reshaping Christ's human form into a species of docetism?<sup>57</sup>

Despite the cogency of these concerns, there are also reasons why a Dionysian intertext might have served to amplify and advance Paul's message. In Euripides's fifth-century Athens, for instance, both the divinity and humanity of Dionysus were taken seriously in their own idiom. Thus, Albert Henrichs can speak of Dionysus's real presence as “a fundamental concept of Greek religion.”<sup>58</sup> “Schein ist Sein,” and Dionysus is the “*deus praesentissimus*,” in cult and on stage.<sup>59</sup>

It is less clear how religiously the *Bacchae* would have been heard in Rome or Philippi in Paul's time, either in the Greek original or in the Latin translations of Pacuvius and Accius. Dionysus had been at home on Italian soil for centuries, at least in relation to his Italian associate, Liber, and his Etruscan counterpart, Fufluns,<sup>60</sup> and Bacchus seems to have been worshipped in earnest from the fourth century BCE onwards.<sup>61</sup> His place in the Roman religion reached a nadir in 186 BCE, when the Roman Senate suppressed his cult and began systematically to hunt down initiates. Ever resilient to persecution, Bacchic worship survived; but whether his cult in the first century, as described by Livy and Tacitus, was “genuine” or had “moved into the realm of ‘purely artificial performance’” remains open to debate.<sup>62</sup> In Philippi and its environs, Peter Pilhofer notes that Dionysus and his counterparts enjoyed relatively uninterrupted worship from pre-Hellenic times into the life of the Roman colony.<sup>63</sup> A series of Greek inscriptions at nearby Drama are perhaps the most impressive evidence.<sup>64</sup> If one adds Latin inscriptions that reference *Liber (pater)* and a *thiasus Maenad[um]* to the scales, the case for serious popular devotion to Dionysus in mid-first-century Philippi grows stronger.<sup>65</sup>

What matters more, however, is not Dionysus's ontological status in Greek and Roman religion but what christological implications this Dionysian intertext would have had when an ancient Christian prose hymn was sung in counterpoint with a tragic Euripidean trimeter. One effect would have been to amplify the mythic contours of the Christian narrative. Bultmann was thus correct, on the one hand, that Paul's language is mythological here; but he was wrong in suggesting that demythologizing was necessary to save its “deeper message.”<sup>66</sup> Better is the instinct of Gershom Scholem, who wondered whether “perhaps Monotheism contains room, after all, on a deeper plane, for the development of mythical lore.”<sup>67</sup> Gerd Theißen similarly suggests that only in remythologizing

christological narrative can one clearly see that “myth is not opposed to the Logos, but is a first form of the Logos.”<sup>68</sup>

## Dionysus and the Roman Empire: Mercury Caesar and the Dionysian Christ

A second contribution arising from this Euripidean reading of the Philippians hymn relates to the political reception of Paul's thought: it establishes the Dionysian Christ as a rival or alternative to the predominantly Apollonian portraiture of the Julio-Claudian emperors.<sup>69</sup> Of course, one should not overplay the Apollo-Dionysus antithesis.<sup>70</sup> Nonetheless, the Dionysus of the *Bacchae* had long been interpreted as a symbol of civic disintegration—recalling the play's first performances in the days of the Athenian empire.<sup>71</sup> In Rome, the Euripidean Dionysus functioned as a similarly ambiguous cultural symbol. As Courtney Friesen writes, “The central problem [of the *Bacchae*] turns out also to be a perennial problem for Rome. What is to be the relationship between the Bacchic impulse toward liberation . . . and the authority and stability of the Roman political establishment?”<sup>72</sup>

Given particularly Mark Antony's Dionysian style, Octavian's primary strategy was, in the words of Christopher Pelling, to “counter with more comfortable gods, especially Apollo with his civilized order, discipline, calm and restraint.”<sup>73</sup> Dionysus, for his part, would have to be rejected outright or domesticated and assimilated.

As a literary example of this imperial preference, it will be beneficial to consider Horace's *Carm.* 1.2. In this pro-imperial *carmen Caesaris*, Horace explicitly identifies Augustus with Pelling's “more comfortable gods,” while simultaneously echoing their Dionysian shadow. Horace begins with a grim, apocalyptic picture of natural upheaval and cosmic flood, staged on the banks of the Tiber in the wake of Rome's long decades of civil war. Horace prays for some emissary of Jupiter to expiate Rome's sins and avenge the wrongs of the fallen,<sup>74</sup> including, perhaps, the murder of Julius Caesar.<sup>75</sup> First among his candidates for a savior is *augur Apollo*, no surprise given Horace's lyric form and his pro-Augustan leanings.<sup>76</sup> His final choice, however, is Mercury—a favorite of Horace's, given his claim that Mercury saved him while fighting against Octavian at Philippi in 44 BCE.<sup>77</sup> Here, it is instrumental to recall that Octavian minted coins not only to Apollo but also to Hermes in the 30s BCE.<sup>78</sup> In a critical verse, Horace bids Mercury change his form (*mutata . . . figura*) and, imitating a youth,<sup>79</sup> condescend to be called the child of a human mother. Thereafter, he should be present (*intersis*) among the Romans, not to be put off by their sins but to expiate them. In the last verse of the *carmen*, Horace reveals that Mercury's human name is Caesar. His hymn thus provides a rough parallel to Paul's hymn to Christ Jesus (Phil 2:5).

While Horace's second *Ode* already offers a rich allusive rereading of Vergil's first Georgic,<sup>80</sup> as I suggested above, his depiction of Mercury-Octavian is also colored by Euripides's *Bacchae*, both in the original Greek and through Accius' translation. Horace's Mercury is presented as a palatable, pro-Augustan alternative “savior god among us,” standing in for the more present but also potentially more destabilizing Dionysus.<sup>81</sup> Of course, Horace will go on, famously, in *Carm.* 2.19 and 3.25, to “rehabilitate” Dionysus and bring him into line with Augustan politics. The surprising reversal of those later odes—which may also entail Horace's own reluctant “reconciliation” with Augustus, as dramatized in the telling first line of the climactic *Carm.* 3.25 (“Quo me, Bacche, rapis tui / plenum?”)—depends on the more standard marginalization of Dionysus in *Carm.* 1.2.<sup>82</sup>

That marginalization, however, is not total. Mercury's Dionysian shadow is evoked in *Carm.* 1.2 by several crucial intertexts, most importantly, in the phrase *mutata . . . figura*, which recalls Dionysus's change of form in the prologue to the *Bacchae*. While the Latin version of Dionysus's prologue is not extant among Accius's tragic fragments, we are fortunate enough to have his rendering of a later line, in which Dionysus's μορφή is plausibly rendered with *figura*.<sup>83</sup> As a brief aside, it is worth noting that the inverse Bacchic hope—that other humans might at last change either *forma* or *figura* for the better—seems to have exercised a long influence on Latin popular religiosity in Philippi. Thus, in a famous third-century funerary inscription from the region, we find a mourner stating to the deceased: “sic placitum est divis a[et]erna vivere forma,” and then, a few lines later, linking the same departed human with *Bromius*.<sup>84</sup> Other intertextual connections between *Carm.* 1.2 and the Dionysian prologue include the thematization of Dionysus's coming (ἦκω, *venias*);<sup>85</sup> his *parousia* (παρεῖμι, *intersis*);<sup>86</sup> both gods' glad willingness to stay, despite the sins of humanity;<sup>87</sup> and their role of vindicating past injustices.<sup>88</sup>

This intertextual interpretation not only renders the Christ of the Philippians hymn as an alternative to Caesar, it also confirms the high christological conclusions of the previous section. While some recent studies

suggest that the Roman auditor of Paul's hymn might have heard an adoptionist or exaltationist christology,<sup>89</sup> this Roman para-imperial reading points instead toward a theology of preexistence. The echoes of Horace's Mercury-Caesar and his Dionysian antitype in the Philippians hymn offer contrasting myths of a savior's previous existence in the form of God, which is exchanged for the sake of dwelling among human beings in order to save them, free them, and effect right worship. At the very least, Roman readings of Philippians do not suggest a clear win for apotheosis over preexistence.

## Incarnation, Gender, and the Role of Women at Philippi

Paul's Dionysian staging of the para-imperial Christ in Phil 2:6–11 includes a noteworthy corollary: the christological basis for a more expansive leadership paradigm in the Christian *ekklesia*, particularly as regards women and slaves.<sup>90</sup> The importance of women in the Philippian church has long been recognized in Paul's reference to Euodia and Syntyche, and secondarily, in the figure of Lydia, mentioned by the author of Luke-Acts.<sup>91</sup> The explicit naming of these female leaders in a letter that begins with a salutation to bishops/overseers (ἐπίσκοποι) and deacons/ministers (διάκονοι),<sup>92</sup> suggests that whatever the unrecoverable contingencies of the struggle in Philippi, Philippians remains central to any reconstruction of Pauline ecclesiology and offers, in some sense, Paul's "final word" on the subject.<sup>93</sup>

That female leadership in Christian Philippi might owe something to Dionysiac religion was already posited several decades ago by Lilian Portefaix, and the plausibility of such a reading is heightened by the presence of the inscriptional references mentioned above to a *thiasus Maenad[um]*.<sup>94</sup> What remains to be seen is how the Euripidean intertext in the Christ hymn might relate to the question of gender—both Christ's and that of Christian leaders in Philippi.

In the first place, it is worth mentioning that gender is not explicitly thematized in Phil 2:6–11. When Paul does refer to the Roman social world in the hymn, it is in the phrase μορφή δούλου (Phil 2:7b: admittedly, this is a male slave). If one thinks ahead to the three pairs of addressees in the deutero-Pauline household codes,<sup>95</sup> Jesus's taking a servile form puts him in the sphere of the less powerful: women (wives), children, and slaves.<sup>96</sup> By opting for the form of a slave, moreover, Jesus chooses the last and lowest of these groups. While this suggests that gender may be in view, it is not directly stated.<sup>97</sup>

Euripides's Dionysus, however, is alluded to (or at least echoed) in the hymn, and it is this point that raises the issue of gender more directly. Those familiar with the tragedy would certainly recall that Dionysus is a gender-bending god, both male and female, and the inspiration of Pentheus's cross-dressing "form" in the *Bacchae*.<sup>98</sup> If Christ is depicted in Dionysian hues, then Roman hearers of Philippians might well wonder whether this new God was also leading them into a reorganization of the social order—one in which women and men each had significant new roles to play.<sup>99</sup>

Of course, the prominence of women in Dionysiac religion did not result from an egalitarian order. Men and women in Dionysiac religion operated in separate but complementary spheres, with men drinking wine (cf. Acts 2:14–15) and women abstaining and awaiting a more sober ecstatic possession.<sup>100</sup> Both, however, were accorded unique, recognized positions. Reading Phil 1:2 and 4:2–3 through this lens, it is tempting to speculate whether Euodia and Syntyche are in fact among the deacons (cf. Rom 16:1), while Clement is an ἐπίσκοπος.<sup>101</sup> Whatever their respective ranks, all are being called to "think the same thing in the Lord" (Phil 4:2; cf. Phil 2:2, 5) and to recall Christ's taking the form of a slave and his disregard for the Roman (and perhaps also nascent ecclesial) pecking order. On this score, it is membership in the book of life (Phil 4:3) and conformity to the mind of Christ that ultimately count. Arguments within and between ecclesial ranks are beside the point.

It is especially noteworthy that among the Pauline Christians, both men and women seem to have been counted among the deacons and probably even the apostles (Rom 16:7). This point sets Pentheus's cross-dressing as a Maenad in a more salutary light. Philo too, borrowing Bacchic language, could praise the common life and labor of male and female Therapeutae, Jewish contemplatives on the shore of Lake Mareotis, as sharing in a more sober Corybantic revelry, which involved both distinction of roles and complementary soteriological progress.<sup>102</sup>

This spiritual and institutional unity, in Paul's case, has a christological basis—not only in the social condescension to the form of a slave but also the metaphysical assumption of a *human* form (Phil 2:7b–d). Here, it is worth revisiting the synopsis from the earlier section:

μορφὴν τ' ἔμην μετέβαλον εἰς ἀνδρὸς φύσιν (*Bacch.* 54)  
μορφὴν δούλου λάβων ἐν ὁμοιώματι ἀνθρώπων[-ου] γενόμενος (Phil 2:7bc)

While Dionysus takes the form of a man (ἄνθρωπος), Christ takes the form of a human being (ἄνθρωπος), both male and female—or better, the form shared by all human beings (ἄνθρωποι). While this may not amount to a full-scale revision of gender-hierarchical statements elsewhere in Paul's letters (e.g. 1 Cor 7:7), it does avoid a purely androcentric description of the incarnation, which might have seemed reasonable in light of Jesus's biological sex. Surprisingly, then, the Dionysian Christ outdoes his Euripidean exemplar in taking on human form and providing a basis, not so much for Penthean gender *bending* as for ecclesial gender *blending*. The newly formed church is led by its servant-Lord toward the discovery of a common mind and humanity.

## The Death of Tragedy

As I have noted already in many places throughout this study, a Roman reader registering the Bacchic intertext with the *carmen Christi* would not simply hear Dionysian overtones but also their subversion. The Euripidean Dionysus is critically unlike Jesus of the Christ hymn in several important respects. The above-mentioned shift from ἀνδρὸς to ἀνθρώπων between Euripides and Paul serves as one example; other salient differences include Dionysus's violence, his concern to assert his own divine honors, and his personal impassibility.<sup>103</sup> Those who knew Euripides's last tragedy understood that failure to worship this god-among-humans ultimately results in a tragic death, as it did for Pentheus and Crassus. In the Christ-hymn, the inverse is true: the anthropomorphic God-man takes on the punishment deserved by Penthean humanity and as a result earns the worship that was denied. While Euripides's Dionysus guards the dignity of his closely-held divine form through ritualized violence, Christ relinquishes his place of honor and diverts the violent potentiality onto his own human person.<sup>104</sup>

This subversion of certain elements of the Euripidean fabula brings us at last to the title of this essay, “The Death of Tragedy.” According to Albert Henrichs, the fifth-century CE epic poet Nonnus of Panopolis “composed a baroque death-song for Dionysus.”<sup>105</sup> As I have argued here, the initial strains of his funeral dirge were already sounding in Paul's redaction of this early first-century hymn. In making this claim, I contribute a footnote to a much larger literary-critical and theological conversation about the compatibility or incompatibility of Christianity and “the tragic.”<sup>106</sup> While my title suggests that the current evidence inclines toward the verdict that Pauline Christian and tragic grammars are ultimately incommensurate, I would like to nuance this judgment by indicating certain agreements with scholars who find a place for the recovery of “the tragic” within Christian discourse.

According to a recent study by Jeff Jay, the argument for the incompatibility of Christianity and tragedy was posed in its strongest form by Nietzsche in the first edition of *The Birth of Tragedy*.<sup>107</sup> Nietzsche has been “followed,” in the world of literary criticism, by George Steiner in *The Death of Tragedy* and variously, in a theological idiom, by John Milbank, David Bentley Hart, and Francesca Aran Murphy.<sup>108</sup> Simultaneously, however, other literary critics and theologians, like David Tracy, have demonstrated the aesthetic and humanistic affinities between Christianity and tragedy. Nietzsche himself, in the second edition of *The Birth of Tragedy*, describes Martin Luther as just such a tragic divine.<sup>109</sup> Catholic theologians like Hans Urs Von Balthasar occupy something of a middle tragic “space.”<sup>110</sup> Christ is “the heir of all the tragedy of the world,” but, in the words of Kevin Taylor, tragedy in Christianity is simultaneously “upheld as true and transcended by its culmination in Christ.”<sup>111</sup>

Space does not permit me to engage these literary-critical and theological controversies at length. As indicated above, the aim of this article is more limited: to plot a single point on a line that, when viewed in its entirety, will unveil the fuller arch. More germane to the question of Paul and tragedy in the first century are the aforementioned studies by Jay and Friesen. One of the most compelling *loci* for the recovery of “the tragic” in the New Testament is the Gospel of Mark. Jay has recently made this case convincingly, arguing that Mark is tragic “in mode” rather than in genre.<sup>112</sup> As such, Mark mirrors the tragic mode of Plutarch's *Crassus*, whose generic similarities to Mark have long been noted. In a similar vein, Friesen has recently argued for hearing echoes of Euripides's *Bacchae* and Sophocles's Oedipus cycle in 1 Corinthians, which paints the “strong” in Corinth as would-be Oedipean “kings.”<sup>113</sup>

In light of these studies, I offer the following three clarifications regarding my claim that the *carmen Christi* sounds a funeral hymn for tragedy. First, to speak of the death of tragedy does not mean to declare the end of “the tragic.”<sup>114</sup> Much depends on the distinction between these two terms. Second, by tragedy I mean not so much a literary aesthetic or sensitivity to the consequences of human ignorance, suffering, or depravity, but either a genre or a fabular structure in a broadly Aristotelian sense. Critical to determining this fabular structure is the narrative’s “end.”<sup>115</sup> Recall here the closing of the *Crassus*:

εἰς τοιοῦτόν φασιν ἐξόδιον τὴν Κράσσου στρατηγίαν  
ὥσπερ τραγωδίαν τελευτῆσαι.

Determining the nature of an “ending” thus requires precision: the *Bacchae* and *Hamlet*, for example, while both generically tragedies, do not represent identical tragic “ends”—especially if the latter’s Anglican/Protestant context and Catholic subtexts are registered. No flights of angels sing Pentheus to his rest.

Third, with Jay, I wish to distinguish between generic identity and the accompanying modes.<sup>116</sup> By “mode,” however, I recall (as a *heurism*) the speculation on the ethos of musical modes by both early Modern and ancient Greek theorists. Tragedy and comedy, on this view, should not be heard as set in purely minor (Aeolian) or purely major (Ionian) keys. Instead, one ought to expect, among dramatic musics, a more complex modal range: echoes of the minor, for instance, in the otherwise “major” Hypolydian mode, which some humanist and Renaissance theorists would deem “tearful, suitable for lamentations.”<sup>117</sup> Classical music theorists, for their part, were not unaware of the psychagogical and political valence of various modes. Plato famously rejected all but the Dorian and the Phrygian modes as potentially dangerous to the ideal republic, since “the modes of music are never disturbed without unsettling of the most fundamental political and social conventions.”<sup>118</sup> And although the Greek Hypolydian (and its related modes) is not identical to its Western homonym—the former depending on pitch, the latter depending on interval<sup>119</sup>—it is just such modes, with their “dirge-like” ethos, that Socrates declared unnecessary to sing or sound in his republic (where no words are used for lamentation), even by women.<sup>120</sup> Plato prizes above all the music of Apollo.<sup>121</sup>

In this way, one can speak more clearly of the persistence of the tragic within Paul’s comic fabula.<sup>122</sup> Christ’s form exchange, on the one hand, participates in the tragic grammar of the *Bacchae*. Christ’s lowly social status, his real suffering on the cross, and the interposition of the God-man between rightful vengeance and the guilty human being, however, transgress the tragic logic. Murphy sums it up concisely: “The kenotic Christ is a comic hero . . . so typically human that he includes *everyone* . . . but so much larger than life that he can give ‘himself’ away.”<sup>123</sup> Christ’s resurrection and exaltation, which in theo-dramatic terms constitute a *eucatastrophe*,<sup>124</sup> thus signal for Paul’s readers the impending death of tragedy. This death is not immanent—Christ and the saints still suffer and die—but eschatological.<sup>125</sup> Only in the end does the fabular structure and true meaning of suffering become clear.<sup>126</sup>

For Nietzsche, of course, tragedy had already committed suicide in the *Bacchae* itself by becoming entirely Dionysian. It was followed by two degenerate epigones: New Comedy, on the one hand, and Socratic dialogue, on the other.<sup>127</sup> The death of tragedy heralded by Paul in Philippians utilizes elements of both of these trajectories. The Ciceronian *meditatio mortis* in Phil 1:20–26 and the brief period “on being a Paulinist” in Phil 4:8–9, as described in a recent study by Betz, serve, on the one hand, as prime examples of its Socratic, philosophical vector;<sup>128</sup> the eucatastrophic hymn of Phil 2, on the other hand, edges toward the comic and the mystical.

This death, however, was not a violent obliteration of jealousy, as others rendered to Dionysus in some quarters of the empire. Nero, for example—that most Apollonian of emperors—when he could not win the tragic contest at the Isthmus of Corinth by talent, resorted to bribing and ultimately murdering his rival tragic actor onstage.<sup>129</sup> At the hands of Paul, Dionysus endures a gentler death—something more like a baptism—in which the god’s better qualities, including the compassion for human suffering so evident in the tragedians, overcome his propensities for epiphanic violence. In this death, the god of many names bends his knee to the name above all others.

## References

- <sup>1</sup> Scholem, Gershom, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1961) 22
- <sup>2</sup> Plutarch, *Crass.* 33.3–5; cf. Euripides, *Bacch.* 1169–1171 (1169: ὀρέων; 1171: θήραν).
- <sup>3</sup> Plutarch, *Crass.* 33.7: εἰς τοιοῦτόν φασιν ἐξόδιον τὴν Κράσσου στρατηγίαν ὥσπερ τραγωδίαν τελευτῆσαι.
- <sup>4</sup> Plutarch, *Crass.* 33.2: Ἡ γὰρ οὔτε φωνῆς οὔτε γραμμάτων ὕψους Ἑλληνικῶν ἄπειρος, ὁ δ' Ἀρταουάσσης καὶ τραγωδίας ἐποίει καὶ λόγους ἔγραφε καὶ ἱστορίας, ὧν ἔνεια διασώζονται.
- <sup>5</sup> See Larsen, Matthew David, “Listening with the Body, Seeing through the Ears: Contextualizing Philo's Lecture Event in *On the Contemplative Life*,” *JSJ* 47 (2016) 447–74, esp. 471 n. 116: “Contrapuntal reading seeks to show the hidden impact of imperialism in literature both in the form of accommodation, or mimicry, and resistance. Said proposes that literature written during the context of imperialism may insightfully be read with an eye to both adoption of imperial perspective as well as resistance.”
- <sup>6</sup> On the reading of the *Bacchae* even by the *indocti*, see Lucian, *Ind.* 19. For more on this, see section one below.
- <sup>7</sup> Weaver, John B., *Plots of Epiphany: Prison-Escape in Acts of the Apostles* (BZNW 131; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2004); Seaford, Richard, “Thunder, Lightning, and Earthquakes in the *Bacchae* and the Acts of the Apostles,” in *What is a God? Studies in the Nature of Greek Divinity* (ed. Lloyd, A. B.; London: Duckworth, 1997) 139–51; Moles, John, “Jesus and Dionysus in *The Acts of the Apostles* and Early Christianity,” *Hermathena* 180 (2006) 65–104; Lee, Doohee, *Luke-Acts and ‘Tragic History’* (WUNT 2.346; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013); and Friesen, Courtney, *Reading Dionysus* (STAC 95; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015). For a study of Dionysus's later Christian reception history, see Massa, Francesco, *Tra la vigna e la croce: Dioniso nei discorsi letterari e figurativi cristiani (II-IV s.)* (Potsdamer Altertumswissenschaftliche Beiträge 47; Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2014).
- <sup>8</sup> Stowers, Stanley K., “Romans 7.7–25 as a Speech-in-Character (προσωποποιία),” in *Paul in His Hellenistic Context* (ed. Engberg-Petersen, Troels; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995) 180–202, esp. 199. On 1 Corinthians, see Friesen, Courtney, “*Paulus Tragicus*: Staging Apostolic Adversity in 1 Corinthians,” *JBL* 134 (2015) 813–32. On Philippians, see Müller, Ulrich B., *Der Brief des Paulus an die Philipper* (THNT 11.1; Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1993) 93–95; idem, *Die Menschwerdung des Gottessohnes: frühchristliche Inkarnationsvorstellungen und die Anfänge des Dokerismus* (SBS 140; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1990) 20–26; idem, “Der Christushymnus Phil 2:6–11,” *ZNW* 79 (1988) 17–44, esp. 23–27; Samuel Vollenweider, “Die Metamorphose des Gottessohns: Zum epiphaniellen Motivfeld in Phil 2, 6–8,” in idem, *Horizonte neutestamentlicher Christologie: Studien zu Paulus und zur frühchristlichen Theologie* (WUNT 1.144; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002) 285–306.
- <sup>9</sup> In his most detailed assessment of the similarities between the *Bacchae* and Phil 2:6–8, Müller (*Menschwerdung*, 24) barely touches on the particular “fit” between Dionysus and Christ but merely lists the former as one example among many Greek and Roman gods in human form. Here, I argue for the particular echo of Euripides's Dionysus. Friesen's work on 1 Cor has rightly refocused attention on the importance of Dionysus and the *Bacchae* in Paul's thought more generally. He and I differ, however, in several points of emphasis: first, my test case is Philippi, not Corinth—a location that is particularly suited to an extended Dionysian reading. Second, I have focused particularly on the political and para-imperial importance of this tragedy in Paul's thought. Third, whereas Friesen's work focuses on Paul and his interlocutors as tragic figures, this study looks rather to the Dionysian (and tragic) Christ. Finally, and most importantly, as I will spell out in the course of this article, these differences lead Friesen and me to different understandings of the tragic inflection or “modality” of Paul's thought. In short, whereas Friesen focuses on the persistence of the tragic, I look toward its sublimation through eucatastrophe. The Paul I discover, at the end of his life in Philippians, is no longer only *Paulus tragicus* but also *Paulus comicus* (see Michael Benjamin Cover, “The Divine Comedy at Corinth: Paul, Menander, and the Rhetoric of Resurrection” *NTS* [forthcoming, October 2018]). Paul's citation of the *Thais* by the new-comic poet Menander in 1 Cor 15:33—particularly in a chapter on the resurrection—suggests that the “comic Paul” is present in the canonical 1 Cor as well. The “tragic” emphasis of Friesen's study of 1 Cor

could thus be complemented by an appreciation of the comic dimension of Paul's thought, which I establish here. For further discussion, see section five below.

- <sup>10</sup> Nor does courtesy, as to do so unnecessarily would be, as Bockmuehl, Markus (“‘The Form of God’ [Phil 2:6]: Variations on a Theme of Jewish Mysticism,” *JTS* 48 [1997] 1–23) puts it, both “conceited and dull.”
- <sup>11</sup> So, e.g., Lohmeyer, Ernst, *Kyrios Jesus: eine Untersuchung zu Phil. 2, 5–11* (SHAW 18; Heidelberg: Carl Winters Universitätsbuchhandlung, 1928); Günther Bornkamm, “Zum Verständnis des Christus-Hymnus: Phil 2, 6–11,” in idem, *Studien zu Antike und Urchristentum* (BEvT 28; München: Kaiser, 1963) 177–87, esp. 178; Martin, Ralph P., *A Hymn of Christ: Philippians 2:5–11 in Recent Interpretation & in the Setting of Early Christian Worship* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997 [1967]) 40–41, who suggests an Aramaic *Vorlage*; cf. Deichgräber, Reinhard, *Gotteshymnus und Christushymnus in der frühen Christenheit: Untersuchungen zu Form, Sprache und Stil der frühchristlichen Hymnen* (SUNT 5; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967) 129, who concluded the opposite (“Der Hymnus erweist sich in seiner Sprache als gut griechisch.”); Hurtado, Larry, *How on Earth Did Jesus Become God? Historical Questions about Earliest Devotion to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005) 84–85; Martin Hengel, “Hymns and Christology,” in idem, *Between Jesus and Paul* (London: SCM, 1983) 78–96; “The Song about Christ in Earliest Worship,” in idem, *Studies in Early Christology* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995) 227–91. For a variety of arguments against the classification of this pericope as “pre-Pauline” and a “hymn,” see Edsall, Benjamin and Strawbridge, Jennifer R., “The Songs We Used to Sing? Hymn ‘Traditions’ and Reception in Pauline Letters,” *JSNT* 37 (2015) 290–311; Peppard, Michael, “‘Poetry’, ‘Hymns’ and ‘Traditional Material’ in New Testament Epistles or How to Do Things with Indentations,” *JSNT* 30 (2008) 319–42; Adela Yarbro Collins, “Psalms, Philippians 2:6–11, and the Origins of Christology,” *BibInt* 11 (2003) 361–72; Samuel Vollenweider, “Der ‘Raub’ der Gottgleichheit: ein religionsgeschichtlicher Vorschlag zu Phil 2.6(–11),” in *Horizonte neutestamentlicher Christologie*, 263–84, esp. 263–64; and Fee, Gordon, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995) 192–93. Bockmuehl (“Form of God,” 2), presents a mediating position: Paul is responsible for this material, whether he has composed it or not.
- <sup>12</sup> On the exegesis of Isaiah in the hymn, see Hurtado, *How on Earth Did Jesus Become a God*, 91–93.
- <sup>13</sup> Bockmuehl, “Form of God,” 2.
- <sup>14</sup> Martin (“Hymn of Christ,” 26) suggests (following Lohmeyer, *Kyrios Jesus*) that “even death on a cross” is a Pauline addition.
- <sup>15</sup> In fact, my position in this study is the inverse of Vollenweider's (“Die Metamorphose des Gottessohns”), with whom I nonetheless share many instincts and critical judgments. Vollenweider notes, on the one hand, that “In Euripides’ [sic] Bakchen finden sich die engsten Berührungen mit Phil 2,6–8” (“Die Metamorphose des Gottessohns,” 288); but, on the other hand, that “[Epiphaniale Vorstellungen] spielen für unser Christuslob Phil 2,6–8 aber deshalb kaum eine Rolle” (ibid., 293). Suggesting the primary influence of Jewish apocalyptic tradition in the hymn, Vollenweider then offers a synthetic or blended reading, in which an angelomorphic christology is superimposed onto the backdrop of the pagan epiphanic metamorphic tradition (“im Vorstellungshorizont hellenistischer Götterepiphanien”; ibid., 296). Inversely, this present study takes the Hellenistic apocalyptic tradition as “given” and then asks what happens when a Bacchic mask is superimposed upon Christ by the hymn's composer(s), Paul, or an ancient reader.
- <sup>16</sup> Dunn, James D. G., “Adam, Christ, and Preexistence,” in *Where Christology Began: Essays on Philippians 2* (ed. Martin, R. P. and Dodd, Brian J.; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998) 74–83; cf. Hurtado, *How on Earth did Jesus Become a God*, 97–102.
- <sup>17</sup> Wright, N. T., “The Lion and the Eagle: Paul in Caesar's Empire,” in *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (2 vols.; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013) 2:1271–1319; Oakes, Peter, *Philippians: From People to Letter* (SNTSMS 110; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) 129–74.
- <sup>18</sup> Barclay, John M. G., “Paul, Roman Religion, and the Emperor: Mapping the Point of Conflict,” in idem, *Pauline Churches and Diaspora Jews* (WUNT 1.275; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011) 345–62; and idem, “Why the Roman Empire Was Insignificant to Paul,” in *Pauline Churches*, 363–87. Petersen, Anders

Klostergaard (“Imperial Politics in Paul: Scholarly Phantom or Actual Textual Phenomenon?” in *People Under Power: Early Jewish and Christian Responses to the Roman Empire* [ed. Labahn, M. and Lehtipuu, O.; Early Christianity in the Roman World; Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2015] 103–29, esp. 113), worries that “in some recent studies, particularly those stemming from the guild of New Testament scholars, more weight is being ascribed to the relevance of the imperial cult as an appropriate context for the interpretation of Pauline texts than it actually merits.” Klostergaard Petersen considers Phil 2:6–11 just such an overanalyzed passage (ibid., 121).

- <sup>19</sup> See Standhartinger, Angela, “Letter from Prison as Hidden Transcript: What It Tells Us about the People at Philippi,” in *The People beside Paul: The Philippian Assembly and History from Below* (ed. Marchal, Joseph A.; Early Christianity and its Literature; Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015) 107–40. See also *Hidden Transcripts and the Arts of Resistance: Applying the Work of James C. Scott to Jesus and Paul* (ed. Richard A. Horsley; Semeia Studies 48; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004).
- <sup>20</sup> Betz, Hans Dieter, *Studies in Paul's Letter to the Philippians* (WUNT 1.343; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015) 20–21. See Phil 1:13 and Phil 4:22.
- <sup>21</sup> For the suggestion that the author of Luke-Acts held a similarly ambiguous relationship to the Roman empire, see Rowe, C. Kavin, *World Upside Down: Reading Acts in the Graeco-Roman Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).
- <sup>22</sup> See Bultmann, Rudolf, *Jesus Christ and Mythology* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958). Whereas Bultmann uses many lines from Athenian tragedy to construct the contemporary human subject, I am here using tragedy to reconstruct the divine object (or better subject) of faith(fulness).
- <sup>23</sup> The Academic Platonist and polymath, Varro (116–27 BCE), is reported by Augustine (*Civ. Dei* 6.5) to have divided religion into three categories: mythical (or poetic); physical (or philosophical); and civic. Clearly, there were interactions between all three, as I am proposing here (between imperial cult, Platonizing ontology, and mythological drama). In this reading, civic and mythical theology are the most important.
- <sup>24</sup> Henrichs, Albert, “Full of Gods: Nietzsche on Greek Polytheism and Culture,” in *Nietzsche and Antiquity: His Reaction and Response to the Classical Tradition* (ed. Bishop, P.; New York: Camden House, 2004) 114–37, esp. 125.
- <sup>25</sup> Mac Góráin, Fiachra, “Virgil's Bacchus and the Roman Republic,” in *Augustan Poetry and the Roman Republic* (ed. Farrell, J. and Nelis, D. P.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) 124–45.
- <sup>26</sup> Mac Góráin, Fiachra, “Apollo and Dionysus in Virgil,” *Incontri di Filologia Classica* 12 (2012–13) 191–238, esp. 195.
- <sup>27</sup> Oakes, *Philippians*, 210. Oakes (ibid., 209) considers the μορφή language as just such a potential locus. This is suggestive in that Paul elsewhere—particularly in the Corinthian Correspondence—uses εικῶν (alongside μορφή) to speak of Christ in a Platonizing mode. One can hardly think of a less Platonizing thing to say than that God has a μορφή (cf. Philo, *Opif.* 69: οὔτε γὰρ ἀνθρωπόμερφος ὁ θεός), particularly one that might be ranked in continuity with the human. Paul's focus on μορφή in a mythic or apocalyptic mode here arises from the “Roman” contingency of Philippians. Cf. Philo, *Mos.* 1.66, and the comments by Müller, *Menschwerdung*, 24, and esp. Bockmuehl, “Form of God,” 15.
- <sup>28</sup> For a consideration of Paul's sending city as a kind of secondary audience for his letters, see Hartwig, Charlotte and Theißen, Gerd, “Die Korinthische Gemeinde als Nebenadressat des Römerbriefs: Eigentextreferenzen des Paulus und kommunikativer Kontext des längsten Paulusbriefes.” *NovT* 46 (2004) 229–52.
- <sup>29</sup> For the division of the hymn into two major sections, see Lohmeyer, Ernst, *Die Briefe an die Philipper, an die Kolosser, und an Philemon* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1956) 90, who traces the view back to Johannes Weiss; and Martin, *Hymn of Christ*, 24–25.
- <sup>30</sup> Bockmuehl, “Form of God,” 19; Martin, *Hymn of Christ*, 40–41, who gives an Aramaic retroversion.
- <sup>31</sup> On the link with the *Shi'ur Qomah*, see Bockmuehl, “Form of God,” 16; Scholem, *Major Trends*, 63–67.
- <sup>32</sup> Dunn, *Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 281–88. See LXX Gen 1:27; Philo, *Leg.* 3.96; *Opif.* 69.
- <sup>33</sup> Euripides, *Bacch.* 1–5; Plutarch, *Crass.* 33 (564–65).

- <sup>34</sup> There are five divine prologues in Euripides: the other four are *Hippolytus* (Aphrodite), *Alcestis* (Apollo, compelled for a while to live among mortals, despite being a god), *Ion* (Hermes—who is the son and λάτρις of Zeus), and *Trojan Women* (Poseidon); see Esposito, Stephen, *Euripides' Bacchae: Translation, Introduction, and Notes* (Focus Classical Library; Newburyport, MA: Focus, 1998) 26.
- <sup>35</sup> Dodds, E. R., *Euripides: Bacchae* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; Oxford: Clarendon, 1960) 62.
- <sup>36</sup> Apollo, in the *Alcestis*, is not said to take human form, but remains very much a God (Euripides, *Alc.* 1–2: ἔτλην ἐγὼ / θῆσσαν τράπεζαν αἰνέσαι θεός περ ὧν); he eats human bread only because of Zeus's punishment (*Alc.* 3–4) and flees at the advent of the personified Death (!) to avoid pollution (*Alc.* 22–23: ἐγὼ δὲ, μὴ μίασμά μ' ἐν δόμοις κίχη / λείπω μελάθρων τῶνδε φιλάτην στέγην). Hermes, in the *Ion*, comes closer to Dionysus (in certain ways), being a willing λάτρις of Zeus (a near synonym of δοῦλος, though hired rather than enslaved); Hermes is, however, δαυμόνων λάτριον (*Ion* 4), not the servant of human beings.
- <sup>37</sup> Euripides, *Bacch.* 53–54.
- <sup>38</sup> Phil 2:6c, 7cd. Not all agree that these are synonyms. See Wright, N. T., “Jesus Christ is Lord: Philippians 2.5–11,” in idem, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991) 56–98.
- <sup>39</sup> <sup>46</sup> reads ἀνθρώπου, which is an even better parallel to *Bacch.* 55.
- <sup>40</sup> The Ps.-Gregorian (Nazianzen) dramatic poet of *Christus patiens*, a 2062-line iambic work (ca. 11<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> cent. CE), recognized these intertextual affinities and combined Philippians 2 with the Euripidean prologue. In one scene, Mary holds the corpse of Jesus and says: σὺ Θεὸς μένων, μορφῆ τε σῆ συν ἦψας ἀνέρος φύσιν . . . μορφῆ συνάψας τοῦ Θεοῦ βροτῶν φύσιν. See Ps.-Gregory, *Chr. pat.* 1536, 1543; cited in Friesen, *Reading Dionysus*, 257. On the comparison of Christ and Dionysius from Nonnus to Hölderlin, Nietzsche, and Girard, see Henrichs, Albert, “Loss of Self, Suffering, and Violence: The Modern View of Dionysus from Nietzsche to Girard,” *HSCP* 88 (1984) 205–40, esp. 216–17.
- <sup>41</sup> Recognition of these intertexts does not mean insisting that Jesus's incarnation was not a *novum* in the history of religions. The “real presence” of Dionysus on the tragic stage remains categorically different from the historical incarnation of the son of God in the historical man Jesus. On this point, Müller (*Menschwerdung*, 21) notes that the language of the hymn “soll die wirkliche Menschwerdung Jesu Christi zur Sprache bringen, was angesichts der religionsgeschichtlichen Umwelt des Urchristentums deshalb Schwierigkeiten bereitet, weil die reale Inkarnation eines Gottwesens, das sich seiner Göttlichkeit radikal entäußert, ohne geeignetes Vorbild ist” [emphasis added].
- <sup>42</sup> For Müller's position, see n. 9 above. For Vollenweider's even more cautious acknowledgement and deployment of these echoes of the *Bacchae* in the *carmen Christi*, see n. 15 above.
- <sup>43</sup> Willis, William H., “A Census of the Literary Papyri from Egypt,” *GRBS* 9 (1968) 205–41, esp. 212, 215.
- <sup>44</sup> On the preference for Euripides (over other tragedians) in “grammatical” education, see Cribore, Raffaella, *Gymnastics of the Mind: Greek Education in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001) 198–99: “The papyri generally show that members of the cultivated public were very fond of Euripides. . . . School papyri confirm this, showing an absolute preference for Euripides. . . . Yet Euripides enjoyed such favor in school not only because he was *linguistically more accessible* but also because a good knowledge of his work . . . was fundamental for the student who continued to rhetorical education” [emphasis added].
- <sup>45</sup> For the “creative redeployment” of and competition with Euripides among Latin dramatists, see Boyle, Anthony J., *An Introduction to Roman Tragedy* (London: Routledge, 2006) 61, 95, *et passim*. For more on Dionysus in Rome, see section three below.
- <sup>46</sup> Scott, James M., *Bacchius Iudaeus: A Denarius Commemorating Pompey's Victory over Judea* (NTOA/SUNT 104; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015).
- <sup>47</sup> Functionally, this would have little impact on the reading offered here, given that many contend that the *Bacchae* simply popularizes certain elements of Dionysiac cultic initiation. On this, see Seaford, Richard, “Dionysiac Drama and the Dionysiac Mysteries,” *CQ* 31 (1981) 252–75.

- <sup>48</sup> Phil 2:6a, 7c. Dunn's attempt to read an adamic christology here stumbles, it seems, on prepositional metaphysics; for Christ is here depicted as being "in the form of God," (ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ ὁ) rather than being made "according to his image" (κατ' εἰκόνα θεοῦ ὁ), a distinction of critical import for early Platonizing interpreters of the Pentateuch. See Philo, *Leg.* 3.96.
- <sup>49</sup> Euripides, *Bacch.* 84.
- <sup>50</sup> Euripides, *Bacch.* 1–3; cf. Rom 1:3.
- <sup>51</sup> Euripides, *Bacch.* 42.
- <sup>52</sup> Euripides, *Bacch.* 2 reveals the name to the audience; in *Bacch.* 466, the stranger speaks the name to Pentheus. The wording of this latter verse actually makes the stranger's identity ambiguous and ancient readers of the *Bacchae* held different positions. Pacuvius (*Pentheus*), the first Latin translator of Euripides, identified the prisoner with the devotee of Bacchus, Acoetes. Ovid, *Metam.* 3.511–733, followed suit. See Friesen, *Reading Dionysus*, 99–100.
- <sup>53</sup> Euripides, *Bacch.* 1378.
- <sup>54</sup> Euripides, *Bacch.* 64; see Segal, *Dionysiac Poetics*, 10.
- <sup>55</sup> Phil 2:9bc; Sophocles, *Ant.*, 1115.
- <sup>56</sup> See *Rhet. Her.* 1.8.13: "Id quod in negotiorum expositione positum est tres habet partes: fabulam, historiam, argumentum. Fabula est quae neque veras neque veri similes continet res, ut eae sunt quae tragoediis traditae sunt."
- <sup>57</sup> See Euripides, *Bacch.* 516: οὔτοι χρεῶν / παθεῖν; 616–621, esp. 616: ὅτι με δεσμεύειν δοκῶν. A docetic reading of the Philippians hymn was, according to John Chrysostom and Tertullian, proposed by Marcion, on the basis of the word ὁμοίωμα. On this, see Müller, *Menschwerdung*, 21. On the contrary, in Philippians, Christ really does suffer in his human form (Phil 3:10: τοῦ γινῶναι . . . τὴν κοινωνίαν τῶν παθημάτων αὐτοῦ, συμμορφιζόμενος τῷ θανάτῳ αὐτοῦ; Cf. 2 Cor 3:18); Paul is really in δεσμοῖς (Phil 1:13, 14, 17).
- <sup>58</sup> Henrichs, "Loss of Self, Suffering, and Violence," 217; according to Henrichs (*ibid.*, 218) it was the Romantics who first internalized Dionysus in "a newly found inner space, that of man's own self," even if Ovid's Bacchus provided some precedent for the Renaissance and Romantic transformations of the god.
- <sup>59</sup> *Idem.*, "Greek and Roman Glimpses of Dionysos," in Hauser, Caroline, *Dionysos and his Circle: Ancient Through Modern* (Cambridge, MA: Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University) 1–11, esp. 3; see also *ibid.*, 5–6: "The Greeks themselves . . . were happily innocent of abstract thoughts about their gods. Whether poets, artists, or simple souls, they would perceive Dionysos visibly in clear and concrete outline, with their real eyes, not with their intellect; they would experience the god in their very limbs, when dancing or drunk." Cf. Nisbet, Robin George Murdoch and Hubbard, Margaret, *A Commentary on Horace: Odes Book 1* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1970) 19: "In the West, Augustus was not a praesens deus."
- <sup>60</sup> Mac Góráin, "Dionysus in Rome," 2.
- <sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.
- <sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.
- <sup>63</sup> Pilhofer, Peter, *Philippi: Band I; Die erste christliche Gemeinde Europas* (WUNT 1.87; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995) 100–107, esp. 105: "Diese Inschriften zeigen, daß der Kult Dionysos sich in römischer Zeit allgemeiner Beliebtheit erfreut. Unter den Mysterien finden sich Thraker, Griechen und Römer, d.h. der Gott ist bei allen drei Bevölkerungsgruppen akzeptiert."
- <sup>64</sup> Pilhofer, *Philippi: Band I*, 100, 103: "Ein Zentrum der Dionysos-Verehrung schon seit der hellenistischen Zeit ist Drama." So also Χάϊδω Κουκούλη-Χρυσανθάκη, "Ο αρχαίος οικισμός της Δράμας και το Ιερό του Διονύσου" ["The Ancient Settlement of Drama and the Temple of Dionysus"] in Η Δράμα και η Περιοχή της: Ιστορία και Πολιτισμός, Δράμα 24–25 Νοεμβρίου 1989 (Drama: 1992), 67–107, cited in Pilhofer, *Philippi: Band I*, 101: "Το ιερό Διονύσου οπωσδήποτε πρέπει να έπαιξε σημαντικό ρόλο στη ζωή και στην ανάπτυξη του αρχαίου οικισμού της Δράμας από τα τέλη του 4ου π.Χ. αιώνα ως και τους ρωμαϊκούς χρόνους."
- <sup>65</sup> Pilhofer, *Philippi: Band I*, 101, 103, 105. Latin inscriptions to *Liber* include the following: Pilhofer, *Philippi: Band II: Katalog der Inschriften von Philippi* (WUNT 1.119; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995), §§094, 164, 332,

338, 339, 340, 341, 342 [Pater], 408 [Pater Deus Optimus], 500, 501c [Pater], 524, 525 [Liber Pater Tasibastenus]. For the *thiasus Maenad[um]*, see Pilhofer, *Philippi: Band II*, §§340 (Philippi, House with a Bath); 095 (Philippi, Eastern Cemetery); restored in 529 (Road between Φωτολίβος and Συμβολή, 1000m before the first house of the latter town; Old Bridge of Kadim Köprü).

<sup>66</sup> Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology*, 18, 31.

<sup>67</sup> Scholem, *Major Trends*, 22; similarly, Fishbane, Michael, *Biblical Myth and Rabbinic Mythmaking* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

<sup>68</sup> Theißen, Gerd, *The Religion of the Earliest Churches: Creating a Symbolic World* (trans. Bowden, John; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999) 325 n. 5; cited by Kraftchick, Steven J., “Recast, Reclaim, Reject: Myth and Validity,” in *Myth and Scripture: Contemporary Perspectives on Religion, Language, and Imagination* (ed. Callender, Dexter E.; Resources for Biblical Study 78; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2014) 179–200, esp. 194.

<sup>69</sup> Tacitus (*Ann.*, 14.14–15) and Ps.-Lucian (*Nero*, 2, 4, 10) bear witness to Nero's Apollonian pretensions. For an interpretation of classical Attic tragedy (and the city Dionysia) as literally and inextricably interwoven with questions of civic stability, military decorum, and political hierarchy, see Goldhill, Simon, “The Great Dionysia and Civic Ideology,” in *Nothing to Do with Dionysos? Athenian Drama in Its Social Context* (ed. Winkler, J. and Zeitlin, F. I.; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990) 97–129.

<sup>70</sup> Writ large, of course, the Nietzschean polarity of Apollo-Dionysus does not hold up to scrutiny. On this, see Mac Góráin, “Apollo and Dionysus in Virgil,” 198–200; and nn. 25 and 26 above.

<sup>71</sup> Esposito, *Bacchae*, 4.

<sup>72</sup> Friesen, *Reading Dionysus*, 101.

<sup>73</sup> Pelling, Christopher, “The Triumviral Period,” in *The Cambridge Ancient History* (ed. Bowman, A. K., Champlin, E., and Lintott, A.; 14 vols.; 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 10:1–69, esp. 43.

<sup>74</sup> Horace, *Carm.* 1.2.29–30: “cui dabit partis scelus expiandi / Iuppiter”?

<sup>75</sup> Horace, *Carm.* 1.2.44: “Caesaris ultor”; Nisbet and Hubbard, *Odes*, 17, suggest that Octavian is himself in view here, not Julius Caesar.

<sup>76</sup> Segal, *Dionysiac Poetics*, 8: “The poetics of the form that belongs to [Dionysus] differs radically from the poetics of his opposite, the god of epic and lyric, Apollo.”

<sup>77</sup> Horace, *Carm.* 2.7.9–14; Harrison, Stephen, “Horatian Self-Representations,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Horace* (ed. idem; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) 22–35, esp. 25.

<sup>78</sup> Mac Góráin, “Apollo and Dionysus in Virgil,” 200.

<sup>79</sup> Horace, *Carm.* 1.2.41.

<sup>80</sup> Vergil, *Georg.* 498–508. See Nisbet and Hubbard, *Odes*, 16–17.

<sup>81</sup> Horace did make productive and creative use of Dionysian tradition, dedicating two *Odes* to Bacchus (*Carm.* 2.19 and 3.25). On these poems and their peculiarity, see Henrichs, “Glimpses,” 10, n. 50. Horace implicitly subjugates Bacchus to the order of Jove (a figure in Augustan propaganda) and turns him primarily into a poetic muse, but not civic genius (Mac Góráin, “Dionysus in Rome,” 1: “Bacchus was not central to the public worship of the state”), whose speech is channeled by Horace to praise Augustus. This is indeed “new wine in old wineskins,” as Henrichs (“Glimpses,” 10) quips. This two-pronged Augustan response to the “problem of Dionysus” has been emphasized by Mac Góráin (“Dionysus in Rome,” 11–12; “Virgil's Bacchus and the Roman Republic,” 124). In addition to “countering” with Apollo, Octavian “managed to recuperate a benign Italian Liber, decoupling him from Dionysus's more suspicious aspects, drunken debauchery, theatricality, and foreignness.”

<sup>82</sup> Friesen, *Reading Dionysus*, 104.

<sup>83</sup> Accius, *Frg.* 217 (*Remains of Old Latin, Volume II: Livius Andronicus; Naevius; Pacuvius; Accius* [trans. E. H. Warmington; LCL 314; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1936]): “Formae figurae nitiditatem, hospes, geris.” Cf. Euripides, *Bacch.* 453: ἀτὰρ τὸ μὲν σὺ μὲν οὐκ ἄμορφος εἶ, ξένε.

<sup>84</sup> Pilhofer, *Philippi: Band II*, §439, 2.2; for the link with *Bromius*, see *ibid.*, 2.6.

<sup>85</sup> Euripides, *Bacch.* 1; Horace, *Carm.* 1.2.30.

- <sup>86</sup> Euripides, *Bacch.* 5; Horace, *Carm.* 1.2.46.
- <sup>87</sup> Euripides, *Bacch.* 436–37; Accius, *Frg.* 216: “Praesens praesto irridens leniter / nobis stupefactis sese ultro ostentum obtulit”; Horace, *Carm.* 1.2.46–49: “laetus intersis . . . / neve te nostris vitiis iniquium / ocior aura / tollat.”
- <sup>88</sup> Mercury's vengeance is to be enacted in particular against the Parthians (!), whom Plutarch places in Dionysus's train. See Horace, *Carm.* 1.2.18, 44, 51 (Medos).
- <sup>89</sup> Oakes (*Philippians*, 206–10) suggests that the major change that occurs in Phil 2:9–11 is that “Christ has replaced the Emperor as the world's decisive power.” While this does not mean that the christology of the hymn does not engage Isa 45, Oakes notes that the original exegetical and theological content has now been demoted to a secondary status, in light of the exemplarist purpose of the hymn and its “heavy reformulat[ion]” within the letter itself. Oakes's stress on the *novum* of the exaltation in political terms parallels Dunn's assessment of the *novum* of Christ's lordship in ontological terms. See Dunn, James D. G., *Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) 252 OpenURL query | [Google Scholar](#): “The exaltation to lordship which the resurrection brought Jesus . . . opens up for us the still more intriguing issue of whether Paul in fact assumed that the risen Christ had been deified.” This adoptionist/exaltationist potentiality in Paul's thought has been explored further by Peppard, Michael, “Adopted and Begotten Sons of God: Paul and John on Divine Sonship,” *CBQ* **73** (2011) 92–110, with specific reference to Rom 1; and Ehrman, Bart, *How Jesus Became God: The Exaltation of a Jewish Preacher from Galilee* (New York: HarperOne, 2014).
- <sup>90</sup> For the significance of the *Bacchae* in stretching male gender norms in classical Athens (and beyond), particularly the thesis that “theater uses the feminine for the purposes of imagining a fuller model for the masculine self,” see Froma I. Zeitlin, “Playing the Other: Theater, Theatricality, and the Feminine in Greek Drama,” in *Nothing to Do with Dionysos?*, 63–96.
- <sup>91</sup> Phil 4:2–3; Acts 16:14–15. On Euodia and Syntyche, see Joseph A. Marchal, “Slaves as Wo/men and Unmen: Reflecting upon Euodia, Syntyche, and Epaphroditus in Philippi,” in *The People beside Paul*, 141–76; and Valerie Abrahamsen, “Priestesses and Other Female Cult Leaders at Philippi in the Early Christian Era,” in *ibid.*, 25–62, esp. 51–54.
- <sup>92</sup> The title ἐπίσκοποι occurs only here in Paul's undisputed epistles. Might this denote a growing acknowledgement of the significance of this office among the Pauline churches toward the end of Paul's life?
- <sup>93</sup> See Mitchell, Margaret M., *Paul, the Corinthians, and the Birth of Christian Hermeneutics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) 97, for Paul's self-interpretation of previous letters; for Philippians as Paul's “last word,” see Betz, *Studies in Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, 152.
- <sup>94</sup> For a more detailed analysis, see Portefaix, Lilian, *Sisters Rejoice: Paul's Letters to the Philippians and Luke-Acts as Received by First-Century Philippian Women* (ConBNT 20; Uppsala, Sweden: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1988); Abrahamsen, “Priestesses and Other Female Cult Leaders,” 42–46; Bremmer, Jan M., “Roman Maenads,” in *Albert's Anthology* (ed. Coleman, K. M.; Loeb Classical Monographs 17; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017), 23–5.
- <sup>95</sup> Col 3:18, 20, 22.
- <sup>96</sup> It is worth noting that “the swapping of identities between master and slave” was not only a tragic pattern but also “a regular motif of Greek ‘New Comedy’ and Roman comedy” (Boyle, *Roman Tragedy*, 95–96)—a point that will be relevant in section five of the present study.
- <sup>97</sup> Portefaix (*Sisters Rejoice*, 144) draws a direct connection between female and christological servitude.
- <sup>98</sup> For the feminine form of Dionysus and Pentheus, see Euripides, *Bacch.* 351, and *ibid.*, 917 (Δι. πρέπεις δὲ Κάδμου θυγατέρων μορφὴν μιῶ.), 981, respectively.
- <sup>99</sup> Zeitlin, “Playing the Other,” 67: “Unless there were something to learn . . . we would not need the genre of tragedy at all to call these different [gender] roles into question, and . . . to challenge the male's civic and rational view of the universe.”
- <sup>100</sup> Henrichs, “Glimpses,” 2.

- <sup>101</sup> Fiorenza, Elizabeth Schüssler (*In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* [New York: Crossroad, 1983] 170) suggests that Euodia and Syntyche are “Christian missionaries”; see also Abrahamsen, “Priestesses and Other Female Cult Leaders,” 51–53.
- <sup>102</sup> Philo, *Contempl.* 12.
- <sup>103</sup> For Dionysus’s suffering human nature but simultaneously impassible divinity, see Euripides, *Bacch.* 500 (suffering); *ibid.*, 515–16 (not suffering). See further n. 57 above.
- <sup>104</sup> Euripides, *Bacch.* 54. Dionysus does not fail to speak of μορφήν τ’ ἐμὴν, even in changing his appearance; his goal becomes the violent revelation of that form. Cf. Phil 2:6b: οὐκ ἄρπαγμὸν ἠγήσατο.
- <sup>105</sup> Henrichs, “Glimpses,” 11.
- <sup>106</sup> See Jeff Jay, *The Tragic in Mark* (HUT 66; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014) 1–24.
- <sup>107</sup> Jay, *The Tragic in Mark*, 3–11.
- <sup>108</sup> Steiner, George, *The Death of Tragedy* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1963); Milbank, John, *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, and Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1997); Hart, David Bentley, *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003); Murphy, Francesca Aran, *The Comedy of Revelation: Paradise Lost and Regained in Biblical Narrative* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2000). For a helpful assessment of these critics, see Jay, *The Tragic in Mark*, 6; and Ben Quash, “Four Biblical Characters: In Search of Tragedy,” in *Christian Theology and Tragedy: Theologians, Tragic Literature, and Tragic Theory* (ed. T. Kevin Taylor and Giles Waller; Ashgate Studies in Theology, Imagination and the Arts; Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2011) 15–34.
- <sup>109</sup> Jay, *The Tragic in Mark*, 5.
- <sup>110</sup> On theological “spaces,” see O’Regan, Cyril, *Theology and The Spaces of Apocalyptic* (Père Marquette Lecture in Theology; Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2009) 26–34.
- <sup>111</sup> Kevin Taylor, “Hans Urs von Balthasar and Christ as Tragic Hero,” in *Christian Theology and Tragedy*, 133–48, esp. 143.
- <sup>112</sup> Jay (*The Tragic in Mark*, 21) defines mode as “an evocation or distillation of a genre’s internal repertoire.” See *ibid.*, 79–106.
- <sup>113</sup> Friesen, “*Paulus Tragicus*,” 820, 827. See 1 Cor 4:8.
- <sup>114</sup> A similar terminological difficulty, arising from confusion about the terms “apocalyptic,” “apocalypse,” and “apocalypticism,” is addressed in Collins, John J., “Apocalypse: The Morphology of a Genre” (*Semeia* 14; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1979).
- <sup>115</sup> See, e.g., Aristotle, *Poet.* 9.9; 10.2; and esp. 13.11–13, which suggests that the homecoming (νόστος) of Odysseus derives its pleasure from a comic ending.
- <sup>116</sup> Jay, “A Typology of the Tragic Mode,” in *idem*, *The Tragic in Mark*, 79–106.
- <sup>117</sup> For this description of the Hypolydian mode, see Palisca, Claude Victor, “The Ethos of Modes during the Renaissance,” in *The Emotional Power of Music: Multidisciplinary Perspectives on Musical Arousal, Expression, and Social Control* (ed. Cochrane, Tom, Fantini, Bernardino, and Scherer, Klaus R.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) 103–14, esp. 107.
- <sup>118</sup> Plato, *Resp.* 424c. For the discussion of various modes, see Plato, *Resp.* 398d–399c.
- <sup>119</sup> Palisca, “Ethos of Modes,” 105.
- <sup>120</sup> Plato, *Resp.* 398cd: Τίνας οὖν θρηνώδεις ἁρμονίαι; λέγε μοι· σὺ γὰρ μουσικός. Μειζολυδιστί, ἔφη, καὶ συντολυδιστί καὶ τοιαῦταί τινες. Οὐκοῦν ἀΐται, ἦν δ’ ἐγώ, ἀφαιρεταί; ἄχρηστοι γὰρ καὶ γυναιξίν ἄς δεῖ ἐπιεικεῖ εἶναι, μὴ ὅτι ἀνδράσι. See Palisca, “Ethos of Modes,” 104–5.
- <sup>121</sup> Plato, *Resp.* 399d. By contrast, Palisca, “Ethos of Modes,” 107, gives the Classical description of Plato’s forbidden Hypolydian as “Bacchic, intoxicating.”
- <sup>122</sup> With regard to Paul’s comic fabula, it is noteworthy that the only iambic trimeter that Paul cites in his letters is from Menander’s (Euripidean) comedy, *Thais* (1 Cor 15:33b).
- <sup>123</sup> Murphy, *The Comedy of Revelation*, 345–46 [emphasis in original].
- <sup>124</sup> This term was coined by J. R. R. Tolkien in his Andrew Lang lecture at the University of St. Andrews, “On Fairy Stories” in *idem*, *Tree and Leaf* (London: Harper Collins, 2001 [1964]) 3–80, esp. 68–69,

wherein *eucatastrophe* involves “joy beyond the walls of the world, poignant as grief.” See also Murphy, *The Comedy of Revelation*, 1–28.

<sup>125</sup> Phil 3:10 offers further evidence for Paul's inversion of the tragic grammar: “the power of Christ's resurrection” precedes and conditions “the communion of his sufferings.”

<sup>126</sup> The same principle is followed by Renaissance composers like Josquin de Prez. See Meier, Bernhard, “Rhetorical Aspects of the Renaissance Modes,” *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* **115**(1990) 182–190, esp. 184: “the ending dictates the character of the whole, ‘a fine denominatur res.’”

<sup>127</sup> See Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy*, §11–15. For Socrates and the tragic, see Plato, *Phaedo*, 115a.

<sup>128</sup> See Betz, *Studies in Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, 22–40; 69–89; and esp. 141, for Phil 1:20–26 as a *meditatio mortis* (Seneca, *Ep.* 54.2) or *praemeditatio futurorum malorum* (Cicero, *Tusc.* 3.29–32; 1.74), a tradition whose concepts “point back to Plato.”

<sup>129</sup> For Nero's Apollonian pretensions, see Tacitus, *Ann.* 14.14–15; Ps.-Lucian, *Nero* 2, 4. For Nero's alleged murder of the tragic player at the Isthmus of Corinth, see Ps.-Lucian, *Nero* 9–10.