

## «Only hold fast to what you have until I come» (Rev 2:25)

### LOYALTY AND HOPE WITHOUT COMPROMISE: AN EXEGETICAL AND THEOLOGICAL READING OF THE MESSAGE TO THYATIRA (REV 2:18-29)

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#### Abstract

*The article, "Loyalty and Hope without Compromise: An Exegetical and Theological Reading of the Message to Thyatira (Rev 2:18-29)," provides a detailed analysis of the letter to the Church in Thyatira from the Book of Revelation. The author argues that the message is an urgent call for believers to maintain unwavering loyalty and hope in Christ, resisting the pressures of compromise. The church is praised for its growing works, love, and perseverance, but severely criticized for tolerating the false prophetess "Jezebel." This figure symbolizes seductive teachings that lead Christians to participate in idolatrous cults (spiritual fornication and eating meat sacrificed to idols), a major issue in Thyatira due to the economic necessity of joining trade guilds associated with pagan practices. Jesus, identifying himself as the Son of God who sees all, warns of impending judgment for the unrepentant. Conversely, the faithful who conquer and hold fast are promised a share in Christ's authority over the nations and the morning star, emphasizing that true security and power come only from Christ, not from worldly accommodations. The message serves as an admonition to the universal Church to preserve its distinct identity against all forms of compromise.*

#### INTRODUCTION

The so-called «seven letters» of the Revelation are not real letters but rather function as messages that follow the same letter-like rhetorical pattern and form a literary unity that is an integral part of the opening vision of the book<sup>1</sup>. Each message examines the reality of a particular church in a concrete situation. However, as it is typical of the book of Revelation, the predominance of symbols and images makes the message difficult to grasp, so that it needs to be decoded to unearth its theological dimension. As Zumstein affirms,

The New Testament speaks of God, of the human being's situation before God and of the life project that proceeds from this. It seeks to convey a profiled conception of human existence and of the world *coram Deo*. Any reading of the New Testament that does justice to what the text is about is, by that very fact, a

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. SCHÜSSLER FIORENZA Elisabeth, *Apocalisse: visione di un mondo giusto*, Brescia, Queriniana, 1994, p. 70-71.

theological reading. To deny the theological dimension of the New Testament, for whatever reason, is to censor the text in what it wants to convey, to silence it (my own translation)<sup>2</sup>.

Since God, in Sacred Scripture, speaks through humans and in human fashion, in order to understand what God wished to communicate, the exegesis carefully investigates what meaning the sacred writers really intended, and what God wanted to manifest by means of their word<sup>3</sup>.

This article, entitled «Loyalty and Hope without Compromise: An Exegetical and Theological Reading of the Message to Thyatira (Rev 2:18-29) », aims to unearth the underlying message of the so-called letter to Thyatira. We are aware that there is no scientific method for studying the Bible that is able to exhaust all the richness contained in the biblical texts<sup>4</sup>. In this article we use a synchronic approach (narrative criticism), although there will be some nuances of a diachronic approach. In fact, diachronic and synchronic methods are essential in exegesis, as they complement each other.

The article is outlined as follows: 1) Textual criticism; 2) Translation of the text; 3) Literary genre; 4) Historical-geographical setting of Thyatira; 5) the analysis of the message, and 6) conclusion.

## 1. Textual Criticism

Revelation 2:18-29 appears with not many relevant issues to be discussed regarding textual criticism. Bruce Metzger<sup>5</sup> identifies three issues, one in verse 20, and two in verse 22<sup>6</sup>:

### Verse 20 *γυναῖκα* {B}

On the basis of what was regarded as preponderant testimony, a majority of the Committee preferred the reading *γυναῖκα* without *σοῦ* (ⲕ C P 1 1611 2053 2344 Old Latin vg cop<sup>sa, bo</sup> arm eth Tertullian *al.*). The reading with *σοῦ* (“your wife Jezebel”), which requires *ἄγγελος* in verse 18 to be taken as the bishop or leader of the church at Thyatira, is supported by (A) 046 1006 1854 syr<sup>ph, h</sup> Cyprian *al.*, and appears to be the result of scribal confusion arising from the presence of several instances of *σοῦ* in verses 19 and 20.

### Verse 22 *κλίνην* {A}

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<sup>2</sup> « Le Nouveau Testament parle de Dieu, de la situation de l'être humain devant Dieu et du projet de vie qui en découle. Il veut transmettre une conception profilée de l'existence humaine et du monde *coram Deo*. Toute lecture du Nouveau Testament qui rend justice à la chose dont parle le texte est de ce fait même une lecture théologique. Taire pour quelque raison que ce soit la dimension théologique du Nouveau Testament, c'est censurer le texte dans ce qu'il veut transmettre, c'est le réduire au silence » (ZUMSTEIN Jean, « La recherche en théologie du Nouveau Testament », in BOUSQUET François, GAGEY Henri-Jérôme, MEDEVIELLE Geneviève *et al* (ed.), *La responsabilité des théologiens. Mélanges offerts à Joseph Doré*, Paris, Desclée, 2002, p. 129).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. VATICAN II, *Dei Verbum*, nr. 12.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. PONTIFICIA COMMISSIONE BIBLICA, *L'interpretazione della Bibbia nella Chiesa*, Città del Vaticano, Libreria editrice vaticana, 2014, p. 36.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. METZGER M. Bruce, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament, Second Edition*, Stuttgart, German Bible Society, 1994, p. 664-665.

<sup>6</sup> For a more detailed annotation of the textual criticism of the pericope in question confer AUNE David A., *Revelation 1–5*, Coll. «Word Biblical Commentary», Vol. 52A, Dallas, Word Books, 1997, p. 630-638.

Instead of *κλίνην*, which is decisively supported by ⋈ C P 046 1 1006 1611 1854 2053 2344 it<sup>gig</sup>, ar vg syr<sup>ph, h</sup> cop<sup>bo</sup> *al*, several witnesses, wishing to increase punishment threatened to Jezebel, have introduced various glosses. Thus, A reads *φυλακὴν*, probably derived from ver. 10; 2071 and arm read *κλίβανον* (“an oven, furnace”); 1597 and cop<sup>sa</sup> read *ἀσθένεια*; and several Latin manuscripts known to Primasius read *luctum* (“sorrow, affliction”).

## Verse 22 ἔργων αὐτῆς {A}

Instead of *αὐτῆς* (which is strongly supported by ⋈ C P 1006 1611 2053 it<sup>gig</sup> vg syr<sup>h</sup> cop<sup>sa, bo</sup> Tertullian *al*), the Textus Receptus, following A 1 1854 2081 2344 it<sup>ar</sup> syr<sup>ph</sup> arm ath Cyprian *al*, reads *αὐτῶν*. The latter reading appears to be secondary, having been introduced either unwittingly (a mechanical repetition of the preceding termination) or deliberately (so that the repentance should be for their own works rather than for another’s). Several singular readings reflect scribal eccentricities.

Although Metzger’s allegations noted above are legitimate, for the matter of convenience we choose to maintain the final form of the text as presented by the editor.

## 2. Translation of the Text<sup>7</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Θυατείροις ἐκκλησίας γράψων· Τάδε λέγει ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ, ὁ ἔχων τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς αὐτοῦ ὡς φλόγα πυρὸς καὶ οἱ πόδες αὐτοῦ ὅμοιοι χαλκολιβάνῳ·

<sup>19</sup> Οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα καὶ τὴν ἀγάπην καὶ τὴν πίστιν καὶ τὴν διακονίαν καὶ τὴν ὑπομονὴν σου, καὶ τὰ ἔργα σου τὰ ἔσχατα πλείονα τῶν πρώτων.

<sup>20</sup> ἀλλὰ ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ ὅτι ἀφεῖς τὴν γυναῖκα Ἰεζάβελ, ἡ λέγουσα ἐαυτὴν προφητὴν καὶ διδάσκει καὶ πλανᾷ τοὺς ἐμοὺς δούλους πορνεῦσαι καὶ φαγεῖν εἰδωλόθυτα.

<sup>21</sup> καὶ ἔδωκα αὐτῇ χρόνον ἵνα μετανοήσῃ, καὶ οὐ θέλει μετανοῆσαι ἐκ τῆς πορνείας αὐτῆς.

<sup>22</sup> ἰδοὺ βάλλω αὐτὴν εἰς κλίνην καὶ τοὺς μοιχεύοντας μετ’ αὐτῆς εἰς θλίψιν μεγάλην, ἐὰν μὴ μετανοήσωσιν ἐκ τῶν ἔργων αὐτῆς,

<sup>23</sup> καὶ τὰ τέκνα αὐτῆς ἀποκτενῶ ἐν θανάτῳ. καὶ γνώσονται πᾶσαι αἱ ἐκκλησίαι ὅτι ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ ἐραυνῶν νεφροὺς καὶ καρδίας, καὶ δώσω ὑμῖν ἐκάστῳ κατὰ τὰ ἔργα ὑμῶν.

<sup>24</sup> ὑμῖν δὲ λέγω τοῖς λοιποῖς τοῖς ἐν Θυατείροις, ὅσοι οὐκ ἔχουσιν τὴν διδαχὴν ταύτην, οἵτινες οὐκ ἔγνωσαν τὰ βαθέα τοῦ Σατανᾶ ὡς λέγουσιν· οὐ βάλλω ἐφ’ ὑμᾶς ἄλλο βάρος,

<sup>25</sup> πληρὴν ὃ ἔχετε κρατήσατε ἄχρι[ς] οὗ ἂν ἦξω.

<sup>18</sup> And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: *Thus says the Son of God*, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze:

<sup>19</sup> I know your works, your love, *faithfulness*, service, and endurance. And your last works are greater than the first.

<sup>20</sup> But I have this against you: you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophet and is teaching and beguiling my servants to practice fornication and to eat food sacrificed to idols.

<sup>21</sup> I gave her time to repent, but *she does not want* to repent of her fornication.

<sup>22</sup> *Look*, I am throwing her on a bed, and those who commit adultery with her, into a great distress, unless they repent of her doings;

<sup>23</sup> and *her children I will kill with death*. And all the churches will know that I am the one who searches minds and hearts, and I will give to each of you as your works deserve.

<sup>24</sup> But to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not learned what some call “the deep things of Satan,” to you I say, I do not lay on you any other burden;

<sup>25</sup> only hold fast to what you have until I come.

<sup>7</sup> The English translation is taken from the New Revised Standard Version, Catholic edition, except the words in italic which are our own translation.

<sup>26</sup> καὶ ὁ νικῶν καὶ ὁ τηρῶν ἄχρι τέλους τὰ ἔργα μου, δώσω αὐτῷ ἐξουσίαν ἐπὶ τῶν ἐθνῶν

<sup>27</sup> καὶ ποιμανεῖ αὐτοὺς ἐν ῥάβδῳ σιδηρᾷ ὡς τὰ σκεύη τὰ κεραμικὰ συντρίβεται,

<sup>28</sup> ὡς καὶ ἐγὼ εἴληφα παρὰ τοῦ πατρός μου, καὶ δώσω αὐτῷ τὸν ἄστέρα τὸν πρωϊνόν.

<sup>29</sup> ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις.

<sup>26</sup> To everyone who conquers *and keeps* my works to the end, I will give authority over the nations;

<sup>27</sup> to rule them with an iron rod, as when clay pots are shattered

<sup>28</sup> even as I also received authority from my Father, *and I will also give the morning star.*

<sup>29</sup> Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.

### 3. Literary Genre

By its form and content, our pericope seems to be an amalgamation of several literary genres, such as epistolary, sapiential, apocalyptic and prophetic. The epistolary genre is corroborated by the pericope's form as it contains elements of an ordinary letter. Such elements are: the addressee (the angel of the church in Thyatira) (18a); the sender (which identifies himself as «the son of God») (v. 18b); the body of the message (vv. 19-28); and the conclusion (v. 29).

While carrying elements of an ordinary letter, the language used recalls wisdom literature, a genre of ancient literature characterized by teaching its audience instructions for a commendable life to grow in virtue and obtain divine favour. Wisdom in the Bible is the life application of knowledge or truth learned from experience and it is very practical while it does not expound truth that is merely theoretical<sup>8</sup>.

The apocalyptic genre is nuanced in the pericope not only because we are dealing with the book of Apocalypse, but also because the pericope in question has a particular tone prone to apocalyptic regarding the language adopted. Although the whole book is a divine revelation, our pericope is particularly clad in figurative language and frightening images such as the «Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze» as well as language that expresses judgment and condemnation. According to Hernando, Apocalypse «is a kind of ancient prophetic literature, Jewish and Christian, that claims to be God's revelation of his coming judgment and deliverance at the end of history»<sup>9</sup>.

The pericope in question is also a prophesy inasmuch as it is a call to conversion and a proclamation of the revealed will of God to his people, by an inspired prophet who is acting as his mouthpiece or spokesperson<sup>10</sup>. Thus, «the Son of God» is the real author of the message, while John is the mouthpiece who transmits the message entrusted to him.

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. HERNANDO James D., «Literary Genres. Wisdom literature», in *Dictionary of Hermeneutics. A Concise Guide to Terms, Names, Methods, and Expressions. Revised Edition*, Springfield, Gospel Publishing House, 2013, p. 109.

<sup>9</sup> HERNANDO James D., «Literary Genres. Apocalypse», in *Dictionary of Hermeneutics. A Concise Guide to Terms, Names, Methods, and Expressions. Revised Edition*, p. 93.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. HERNANDO James D., «Literary Genres. Prophecy», in *Dictionary of Hermeneutics. A Concise Guide to Terms, Names, Methods, and Expressions. Revised Edition*, p. 105; BIGUZZI Giancarlo, *Apocalisse: nuova versione, introduzione e commento*, «I libri biblici: Nuovo Testamento», Milano, Figlie di San Paolo, 2005, p. 92.

#### 4. Historical-Geographical Setting of the City of Thyatira

No phenomenon can be studied in isolation from the context to which it belongs<sup>11</sup>. Hence the need to review the context to which the message in analysis was addressed. Thyatira (modern Akhisar) was located about thirty-five miles inland, between Pergamum and Sardis in northern Lydia<sup>12</sup>, at the mouth of a long fertile valley which connected the valleys of the Hermus and Caicus rivers. It was the hometown of Lydia, Paul's first convert in Macedonia (Acts 16:14). A trade route ran from Pergamum and went all the way to Syria. Founded by the Seleucids, it had been permanently marked by its military role, and its population was still considered Macedonian in memory of the garrison who had occupied it<sup>13</sup>.

Within the Roman province of Asia, Thyatira was judiciary attached to Pergamum until the time of Caracalla (A.D. 211–17), when Thyatira became a metropolis in a separate *conventus*<sup>14</sup>. Although never systematically excavated, the city has left us a large number of inscriptions and coins attesting that the city was well known throughout the province and was particularly industrious<sup>15</sup>. However, Thyatira had never been an outstanding trade city, compared with other cities mentioned in the book of Revelation. The only aspect that assured the prominence of the city was the presence of lively trade guilds or trade associations, which were a common feature of ancient community life in Asia<sup>16</sup>.

Trade guilds in Thyatira included clothiers, bakers, tanners, potters, linen workers, wool merchants, slave traders, shoemakers, dyers, and coppersmiths. The life of these guilds, outside of which it must not have been easy for individuals to practise trades, included meetings and banquets of a religious nature<sup>17</sup>. As Keener describes,

Thyatira's economy seems to have emphasized trades and crafts. The trade guilds each had common meals (normally about once a month) dedicated to their patron deities. Although Thyatira had a Jewish community, it does not appear to have been influential; Christians who refused to participate in the life of the guilds might thus find themselves isolated socially and economically (cf. 13:17). Thyatira was only beginning to achieve prosperity in this period, hence its citizens probably valued wealth highly. Thyatira hosted a major cult of Apollo, son of Zeus and the deity associated with prophecy and the sun. Some scholars note that the emperor was linked with Apollo and suggest that he may have been worshiped in Thyatira as his earthly manifestation. Although bronze-working was not unique to Thyatira, some scholars have also pointed to the bronze-workers' guild in that city<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. GUIDI Maurizio, «La questione contestuale: l'influsso del contesto sul testo», in GRILLI Massimo, GUIDI Maurizio, OBARA Elzbieta M., *Comunicazione e pragmatica nell'esegesi biblica*, Roma, Gregorian University and Biblical Institute Press, 2016, p. 49.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. AUNE David A., *Revelation 1–5*, p. 641.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. PRIGENT Pierre, *L'Apocalypse de Saint Jean*, «Commentaire du Nouveau Testament», XIV, Genève, Labor et Fides, 2000, p. 137.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. AUNE David A., *Revelation 1–5*, p. 641.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. PRIGENT Pierre, *L'Apocalypse de Saint Jean*, p. 138.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. THIMMES Pamela, «Women Reading Women in the Apocalypse: Reading Scenario 1, the Letter to Thyatira (Rev 2:18-29)», *CBR*, 2.1 (2003), p. 130.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. AUNE David A., *Revelation 1–5*, p. 641.

<sup>18</sup> KEENER Craig S., «Oracle to the Church of Thyatira», in *The IVP Bible Background Commentary. New Testament, Second Edition*, Downers Grove, IVP Academic, 2014, p. 734.

While the city would have been as religious as any other city in the Empire, Thyatira was not a religious centre. The absence of imperial temple in the city corroborates the idea. However, Thyatira did have an imperial altar and imperial priests. The emperor was regarded as the son of Apollo, and the worship of Apollo Tyrinnæus was simultaneously an act of emperor worship and veneration of the god who was the patron of the guilds<sup>19</sup>.

Overall, historians present Thyatira as a modest city in comparison to the other cities the seven letters were addressed to. The city must have been an active city, but still a modest one that did not shine like others did<sup>20</sup>.

## 5. Structure of the Message to Thyatira

Mitchell Reddish proposes the following structure: 1) identification of the addressee (v. 18a; 2) identification of the sender (v. 18b); 3) words of praise (v. 19); 4) words of criticism (vv. 20-23); 5) exhortation (vv. 24-25); 6) appeal to listen (v. 29); and 7) promise to the faithful (vv. 26-28)<sup>21</sup>.

For convenience, we propose the following structure<sup>22</sup>: 1) introduction (v. 18), which includes the identification of the sender («the son of God»), of the addressee («the angel of the church of Thyatira»), and the common formula *τάδε λέγει*; 2) the body of the letter (vv. 19-28), which can be subdivided into five parts: i) commendation (v.19) – a sort of *captatio benevolentiae*, a rhetorical technique that aims at capturing the goodwill of the audience at the beginning of a speech or appeal; ii) accusation (vv. 20-21) – Christ reprimands the audience by denouncing bad deeds (tolerance towards Jezebel's teachings; eating of food sacrificed to idols; fornication); iii) warning and judgment (vv. 22-23) – the sender cautions the audience and promises a severe punishment unless they change their ways; iv) exhortation (vv. 24-25) – those who are considered blameless are encouraged to remain steadfast until Christ comes; and v) the promise (vv. 26-28) – those who will remain faithful to the end («the conquerors»), are promised a consoling reward; their steadfastness will not be overlooked; 3) the conclusion (v. 29), consists of the aphorism or the proclamation formula «let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches», common to all letters.

### 5.1. Introduction (v. 18)

The opening of the letter to Thyatira follows the same formula common to the seven letters. Firstly, the identification of the addressee; secondly, the command to write; thirdly, the aphorism *τάδε λέγει*<sup>23</sup>; and fourthly, the identification of the sender, who in this case is *ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ* (the Son of God).

<sup>19</sup> Cf. THIMMES Pamela, «Women Reading Women in the Apocalypse: Reading Scenario 1, the Letter to Thyatira (Rev 2:18-29) », p. 129-130.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. PRIGENT Pierre, *L'Apocalypse de Saint Jean*, p. 138.

<sup>21</sup> REDDISH Mitchell, *Revelation*, Macon, Smyth and Helwys, 2001, p. 63.

<sup>22</sup> For a more detailed outline cf. AUNE David A., *Revelation 1–5*, p. 640.

<sup>23</sup> According to Aune, the aphorism *τάδε λέγει* is an intentional archaism that had two associations for the readers of Revelation: the first, is a prophetic messenger formula occurring more than 250 times in the LXX, used to translate the Hebrew phrase *כה אמר יהוה* («thus says the Lord»). The second, is a proclamation formula

The denomination ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ occurs forty-six times in the New Testament and only here in the book of Revelation. It is the only instance in the New Testament where the Son of God is the subject of a transitive verb of speaking<sup>24</sup>. The expression ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ is followed by a relative subordinate clause that substantially modifies the name: ὁ ἔχων τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς αὐτοῦ ὡς φλόγα πυρὸς καὶ οἱ πόδες αὐτοῦ ὅμοιοι χαλκολιβάνῳ. There are reports of Roman emperors who claimed the title of «son of God» in their official letters<sup>25</sup>. However, this particular «Son of God», the author of the letter, appears with unusual traits: his eyes are «like a flame of fire», and his feet «like burnished bronze».

The images of «flame of fire» and «burnished bronze» attributed to the divine figure may allude to the bronze-working activities that used to exist in the city. As Moyse has noted, «to Thyatira, the only one of the seven, known to have had a guild of coppersmiths, the divine speaker is described as having eyes like “a flame of fire” and feet like “burnished bronze” »<sup>26</sup>.

Other than suggesting a specific activity practiced in the city, «eyes like a flame of fire» could suggest a far-reaching and penetrating gaze that no one can resist or hide from (cf. v. 23b «I am the one who searches minds and hearts»), while the «feet» resembling «burnished bronze» (that occurs also in 1:15a), could be read in contrast with the «clay pots» mentioned in 2:27. Bronze, on the one hand, and clay on the other, symbolize two antagonistic extremes: solidity and frailty, respectively. To the Son of God belongs the «solidity» (power), which he shares with his allies (cf. v. 26), while those opposed to him are weak. Thus, the two images (eyes and feet) could symbolize power, autonomy and stability of the one who possess them, unlike the idols of the gentiles who, despite being «made of silver and gold», that is, valuable in appearance, «they have eyes but cannot see» and «feet but cannot walk» (Ps 115:4-7); in other words, they are lifeless and worthless.

## 5.2. The Body of the Message (vv. 19-28)

As we have mentioned earlier, it contains the message of the letter and it can be subdivided into five parts (cf. the structure above).

### 5.2.1. Commendation (v. 19)

While οἶδά introduces the body of the message in all the seven messages as «a sort of diagnosis of the positive and negative behaviour of each congregation»<sup>27</sup>, the expression οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα occurs in the letter to Thyatira as well as in all the subsequent letters: Sardis (3:1), Philadelphia (3:8), and Laodicea (3:15). In the letter to Thyatira, the expression is followed by a list of four uninterrupted good works, perhaps to capture the audience's attention (*captatio benevolentiae*): «οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα καὶ τὴν ἀγάπην καὶ τὴν πίστιν καὶ τὴν διακονίαν καὶ τὴν ὑπομονήν σου» (v. 19a).

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characteristic of Persian royal diplomatic letters and edicts. This third-person formula introduces and provides justification for the use of first person in the text that follows (Cf. AUNE David A., *Revelation 1–5*, p. 508-509).

<sup>24</sup> Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 641.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 642.

<sup>26</sup> MOYSE Steve, *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation*, coll. «Journal for the Study of the New Testament. Supplement Series», vol. 115, Sheffield, Sheffield Academic Press, 1995, p. 26.

<sup>27</sup> AUNE David A., *Revelation 1–5*, p. 509.

Οἶδα is a special case of verb that is only found in the past perfect tense, but has the meaning of present (οἶδα: indicative perfect active first-person singular). It is translated: «I am aware of», or simply «I know»<sup>28</sup>. In the immediate context, the verb draws us back to the penetrating gaze of the «eyes like a flame of fire» of the previous verse. None of the most intimate gestures and attitudes of this Christian community are hidden from «the Son of God».

The concepts ἀγάπην (love), πίστιν (faithfulness), διακονίαν (service) and ὑπομονήν (endurance) emphasize various aspects of the life of this Christian community. These concepts are subordinate to τὰ ἔργα which is a general denomination that encompasses the four concepts, just as κόπος (toil) and ὑπομονή (endurance) in 2:2<sup>29</sup>.

The first three commendations had not yet been mentioned to any church, while the last one (ὑπομονή) is already found twice in the letter to Ephesus (2:2.3). Love (ἀγάπην) and service (διακονίαν) refer to the zeal of the community on the horizontal dimension. Faithfulness (πίστιν), on the other hand, is in regard to Christ and God (vertical dimension), while endurance (ὑπομονήν) relates to both dimensions of the Christian life<sup>30</sup>.

«Καὶ τὰ ἔργα σου τὰ ἔσχατα πλείονα τῶν πρώτων» (19b). Once more, the term ἔργα is used as a general term that indicates the behaviour of the Christians in Thyatira, but this time it alludes to the progress in Christian behaviour, certainly implying an earlier knowledge of the character of the Thyatiran community of believers<sup>31</sup>.

### 5.2.2. Accusation (vv. 20-21)

The adversative conjunction ἀλλὰ marks a drastic shift from praise to accusation. It sets up a contrast with the praiseworthy deeds previously mentioned in v. 19. The content of the accusation is centered on the character Jezebel. Christ accuses the community of tolerating a certain Jezebel who claims to be a prophetess, teaching and enticing Christian believers to practice fornication and to eat meat sacrificed to idols. The question that rises is: Who is the Thyatiran Jezebel?

There are several hypotheses concerning her identity. Grotius, quoted by Prigent, argues that she is the wife of the bishop of Thyatira, who is identified in the introduction of the letter as «the angel of the church of Thyatira» (v.18)<sup>32</sup>. Barker<sup>33</sup>, on her side, claims that the Jezebel in question is Lydia, a native of Thyatira and merchant in purple, whom Paul had met in Philippi. Being a purple merchant, continues the scholar, implies that Lydia was a wealthy woman who had dealings with other peoples and cultures. Thus, using her influence she enticed Thyatiran Christians to open themselves up to foreign practices to secure their social and economic life.

Another hypothesis suggests that Jezebel is a symbolic character designating the Roman Empire. As noted by Friedrich, «Revelation teaches political watchfulness, which

<sup>28</sup> Cf. SERAFINI Filippo, *Corso di Greco del Nuovo Testamento*, Torino, San Paolo, 2003, p. 187.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. AUNE David A., *Revelation 1–5*, p. 642.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. BIGUZZI Giancarlo, *Apocalisse: nuova versione, introduzione e commento*, p. 117.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. AUNE David A., *Revelation 1–5*, p. 643.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. PRIGENT Pierre, *L'Apocalypse de Saint Jean*, p. 57.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. BARKER Margaret, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 2000, p. 100.

refuses to confuse the things of God with the things of Caesar»<sup>34</sup>. It is known that during the reign of the Flavians, especially Domitian, the imperial cult was promoted in the Roman provinces of Asia and that Domitian ordered the population to acclaim him «Lord and God» and to take part in the emperor's cult<sup>35</sup>. In Thyatira, as previously mentioned, the emperor was also venerated as Apollo incarnate and as the son of Zeus. In this context, Christians were forced to experience growing conflicts with the official civil religion of the province, because they acclaimed Jesus Christ as their lord, and not the emperor.

Thus, Thyatiran Christians were at a high risk of compromising their identity. While keeping their identity unblemished they were in danger of losing social and economic favours in a society where imperial cults were often regarded as a way of gaining personal advances and public recognition of honour<sup>36</sup>. As Kovacs and Rowland affirm, «as Jezebel brought idolatry into Israel, so Romanism weds Christian doctrine to pagan ceremonies»<sup>37</sup>.

For Schüssler Fiorenza, Jezebel – like Nicolaitans and Balaam – is a representative character of individuals who had a certain authority and influence in the Christian community of Thyatira, whose teachings and convictions might have threatened Christian doctrine by leading believers to religious compromise. According to her,

The community of Thyatira, in turn, deserves censure because it accepted the influence and teaching of a woman prophet and her school. Probably all three terms – Nicolaitans, Balaam and Jezebel – theologically label the same group of Christian prophets who allowed their followers to eat food sacrificed to idols and to participate in pagan religious festivals. This theological stance probably offered political, economic, and professional advantages to Christians living in prosperous trade cities of Asia Minor, as meat sacrificed to idols was served at meetings of trade guilds and business associations, as well as at private receptions. An alternative theological perspective to John's rhetorical “*aut-aut*” was provided as a theological compromise, was proposed. This alternative prophetic rhetoric allowed Christian believers to actively participate in the commercial, political and social life of their cities and the empire (my own translation)<sup>38</sup>.

The actual Jezebel is an infamous character in the Hebrew Bible, who was a foreign wife of King Ahab of Israel. According to the book of Kings, Jezebel is a daughter of King Ethbaal of the Sidonians (1 Kgs 16:31). She was a promoter of Baal worship and a persecutor of the prophets of Yahweh (1 Kgs 18:4.13). Because the biblical tradition often uses sexual

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<sup>34</sup> FRIEDRICH Nestor Paulo, «Adapt or Resist? A Socio-Political Reading of Revelation 2:18-29», *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, 25.2 (2002), p. 186.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. SCHÜSSLER FIORENZA Elisabeth, *Apocalisse: visione di un mondo giusto*, p. 71.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. GALLUSZ Laszlo, *The Throne Motive in the Book of Revelation*, coll. «Library of New Testament Studies», vol. 487, London / New York, Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014, p. 279.

<sup>37</sup> KOVACS Judith, ROWLAND Christopher, *Revelation. The Apocalypse of Jesus Christ*, coll. «Blackwell Bible Commentaries», Malden / Oxford / Carlton, Blackwell Publishing, 2004, p. 56.

<sup>38</sup> «La comunità di Tiatira, a sua volta, merita una censura, perché ha accettato l'influenza e l'insegnamento di una donna profeta e della sua scuola. Probabilmente tutti i tre termini – Nicolaiti, Balaam e Gezabele – etichettano teologicamente lo stesso gruppo di profeti cristiani che permette ai suoi seguaci di mangiare cibo sacrificato agli idoli e di partecipare alle festività religiose pagane. Questa posizione teologica, probabilmente, offriva vantaggi politici, economici e professionali ai Cristiani che vivevano in città commerciali prospere dell'Asia Minore, poiché la carne sacrificata agli idoli veniva servita negli incontri di corporazioni commerciali e associazioni d'affari, come pure nei ricevimenti privati. Si forniva una prospettiva teologica alternativa all'“*aut-aut*” retorico di Giovanni, poiché si proponeva un compromesso teologico. Questa retorica profetica alternativa consentiva ai credenti cristiani di partecipare attivamente alla vita commerciale, politica e sociale delle loro città e dell'impero» (SCHÜSSLER FIORENZA Elisabeth, *Apocalisse: visione di un mondo giusto*, p. 74).

imagery to describe idolatry, Jezebel is accused of «many whoredoms and sorceries» (2 Kgs 9:22).

In summary, we can say that the Thyatiran Jezebel is not a real woman but John's construction based on biblical typology. Whether it is an individual, a group or system, the activity of leading believers astray is definitely the reason for the allusive characterization as Jezebel<sup>39</sup>. This metaphorical use of sexual imagery explains the charge of fornication levelled against the Thyatiran Jezebel: she is «teaching and beguiling my servants to practice fornication and to eat food sacrificed to idols» (v. 20). She is a seducer who leads people astray with her false teachings, causing them to «commit adultery with her» (2:22).

Pamela Thimmes notes that of the four female figures who appear in the Book of Revelation, namely Jezebel (2:18-29), the woman clothed with the sun (12:1-17), the prostitute of Babylon (ch. 17-18) and the bride (19:21-22), only the prophetess of Thyatira is identified with an actual human female<sup>40</sup>. These four female figures are categorized into wholly good (the woman clothed with the sun and the bride) and the wholly bad (Jezebel and the prostitute of Babylon)<sup>41</sup>. According to Aune, nearly all the *πορν-* cognates in the book of Revelation are to be read figuratively rather than literally, except in 9:21; 21:8 and 22:18<sup>42</sup>.

Note that food sacrificed to idols had been forbidden by the Council of Jerusalem (cf. Acts 15:29), while Paul had interpreted the issue rather liberally, arguing that, since idols do not exist, the food offered to them could not be any different from ordinary one. Thus, Christians should abstain from eating only if to eat would cause anxiety to a weaker fellow (cf. 1 Cor 8:8; 10; Rom 14)<sup>43</sup>.

Verse 21 continues the accusation against Jezebel by saying that «I gave her time to repent, but she does not want to repent of her fornication». The construction of this sentence boasts an ingenious logic. While the verb of the main proposition (*apodosi*) is conjugated in the aorist (ἔδωκα), that of the subordinate proposition (*protasis*) is conjugated in the present tense (οὐ θέλει), thus linking the past to the present open to the future. In other words, Jezebel has been given time to convert, but she is still obstinate in practicing evil. The clock is ticking; the time is not yet over. In biblical literature «patience» is one of God's attributes. Time belongs to God and God grants time to people, conveying the idea that God allows people to grow mature and to repent (cf. Lc 13:6-9; 2 Pet 3:9; Acts 17:30).

### 5.2.3. *Warning and Judgment (vv. 22-23)*

Immediately after the accusations, the discourse shifts into threats. The reader gets the impression that here, the divine figure raises the voice for displeasure and at Jezebel's

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<sup>39</sup> Cf. GULAKER Cato, *Satan, the Heavenly Adversary of Man. A Narrative Analysis of the Function of Satan in the Book of Revelation*, coll. «Library of the New Testament Studies», vol. 638, London, Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2022, p. 80.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. THIMMES Pamela, «Women Reading Women in the Apocalypse: Reading Scenario 1, the Letter to Thyatira (Rev 2:18-29) », p. 129.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. DECOCK Paul B., «Between the Whore and the Bride: Apocalypse 17-22: Listening to Feminist Readings», in MATAND BULEMBAT Jean-Bosco (Dir.), *Women in the Bible. Point of View of African Biblical Scholars. Proceedings of the Fifteenth Congress of the Panafrican Association of Catholic Exegetes*, Abidjan, Presses de l'ITCJ, 2013, p. 377.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. AUNE David A., *Revelation 1-5*, p. 645; see also PRIGENT Pierre, *L'Apocalypse de Saint Jean*, p. 57.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. BARKER Margaret, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, p. 101.

obstinacy in practising evil. The demonstrative particle ἰδοὺ corresponding to the Hebrew word הִנֵּה («Look! Behold! See! »), focuses the implied reader towards an emotional response of antipathy towards Jezebel and her teachings, to make sure none of the faithful of Thyatira associates with her<sup>44</sup>.

The image of «the bed» is particularly suggestive in that it has sexual connotations inasmuch as it is connected with the crime Jezebel is accused of. The bed is the place where Jezebel commits adultery with her associates. However, this time, Jezebel will not lie in bed of her own free will: «I am throwing her on a bed» (v. 22). Coupled with βάλλω, the bed, the place of seduction and sexual pleasure, becomes an instrument of «measure-for-measure» punishment. Like Reddish would say, «she likes the bed so much that Christ would throw her into it»<sup>45</sup>.

The conjugation of the verb in present tense (βάλλω), suggests the idea of impending doom. The time granted to Jezebel to repent is not unlimited. The judgment is already at hand. Either Jezebel changes her attitude and is saved, or she continues in her wickedness and is condemned.

Verse 23 can be divided into two parts. The first part is linked to verse 22 as it concerns the warning against Jezebel in the person of her offspring, literally «and I will kill her children with death». Biguzzi notes a disproportion between the punishment threatened to be inflicted on Jezebel and the one intended for her children. While Jezebel is threatened with illness, her children are threatened with death<sup>46</sup>. We suggest as Prigent<sup>47</sup> that «her children» be read in the spiritual sense (her followers) and not in the biological sense. In this way, the oracle implies the extermination of Jezebel's «generation» within the Christian community of Thyatira.

The second part of v. 23 alludes to retributive justice with the intention of dissuading the faithful to abandon any attitudes that jeopardize Christian identity: δώσω ὑμῖν ἕκαστω κατὰ τὰ ἔργα ὑμῶν («I will give to each of you as your works deserve»). Curiously, the verb δίδωμι (I give), which is transitive, appears here without an object. The question that rises is obvious: what is Christ going to give? While the absence of the direct complement may suggest something indeterminate, it suggests as well that Christ, the «ἐγὼ εἰμι» is the supreme benefactor and judge. As Biguzzi has noted, «what will happen in Thyatira, should make everyone realize that the presence of Christ in the midst of the churches, is a demanding presence from which one cannot evade or hide: for with his eyes like “a flame of fire” (v. 18), he is able to scrutinize the innermost truth of every person in order to retribute justly, for good or ill» (my own translation)<sup>48</sup>.

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<sup>44</sup> Cf. GULAKER Cato, *Satan, the Heavenly Adversary of Man. A Narrative Analysis of the Function of Satan in the Book of Revelation*, p. 81.

<sup>45</sup> REDDISH Mitchell, *Revelation*, p. 65. Some translations render «I am throwing her on a sick bed» (cf. *La Bible de Jérusalem* and *La sacra Bibbia CEI*).

<sup>46</sup> Cf. BIGUZZI Giancarlo, *Apocalisse: nuova versione, introduzione e commento*, p. 118.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. PRIGENT Pierre, *L'Apocalypse de Saint Jean*, p. 58.

<sup>48</sup> «Ciò che accadrà a Tiatira dovrà far capire a tutti che la presenza del Cristo in mezzo alle chiese è una presenza esigente e a cui non ci si può sottrarre o nascondere: con i suoi occhi come “vampa di fuoco” (v. 18), infatti, egli è in grado di scrutare la verità più intima di ognuno per retribuire con giustizia, nel bene e nel male» (BIGUZZI Giancarlo, *Apocalisse: nuova versione, introduzione e commento*, p. 118).

With the expression «all the churches», the author suspends the apparent restrictive nature of his message to Thyatira and extends it to all churches. This implies that the seven letters are addressed to the universal Church<sup>49</sup>.

The allusion to the retributive justice in v. 23 is not strange in the book of Revelation, as it also recurs in 20:13 and 22:12. Furthermore, this is the criterion for the judgment of the Son of Man according to Matthew (16:27), whereas in the Old Testament it is God's judgment (cf. Ps 7:8-9; 125:4-5)<sup>50</sup>.

#### 5.2.4. *Exhortation (vv. 24-25)*

After raising his voice with accusations and threats against Jezebel and her partisans, Christ lowers the tone to address those who resist Jezebel's misleading teachings. No additional recommendations are imposed, except the encouragement to remain firm in their faith: «Only hold fast to what you have until I come». The phrase recalls the commendations of v. 19. While the faithful resist the teachings of Jezebel – «the deep things of Satan» – they must keep the «love, faithfulness, service and endurance», until Christ comes. As Prigent affirms,

there is no higher requirement than to take care to preserve love, faith, service and perseverance that the community of Thyatira was credited with in verse 19. There is no higher morality and no more authentic and pure faith. There is no better guarantee against heresy. There is no other way to await the coming of Christ (my own translation)<sup>51</sup>.

#### 5.2.5. *The Promise (vv. 26-28)*

Verse 26 introduces the promises with a substantival participle ὁ νικῶν (from νικάω, be victorious, win, prevail, overcome, defeat, conquer)<sup>52</sup>. The verbal form occurs eight times in the New Testament, seven of which are in the Book of Revelation (Jn 5:5; Rev 2:11, 26; 3:5, 12, 21; 6:2; 21:7). In the immediate context it alludes to the metaphor of war or athletic contest whose prize is «authority [ἐξουσίαν] over the nations» and the «morning star». The winner is thus seen as one who has not yet come to victory, but is still fighting<sup>53</sup>. As Friedrich observes, «to the church in the city of least political and military importance is given the promise of authority over the nations. The promise is given using strong vocabulary and points to a theme that pervades the whole of Revelation: that of power»<sup>54</sup>.

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<sup>49</sup> Cf. PRIGENT Pierre, *L'Apocalypse de Saint Jean*, p. 58.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 59.

<sup>51</sup> « Il n'y a pas d'exigence plus haute que de veiller à conserver l'amour, la foi, le service et la persévérance dont la communauté de Thyatire était créditée au verset 19. Il n'y a pas de morale supérieure ni de foi plus authentique et plus pure. Il n'y a pas de meilleure garantie contre l'hérésie. Il n'y a pas d'autre façon d'attendre la venue du Christ » (*Ibidem*, p. 60).

<sup>52</sup> Cf. RUSCONI Carlo, «νικάω», in RUSCONI Carlo, *Vocabulario del greco del Nuovo Testamento*, Bologna, Edizioni Dehoniani, 2013, p. 269.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. BIGUZZI Giancarlo, *Apocalisse: nuova versione, introduzione e commento*, p. 119.

<sup>54</sup> FRIEDRICH Nestor Paulo, «Adapt or Resist? A Socio-Political Reading of Revelation 2:18-29», p. 190.

As Aune affirms, «the Messiah is spoken of in 12:10 as possessing ἐξουσία, “authority,” and similarly ἐξουσία over every “tribe and people and language and nation” is given to the Beast in Rev 13:7, presumably by God (passive of divine activity) »<sup>55</sup>.

The conqueror is «the one who keeps» (ὁ τηρῶν – another substantival participle from τηρέω, which serves to further delineate the specific meaning of ὁ νικῶν) «the works» of Christ, τὰ ἔργα μου (my deeds). This is a typically Johannine construction (cf. Rev 12:17; 14:12; 15:3; 22:7; John 14:21; 1 John 2:4; 3:24). In this particular case Christ’s deeds are in a sharp contrast with Jezebel’s<sup>56</sup>.

The authority over nations granted to the conqueror is highlighted by the metaphor of the «iron rod», which brings us back to the characteristics of the «Son of God» in the opening of the letter, especially the one of the «feet like burnishing bronze» (v. 18). As Barker affirms, the promise of power over nations is made by paraphrasing Psalm 2, a coronation Psalm: «You shall break them with a rod of iron, and dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel» (Ps 2:9)<sup>57</sup>. According to Aune,

The crook is a symbol of royalty in Mesopotamian art and literature and is included in the relief at the top of the basalt Code of Hammurabi. God is referred to twice under the metaphor of shepherd in the OT (Pss 23:1; 80:2), and his possession of a comforting shepherd’s staff is part of the shepherd metaphor in Ps 23:4b; Mic 7:14. The sceptre is primarily associated with the royal role of meting out justice (Isa 11:4; Ps 45:7) and is frequently used in a context of punishment (Isa 10:5, 26; 30:31; Ps 110:2; Job 9:34; 21:9; Lam 3:1)<sup>58</sup>.

Just as Christ conquered the world (John 16:33) and was crowned by the Father (Phil 2:9-10), so the conqueror will be granted a share in the destiny of the risen Christ: «even as I received authority from my Father» (v. 28a). In addition to the power, the conqueror will be given «the morning star», a title which Jesus uses for himself elsewhere in Rev 22:16. According to Barker,

The title is a mystery; it appears in Psalm 110:3, another coronation psalm which has been damaged in transmission and is no longer readable. The translator of the LXX recognized in v. 3 the title “Morning Star” and rendered the line “I begot you from the womb before the Morning Star”. “I begot you” is certainly one way to read the Hebrew *yldtyk* and so it is possible that this psalm once described the temple ritual for the divine birth of the king who was then appointed as Melchizedek and the Morning Star. The parallel structure of Hebrew poetry, where the second line duplicates the meaning of the first, shows that the Sons of God who sang for joy at the creation were also known as Morning Stars (Job 38:7). Perhaps this was an ancient title for a Son of God as it had been for the kings of Ugarit<sup>59</sup>.

In short, the promise says that whoever perseveres to the end will share in Christ’s victory and glory.

### 5.3. Conclusion (v. 29)

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<sup>55</sup> AUNE David A., *Revelation 1–5*, p. 654.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. PRIGENT Pierre, *L’Apocalypse de Saint Jean*, p. 60.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. BARKER Margaret, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, p. 107.

<sup>58</sup> AUNE David A., *Revelation 1–5*, p. 654.

<sup>59</sup> BARKER Margaret, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, p. 107.

The conclusion of the message to Thyatira in v. 29 is made up of the proclamation formula ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω («let anyone who has an ear listen»). Formulated in the third person, the aphorism is placed at the end of each of the seven messages, either in the penultimate position (2:7.11.17) or in the final position (2:29; 3:6.13.22), and «functions as a proclamation formula, i.e., an injunction to an audience to pay very close attention to the message that it accompanies»<sup>60</sup>.

According to Aune, proclamation formulas often introduce Old Testament prophetic oracles with such expressions as «hear the word of Yahweh» (1 Kgs 22:19; Am 7:16; Jer 29:20). In the New Testament, the aphorism «He who hears let him hear», and its variants, are rooted in Jesus' tradition. In this particular case, it is intended to authenticate the author's revelatory encounter with the exalted Christ<sup>61</sup>.

The object of listening is the word or the message of the Spirit, addressed not only to the church in Thyatira but to the universal Church represented by the seven churches. While the reader expected the formulation «let anyone who has an ear listen to what “the Son of God” is saying to the churches», the author of the message who was identified as «the Son of God» in the introduction of the letter (v. 18) is curiously identified now as «the Spirit», perhaps to emphasize the Spirit's close connection with the exalted Christ, as the prophetic Spirit who mediates Christ's message<sup>62</sup>.

## 6. Conclusion

Christ's message to Thyatira reveals his intimate knowledge of achievements and challenges of this community of believers. The letter to Thyatira contains intriguing allusions to socio-historical and geographical settings, allusions that the original hearers of John's work would certainly have noted<sup>63</sup>. Although the seven messages have specific warnings and commendations for each congregation, they are actually circular pronouncements for the universal Church: «Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches (2:29).

Unlike other six churches, the Church at Thyatira is commended for its «love, faith, service, and patient endurance» (2:19). For instance, while Ephesus is guilty of abandoning the love it initially had, the church at Thyatira is a growing and maturing church, one whose «last works are greater than the first» (2:19). The only problem found at Thyatira is the church's toleration of a false prophetess and teacher, symbolically called «Jezebel».

Such a problem would have been particularly acute in a place like Thyatira with its numerous trade guilds that were often associated with particular deities. At the feasts of the guilds, meat that had been offered to the gods was served. In addition, in order to keep individual business running, one had to integrate the existing guilds, which meant taking part in ordinary activities that sometimes involved idolatrous cults.

This situation put Christians in a great dilemma. How could they progress in social and economic life without tarnishing their Christian identity? What was a Christian to do? Did,

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<sup>60</sup> AUNE David A., *Revelation 1–5*, p. 511.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 512.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 512.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. REDDISH Mitchell D., *Revelation*, p. 52-64.

for instance, eating meat sacrificed to idols in festivals involve one in worship of alien gods? The seriousness of this dilemma received particular attention in St. Paul's letter to the Corinthians (cf. 1 Cor 8).

Christ's identification as «the Son of God» counteracts the claims of certain Roman emperors who thought they were gods. Jesus Christ is the only «Son of God». His attributes, which recall the bronze-working activity that the city hosted («eyes like flame of fire» and «his feet like burnished bronze»), place this «Son of God» in an unrivalled position. Christ who scrutinises hearts is the supreme benefactor and judge who will give to each one as their works deserve (v. 23). Far from being a threat, this is a message of hope that invites the faithful not to lose sight of what is essential in the face of the ephemeral offers that the world provides. It is not the Roman emperors or «Jezebel» or guild associations that promote true social and economic stability.

Thus, the message to Thyatira proclaims that the risen Christ is the only Lord who gives true security, comfort and power. It is therefore incumbent on us to see human being as a protagonist in a process in which he/she is a receiver of God's favours and an active subject of decisions that determine the very meaning of his/her being<sup>64</sup>. The conquerors of Thyatira, a less prominent city than the others, are paradoxically promised «authority over the nations» (vv. 26-27). In a society that proposes various offers like Thyatira as means for achieving economic and social prosperity, Christians are called not to lose sight of their faith in Christ, fighting against all attitudes and practices that would compromise their identity.

Bearing in mind that our study is far from exhaustive, another perspective of research would be to analyse the impact of the reception of the message to Thyatira (and indeed of the other six messages) in today's particular churches, especially in the African context. As Mundele would say, «the Bible, being a book that contains human life experiences at individual and communal levels, provides a lot of aspects of human life. However, we have also seen that the biblical texts are Word of God, which transcends time in such a way that people of any era can refer to it and appropriate it at their time»<sup>65</sup>.

Africa is a place where in the name of «globalisation», loyalty and hope in the risen Christ is threatened by a constant loss of cultural values and community references. While freeing us from many constraints, this reality also deprives us of consistent strategies for life projects<sup>66</sup>. As a result, any form of immediate satisfaction is continually sought in the present while jeopardising Christian identity.

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<sup>64</sup> Cf. PONTIFICIA COMMISSIONE BIBLICA, *Che cosa è l'uomo? Un itinerario di antropologia biblica*, Città del Vaticano, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2020, p. 15.

<sup>65</sup> MUNDELE Albert Ngengi, *A Handbook on African Approaches to Biblical Interpretation*, Limuru, Kolbe Press, 2012, p. 61.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. DI GREGORIO Luigi, *Demopatìa. Sintomi, diagnosi e terapie del malessere democratico*, Soveria Mannelli, Rubbettino Editore, 2019, p. 112.

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