

UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

FACULTY OF THEOLOGY

The relation between mission and ethics in the Book of Revelation

**Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement for
Master's Degree (MTh) New Testament**

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DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and has not previously in its entirety or in part been submitted to any institution for a degree.

Signature

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Under God, let me begin by pointing out that it will not be possible to mention everyone by name who helped me to finish and complete this dissertation.

Therefore, I would like first and foremost to thank God who provided both the will and the inspiration to choose this topic. The compendium of ethics and mission in the book of Revelation became a smooth journey.

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ABSTRACT

While character formation plays a pivotal role in understanding ethics and mission in New Testament studies, this study attempts to answer the fundamental questions: (1) What does the dynamic relationship between mission and ethics in Revelation entail?(2) What mission and ethics lessons can be extracted from the book of Revelation? (3) How would the messages from the book of Revelation influence the mission and ethics of contemporary Christians? The focus of my investigation is Revelation 2-3; I have emphasised on the seven proclamations since they form a foundation of the book of Revelation.

The first few chapters are an attempt to envisage the re-alignment character of the messages of the seven proclamations. Thus, I emphasised identity, ethics, ethos and mission as being crucial for the explication of the messages to the seven congregations. This lays a foundation on how character formation plays an important role in the seven proclamations of Revelation 2-3. An exhaustive analysis of chapter 2-3 helped to identify the problem within the communities of faith and to come up with a relevant solution to the problem identified.

The study begins with a detailed exegetical synopsis of each of the messages to the seven proclamations in Revelation 2-3.

The analysis suggests that the major themes of this work are identity, ethics, ethos and mission. I also tried to make a distinction between identity, ethics, ethos and mission in my implicit attempt to investigate their interconnection. Although this was going to be impossible if the methodology of character formation by Stanley Hauerwas was not employed in this study.

For this reason a relevance-based investigation must begin with an implicit cognitive call for mission and ethics within the context of the seven churches in Asia. Meanwhile, the consequences of relevant communities are that the majority were opposing the common practices.

At the end it is clear that the biblical narratives have an effect of shaping what we call a community of character, a body of people taught by Gods' grace to live in non-violence, forgiveness and as a peace loving community.

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Chapter 1

Background of the study

1.1. Introduction

This study investigates the relation between mission and ethics in the book of Revelation particularly in chapters two and three. The book of Revelation has twenty two chapters and my focus in this research will be on the seven proclamations. In the first chapters of revelation we find the communities of faith that forms the foundation of the Apocalyptic. Obviously the attempt of investigating the character of the people during the time when the book of Revelation was written will be irrelevant, if we neglect the involvement of the community which the writer was addressing.

It is a complex concept to investigate the mission and ethics of the book of Revelation by neglecting the key role players in the letters to the seven proclamations. Decock (1999:2) argues that “the Apocalypse intends to interpret the experience of the hearers and influence their understanding and behaviour”. Hence, one may be tempted to forget that the book of Revelation displays a picture of current events in the Roman province that were taking place during the time of John or the events that had just taken place in the recent past Edinger (1999:8). With regard to the title “relation” in the title of this dissertation, it means ‘the way two things are linked to each other’. According to Van der Watt 2006 (cited in Kok, 2011:2), the term ‘ethics’ is to be understood as a generic term referring to the *moral codes, values, principles and norms* in a particular society based on the systematic reflection upon the latter. Furthermore, Van der Watt (2006: v-viii) states that “ethics is to do with how we understand ourselves, our relationship to God and other people and the values, rules and principles”.

Although the problem to be investigated seems to be narrowed to mission and ethics, these are perceived as practical ways in which we do things in our society or group, the institutionalised practices, concerned with the rational analysis of morals, the critical examination of ethos and subsequent questioning of the motives of morality (Zimmermann 2009:400; Van der Watt 2004:2-3, Kok, 2011).

In this study, the two constructs, i.e., mission and ethics will also embrace the term ‘Identity’, which relates to the question of *who we are*, the values we live by on the basis (motivation) of how we understand ourselves, our relationship to God and the

world and values, rules and principles we defer from that (Kok 2011¹).

Hauerwas (2006:93) argues that “the community shapes my character and, reciprocally, my character contributes to the kind of community of which I am a member”.

Furthermore, this research investigates how the believers of the seven churches in Asia were able to resist their inward and outward opposition under a radical situation, and how their ethical perspective shaped their character in the book of Revelation.

By way of introducing this argument it will be agreed with Hauerwas ²(2006:15) when he argues that:

Ethics of character and community certainly offers a powerful and attractive framework for the understanding of the Book of Revelation, given the state of modern ethics in general. It is of vital importance that the potential of this approach in theology is enormous and wide-ranging, promising to meet many of the pressing needs of modern theology and practical Christian life.

Hauerwas (2006:16) argues that ethics of character offers a way to bridge the gap between theories and practice that has become a yawning chasmin modern ethics. The book of Revelation should be recognised and understood in a historical context, not as “timeless symbols” (Baucham, 1993b:19). It is impossible to understand and interpret the book of Revelation correctly without considering the proper historical context. Nevertheless, Revelation has suffered various problems, for example, the extreme eschatology movement. Therefore, it is of vital importance to investigate mission and the ethics of the book of Revelation.

1.2. Problem Statement

The study investigates the relation between mission and ethics in the book Revelation particular chapters 2:1-29, 3:1-22 so that a proper reconstruction of character may be understood clearly.

The study attempts to investigate how the seven communities of faith strived under the conditions that confronted the church, while constructing their mission and ethics.

According to Ranko (2002:112) as part of the civic obligations of the society in which they lived, the Christians in Asia were expected to participate in religious festivals in the pagan temples. It cannot be denied, propagate a version of Christianity that turns its

¹ Kok, (2011) ‘Mission and ethics in Galatians’ *HTS Theologies Studies/ Theological Studies*, 67 (1), Art, 896,10 pages.

² Hays, (2006:15-17) *Identity, ethics and ethos in the New Testament, A community of character: toward a constructive Christian social ethics*.

back on the world. Decock (1999:6) argues that “ in the case of the Apocalypse, it can be seen as a crisis provoked by the author who insists that loyalty to Christ cannot go together with loyalty to the Empire” (Collins 1984:77). It suffices my investigation regarding the problem statement that a refusal to participate brought ridicule and the hardships of social isolation and economic sanctions. Pattemore (2004:57) states that “the social, political, cultural, and economic conditions of the period (probably the later years of the reign of Domitian) contribute to the ‘cognitive geography shared by the author and audience’”. This includes the external political environment, and the socio-religious worlds of ancient Greek and Roman religion, of local cults and of the emperor cult.³The problem statement of the study to be investigated is how John’s community of faith realigns their characters under such circumstances.

1.3. Research Questions

The following research questions will guide the study.

- 1.3.1 How could the relationship between mission and ethics in Revelation be envisioned?
- 1.3.2 What mission and ethics lessons can be extracted from the book of Revelation?
- 1.3.3 How would the messages of the book of Revelation influence the mission and ethics of contemporary Christians?

1.4. Objectives of the study

While the major purpose of the study is to relate mission and ethics in the book of Revelation, it is important to spread that purpose into the following objectives which are expected to be achieved as indicated below:

- 1.4.1. Using the book of Revelation to envision mission and ethics as made by the seven proclamations.
- 1.4.2. To reflect the mission and ethics lessons from the book of Revelation.
- 1.4.3. To indicate the way the messages of revelation influences mission and ethics of contemporary Christians.

³ Pattemore, (2004:57) *The people of the God in the Apocalypse*.

1.5. Conceptual Framework

First, it is necessary at this stage to define terms that will be the basis of this study.

1.5.1. Mission

a) Mission- in general terms mission is defined as an important job that a person or a group or committee of persons were sent to a foreign country to conduct, negotiate, and establish relations or any specific task.

A specific task or duty assigned to a person or group of people or a task or duty that a person believes he or she must achieve.

b) Mission- Peter Wagner cited by Kittel in, Theological Dictionary on the New Testament defines mission in the same frame of reference as ‘Apostle’ which is defined “as a Christian leader who is gifted, taught and commissioned by God with authority to established the foundational government of the church within an assigned sphere of ministry by hearing what the spirit is saying to the churches and by setting things in order accordingly for the advancement of the kingdom of God”. This is by no means a comprehensive definition.

c) Mission- (www.dorrancebooksstore.com) 21 March 2014. An important goal or purpose that is accompanied by strong conviction, a calling or vocation: *she has finally found her mission in life.*

1.5.2. Ethics

a) Ethics – (Oxford dictionary) defines ethics as the branch of knowledge that deals with moral principle. “neither metaphysics nor ethics is the home of religion”

b) Moral principle that governs a person or group behaviour. The moral correctness of specified conduct or the basic concept and fundamental principles of decent human conduct-it includes the study of universal values such as essential equality. A code of behaviour, especially of a particular group, profession, or individual.

c) Ethics-Van der Watt (2006:v-ix) cited Kok (2011), the term ‘Ethics’ is to be as a generic term referring to the moral codes, values, principles and norms in a particular society based on the systematic reflection upon the latter. Van der Watt (2006.v-vii).

1.5.3. Ethos

- a) Ethos- (Oxford dictionary) defines ethos as the fundamental character or spirit of a culture, the underlying sentiment that forms the beliefs, customs, or practices of a group or society; dominant assumptions of a people or period: in Greek ethos the individual was highly valued.
- b) According to Kok (2011:2) Ethos is to be understood as the practical way we live out our ethics (practical life style) in a given socio-historical and cultural context (Van der Watt 2004:2-3), the way we do things in our society or group, the institutionalised practices.
Kok (2011:2) defines the term ethics to be understood as the values that we live by on the basis of (motivation) of how we understand ourselves, our relationship to God and to the world and the values, rules and principles that we refer from that.
- c) Ethos- the character or disposition of a community, group, person, (the moral element in dramatic literature that determines a character's action rather than his or her thought or emotion).

1.5.4. Identity

- a) Identity- According to Kok (2011:2) identity relates to the question of who we are, the values we live by on the basis (motivation) of how we understand ourselves, our relationship to God and the world and the values, rules and principles we defer from that.
- b) Identity-May be defined as a distinctive characteristic belonging to any given individual or shared by all members of a particular category or group.

1.5.5. Apocalyptic literature

Apocalyptic literature- A genre of heavily symbolic literature that displays distinctive literary characteristics and claims to unveil the truth about the world as viewed from an apocalyptic perspective

1.5.6. Churches

In this context refers to the community or local congregation of Christians living in each city and not merely to the building or buildings in which they gather for worship, this refers to the seven “letters” in the book of Revelation two and three.

1.6. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative method and uses Stanley Hauerwas perspective of character formation that plays a pivotal role in understanding mission and ethics in the messages to the seven communities. A brief explanation of the exegetical method by Du Toit (2009:120) that is employed in this investigation consists of the following: the diagram below is the outline of the methodology on how exegesis will be carried forward.

Preparatory phase	Main phase	Concluding Phase
1. Preliminary selection of the passage	5 Determining the socio-historical setting of the passage	10. Formulating the message for the first readers.
2. First reading	6 Determining the literary type of the text	11. Suggestions for actualising the text for today.
3. Demarcation of the text	7. determining the place of micro text within its literary macro structure	
4. Textual criticism	8. Analysing the structure of the text.	
	9. Detailed analysis	

Below is a description of the exegetical method:

The first description of the exegetical step is the selection of the passage. According to Du Toit (2009:124) he articulates that a “preliminary choice of the passage to be analysed must be made”. This research will be confined to the book of Revelation.

The book Revelation has 22 chapters but this research will be confined only on Revelation chapters two and three because they form a foundation of the Book of

Revelation which the author addresses the communities of faith.

The second step of the exegetical method is called first reading; Du Toit (2009:124) argues that:

A close reading of the text as if for the first time certainly has its own rewards. At this stage immediate problems such as difficult words, grammatical issues, and idiomatic expressions should be identified and resolved, as far as possible, with the help of dictionaries, handbooks on grammar and style. A word by word translation of the Greek text should be now made.

The third step in the exegetical method is the demarcation of the text. Du Toit (2009:125) suggests that, “for sound exegesis a reliable demarcation is needed, after the first reading, one should check the demarcation of the passage in our Greek text, the text division of the Greek edition may be the target”.

The fourth step in the exegetical method is textual criticism. Du Toit (2009:135) indicates that, “before moving to the main exegetical phase, the text-critical status of a given passage should be considered. In order to do this, the exegete should have a working knowledge of textual criticism”.

The fifth phase of the exegetical method is determining the socio-historical setting of the passage. Du Toit (2009:136) states that, “some remarks should be added about the relationship between ‘intratextual’ and ‘extratextual’ context”.

The sixth step of exegetical method is determining the literary type of the text. Du Toit (2009:138). Further suggests that, “responsible exegesis requires that New Testament genres should be respected and interpreted according to their specific characteristics”.

The seventh step of the exegetical method is determining the place of the macro text within literary macro structure. Du Toit (2009:139) further explains that, “it is of the greatest importance to determine the function of periscope within its macro and meso contexts”.

The eighth step of the exegetical method is analysing the structure of the text. According to Du Toit (2009:141) he argues that “before analysing the passage in detail,

it is important to examine its inner structure”.

The ninth step in the exegetical method is detailed analysis. Du Toit (2009:141) suggests that, “a detailed word by-word and verse by verse analysis of the text should be undertaken”.

The tenth step is known as formulating the message for the first reader. Du Toit (2009:146) articulates that, “all the previous exegetical steps their purpose was to arrive finally at a stage where we can formulate the content and the impact of the biblical text on an informed first century readership or audience”.

At the end of all these stages, a clear understanding of the exegetical method should be made with some degree of confidence. Du Toit (2009:146) asked the following fundamental questions:

How were the issues at stake addressed? What solutions were offered to resolve the problem facing the readers or hearers? How the message would touch their lives, challenge their complacency? Open their eyes, broaden their perspectives, change their attitudes, and guide them towards a decision, bring them to a re-appraisal of their priorities, nurture their spiritual life, invigorate their discipleship, strengthen their faith, widen their love, rekindle their hope, re-focus their service, rectify their misunderstanding, remove their distrust, build up their congregation, console them amid affliction and persecution, enrich their worship?

The eleventh stage of the exegetical method is suggestions for actualising the text for today. Du Toit (2009:146) contends that, “the best solution would therefore be to provide ‘some clear guidelines’ in an effort to provide to the modern day audiences some guidance and invite, each within their own settings, not to do the same, but to do likewise”.

The twelfth and last stage is the translation. Du Toit (2009:146), states that “the exegete should be in a good position to attempt a translation that would be at least to some degree, the semantic equivalent of the original Greek text”.

My intention after discussing the exegetical methodology is to provide a relevant technique or an approach that can be employed in this study. However, it is important to

choose a tool that can answer the question of identity, mission, and ethics. Thus, the study uses Stanley Hauerwas' perspective of character formation that plays a pivotal role in understanding, identity, ethics, ethos and the mission of the seven churches.

1.7. Delimitations and Limitations of the study.

At this stage the delimitations and limitation are probed in terms of library sources and other means of gathering the information in this research, and the challenges to be expected in this reaserch.

Limitations: This study is limited to the book of Revelation chapters 2:1-29, 3:1-22.

The problem anticipated with this research is that there are few sources in the library that are written on the book of Revelation which are related to character formation with particular reference to chapters two and three.

There are shortages of sources that explain ethics and identity in the book of Revelation. Therefore, this research will be limited to Revelation chapters two and three and not the entire book of Revelation in order that the subject of ethics and mission will be communicated.

Delimitations: The research will be confined to Revelation chapters 2:1-29, 3:1-22.

The open letters of the Apocalypse are addressed to the communities of faith in the seven congregations. I will investigate the relation of mission and ethics in the book of Revelation. Firstly, it is a book that has been mostly neglected; it is misunderstood by many professed scholars because of its symbolism. Secondly, there are very few books that explain character formation especially as found in Revelation two and three.

Finally, the main limitation of the study it's going to be the shortage of books that could explain character formation as part of the theological presupposition of this study.

1.8. Structure of the Research Chapters

This research consists of five chapters. The first chapter introduces the study by acquainting the researcher with the problem to be discussed, the impetus for the exegetical method to be employed followed by the organisation of the topics selected as listed below in chronological order.

Chapter one provides the outline and the introduction of the study, explains the purpose the study raises the research question, outlines the conceptual framework and discusses

the exegetical method of the study. This chapter is the foundational structure of this research and it provides the background to this study.

In chapter two the researcher discusses the social-historical and textual context of the book of Revelation particularly in chapters two and three. The writer begins with a brief discussion of the subject in the introduction with specific reference to the socio-historical context.

Chapter three develops the literature review and discusses the contextualisation of the book of Revelation, with specific reference to chapter two and three. This chapter presents a preliminary selection of the passage and articulates the first reading of the passage. This portion of the study provides a theoretical frame work, followed by mission and ethics, the relation of ethics and mission, lessons reflecting on mission and ethics, the influence of the messages of mission and ethics for contemporary Christians and finally the evaluation and summary of the research.

Chapter four is the final segment of my research that provides a comprehensive discussion and recommendations.

CHAPTER 2

Socio-Historical and Textual context of Revelation 2:1-29, 3: 1-22

2.1. Introduction

At this stage a brief investigation of the socio-historical and textual context of the book of Revelation will be carried out, I agree with Gorman (2001:56-73) that “text without a context is a pretext”.⁴ It must be noted from the beginning that the book of Revelation has 22 chapters but this investigation is confined only in chapters two and three of Revelation because that is where we find the communities of faith. Let me indicate that with regards to the study of socio-historical and textual context⁵. Du Toit (2009:124) suggests “a good rule of thumb would be to choose a passage that, at first glance, seems to exhibit a relatively strong degree of inner cohesion from a syntactical, literary semantic perspective”.⁶ Gorman suggests that contextual analysis focuses on the question, on where the historical, social and the cultural situation of the passage were written. He further asks another fundamental question. How does the passage relate to what precedes and follows it, and to the document as a whole? In this chapter we consider the historical (including social and cultural) and literary context of the texts. Gorman (2001:66) further states that, close analysis of a biblical text requires careful attention on its historical and literary contexts. Song (2003:130) commented that, a text must be seen first and foremost as a distinct (if not necessary unique) text, with its own unique unity, in order to prevent intertextuality from becoming ‘an invitation to chaos. It is extremely important that the socio-historical context of the seven congregations in Revelation two and three be investigated in order for a proper reconstruction of an exegetical approach in this research.

2.2. Socio-historical context of Revelation 2-3.

It must be noted from the beginning that the author of Revelation brings a clear communication to the readers or his audience that he was banished because of the word

⁴ Gorman, (2001:56-73) *Elements of biblical exegesis*.

⁵ Song, (2003:130) Socio-historical context means (1) the general socio-historical circumstances of the author and the audiences in Asia minor in the first century; (2) the specific circumstances which play a role in the communication of the Book of Revelation.

⁶ The qualification “relatively strong” is important, since there should naturally exist a degree of cohesiveness between all the parts of a specific document.

of God and the testimony of Jesus (Rev 1:9, 10). This tells us that the book was received on the island of Patmos. Slater (1999:108) argues that, “the letters address internal communal issues that must be corrected in order that churches may withstand social pressures to conform their religious practices and also what they must do in order to be able to endure the coming apocalyptic trials”. I agree with Fee (2002:7-8) when he says, “before the investigation of any sentence, paragraph, and other subsection of the document, one always needs to have a good sense of the entire document”. Here are questions that one may ask, before investigating the Book of Revelation particular the seven churches. Fee (2002:8) suggests the following questions:

Who is the author? Who were the recipients? What are the relationships between them? Where do the recipients live? What are their present circumstances? What historical situation occasioned this writing? What is the author’s purpose? What is the overall theme concerned with?

It will be impossible to take this journey of an exegetical method if the above questions are not considered. The introductory section of the messages to the seven churches describes John’s encounter with the resurrected and glorified Christ on the island of Patmos⁷ (1:9-20) and how Christ commissioned him to write in a book the things he saw in a vision and pass it on to the churches (1:11). Stefanovic (2002:89) argues that, “the introductory section of the seven messages to the churches apparently applies to the entire book of Revelation”.⁸ The author of Revelation identified himself in the book merely as John, with no further qualification (1:1,4,9;22:8) but calling himself “the servant of God”, and the one “who shares in the tribulation”. Botha, deVilliers and Engelbrecht (1988:1) explains that, “John was a man of authority, well known to his readers, a man whose words would be accepted as being a revelation from God” (See Rev. 22:7, 9 and 18-19). according to Stefanovic (2002:4) the book of Revelation was written in a time of Roman hostility toward Christianity that eventually turned into direct persecution. Song (2003:130) states that, Domitian is a persecutor of the Christian church. Generally two different views exist among scholars on the exact date

⁷ Stefanovic, (2002:89) *The Revelation of Jesus, commentary on the book of Revelation 1: 9 “Patmos”*. A small, rocky, and desolated island in the Aegean Sea (today called Patino) belongs to the Sporades Islands, some 50 miles southwest off the coast of Asia Minor. The island is about 16 miles square. It was a penal settlement, a kind of labour camp, to which the Roman authorities sent offenders (like an ancient Alcatraz). Because of his effective witnessing about Christ, John was, according to tradition, banished to Patmos during the reign of the Roman Emperor Domitian (A.D. 81-96) and forced to work in the quarries. Later he was released by Nerva and permitted to return to Ephesus.

⁸ Stefanovic, (2002:89-155) *The Revelation of Jesus, commentary on the book of Revelation*.

of the writing of the book. Stefanovic (2002:4) indicates that “some argue that it was written during the persecution of Christians under Nero (A.D.54-68)”. Therefore, general scholarly consensus maintains that Revelation was written during the time of Domitian (A.D. 81-96). Thus, as we approach any single vision (or letter), we must always be aware of the socio-historical situation particular to the seven letters to the churches in Asia, the persecution of the church and the judgement of God against the persecutors. Decock (1999:6) suggests that, “part of the discernment is the “testing” as we find it in 2:2, while the church of Ephesus was able to test correctly (2:2); the church of Laodicea is challenged to buy from Christ salve to anoint their eyes so that they may see (3:18)”.⁹ The church of Pergamum was persecuted by Greco-Roman politico religious customs. In spite of the situation within the seven communities, Fee (2002:31) suggests that, “the letters and the visions depicting the church’s suffering belong to the history of the author and his readers”. The consensus date for the writing of Revelation is preferable for several reasons one of which is to understand the historical situation of the communities of faith during John’s time. There are number of reasons for one to investigate the date and place and setting of the book of Revelation particularly the seven churches. Song (2003:130) argues that, “John stayed in Jerusalem for a number of years, eventually leaving Palestine shortly before the destruction of Jerusalem in (A.D.70)”. He subsequently settled in Ephesus in Asia Minor. Secondly, in an early years Slater (1999:29) cited by Song (2003:131) argues that, “it would be a mistake to interpret the book of Revelation as a response to Domitian’s supposed excessive claims to divinity or to a reign of terror at the end of his rule”. Christian’s writers, including Irenaeus, the disciple of Polycarp (A.D. 60-150) who was John’s disciple, believed that the Book of Revelation was written during the time of Domitian and can only date Revelation to the early AD 90s, the last years of Domitian’s principate or rule, but also presupposes the severe persecution of Domitian. On the question of who, when and where was the book of Revelation written? Most early Christian writers say that the Book of Revelation was written in the reign of Domitian, about 95 CE. Irenaeus, writing about a century later, was the first to mention this date. ‘It was seen... almost in my own lifetime, at the end of Domitian’s reign’ (AH 5.30). Clement of Alexandria and Origen states that, “both mention that John was banished to Patmos, but neither names the empire responsible”.¹⁰ The Christian literate taught us that John, saw Revelation

⁹ God is testing people: 2:10, 3:10, Paul, I Thess 5:21 uses another verb:

¹⁰ Barker, (2000:75) *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*.

when he was on Patmos, condemned to the mines by Domitian (Rev 1:9, 10). Although he does not name them, Eusebius wrote that ‘*our ancient ones*’ taught that the apostle John returned to Ephesus at the end of Domitian’s reign, after his exile on the island’ (*history 3.20*)¹¹. The evidence of the book itself, however, suggests it was not written at any one time. The final form of the book of Revelation may be dated from the reign of Domitian, when it was translated into Greek and first known to the churches.

In spite of the belief that the seven churches were persecuted in a perceived way or that there was no full- scale persecution by the Roman Empire, they were suffering from both inwardly problems and from outwardly intermittent persecution. Many scholars have followed Eusebius in his belief that it was John the elder who wrote the Book of Revelation. Song (2003:131) argues that, “John explicitly speaks of *θλίψις* (Rev.1:9), which means oppression, tribulation or tribulation or pressure; (NRSV) translates it as persecution”. In my observation it is clear that throughout Revelation there are a number of references revealing persecutions and martyrdom, (Rev 6:9-11; 13:5-10, 16-18, 17: 6 and 20:4-6). The emperor worship and its attendant oppression were of critical importance to John’s audiences. Aune (2002:131) argues that, based on the evidence found in the historical allusions in the seven proclamations, John was familiar with the situations of each church and may have exercised an itinerant prophetic ministry himself. The socio-historical setting of the communities of faith is now examined in the context on how the believers responded to the situation that was surrounding them particularly the seven churches in Asia. I agree with Decock (1999:13) when he suggests that:

It will be important to focus also on “the two lines of action” since the Apocalypse challenges the churches with regards to their works: the first, fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh letter open with an expression, “I know your works” the works also appear in letters in 2:5,6,19, 23, 26, 3:2, finally the theme of judgment according to their works is expressed in 2:23;14:13;18:6, 20:12;13;22:12.

It is imperative that one must understand the historical and social setting of John’s Churches. Burge and Hill (2012:1587) argue that “Asia Minor was a Roman province where the imperial cult was popular and politically influential”. This was one major problem that

¹¹ Ibid, p.75.

the believers must overcome by taking a stand against the common practice. Burge and Hill (2012:1587) explain that:

It was natural for the inhabitants to honor the Roman emperor as part of their on-going practice of worshiping living monarchs. This was the greatest challenge to the worshippers in the seven congregations. The seven churches to which the Book of Revelation is addressed (1:11) were all located in major urban centres.¹²

Burge and Hill (2012) further suggests that, “faithful Christians who were committed to monotheism and worshiped Christ, not Caesar, as Lord and God faced a crisis as they were pressured to participate in the cultic life of the city”. This was a challenge to the believers, Burge and Hill (2012:1587) further state that, “a lack of support for the cult often meant exclusion from the guild, economic hardship, and sometimes even confiscation of property, imprisonment, or death (Rev.2:9-10; 2:13;3:8)”. I agree with Burge and Hill (2012:1587) when he argues that, “hostility came not only from the Roman government, the local city magistrates, and trade guilds but also from the Diaspora Jews, the Jewish people were among the few in the Roman Empire who were exempt from mandatory participation in the imperial cult”. He further explains that “Jews were obligated to make daily sacrifices to God on behalf of the emperor but were not required to worship Caesar. However, as hostilities between the synagogue and church erupted over the identity of Jesus as the Messiah”.

It appears as though the seven congregations have something in common, they share a common experience with both the internal and external problems (Rev 2:23b). Cook (2011:31) argues that “the arrangement of the letters may be geographically significant.” Song (2003:133) suggests that:

The seven cities from a circuit on a major Roman road of that time, one could travel from Ephesus north to Smyrna, further north to Pergamum; southeast to Thyatira, further south to Sardis, Southeast to Philadelphia; further southeast to Laodicea and almost due west back to Ephesus”. This route might have been the one John took when visiting these churches, and may explain the order of their location.

I agree with Song (2003:133) that the letter to the seven churches suggests that John is faced not with one set of ‘opponents’ throughout the province, but with different problems in the various congregations.

¹² Burge and Hill, (2012:1587) *The Baker illustrated bible commentary*.

Let me note here that the problems in the seven churches are caused, inwardly, by the teaching of Balaamites (‘ruler of the people’) in Pergamum, of the Nicolaitans (conqueror of the laity, the people’) in Ephesus and Pergamum, and of Jezebel in Thyatira, and the spiritual indolence, and outwardly, by Roman Empire and by Jews in Diaspora. Stefanovic (2002:110-132) argues that, “the Nicolaitans, Balaam, and Jezebel all fostered accommodation of the surrounding culture. As Balaam mislead the Israelites into committing idolatry and immoral practices, the Nicolaitans misled some members of the community with their false teaching”. According to Song (2003:133) he states that, “the Nicolaitans are likened to Balaam in Revelation 2:14, and the use of ‘so’ or ‘likewise’ ‘at the beginning of Revelation 2:15 links to Balaam’s practice with the Nicolaitans’ teaching, thereby suggesting that they shared the same immoral practices”.

The false teachers were probably no more than antinomian libertine groups who opened the door to syncretism and religious compromise as well. The Christian community in Pergamum are not free from fault (Rev 2: 14-15). The community has withstood external threats but succumbed to internal ones. Christ citizens demonstrated their acceptance of false teachers and doctrines, evidenced by the reference of false teachers and doctrines; this is evidenced by the references to ‘Balaam’, ‘Balak’ and the Nicolaitans. The reference to Balaam and Balak is a symbolic employment of Numbers 22:41-31:24. Balaam represents the prototypical false teacher in the second temple Judaism and early Christianity. King Balak of Moab hired Balaam to pronounce curses upon Israel. Instead Balaam blessed Israel four times (Numbers 22-24). However, Balaam fell into disrepute when, after his counsel, Israelite men committed fornication with Moabite women (See: Numbers 31:16). Sexual fornication was associated with idolatry and actions perceived idolatrous, such as eating meat offered to idols. In relation to the Book of Revelation, everyday experiences of harassment, persecution, and hostility from pagan as well as Jewish neighbours and from the provincial authorities must have challenged the community’s faith in Christ as “Lord and King” of the world. According to Fiorenza (1991:55) John explicitly polemics against these rival Christian prophets in the messages addressed to the churches in Ephesus, Pergamum and Thyatira. Ephesus earns praise because it has rejected the false prophets and shown hatred for the works of the so-called Nicolaitans, whereas Pergamum receives criticism for tolerating

those who hold to the teaching of Balaam. The community in Thyatira, in turn provokes censure because it has accepted the influence and teaching of a woman prophet and her school¹³. These are some of the major crisis that the communities of faith in Revelation had to resist. The seven churches were faced by inwardly and outwardly opposition; here is evidence of the socio-historical background. Dulling (2003:452) suggests that, “political, social and economic conflicts led John of Patmos to advocate exclusivism and rejection of the ways of the world”. John’s attack on the Nicolaitans (2:6, 15), “Balaam” (2:14), and “Jezebel” (2:20) is an attack on eating meat sacrificed to idols (2:14, 20) and those who practice “fornication” (2:14, 20-23). Stefanovic (2002:113) states that:

The church is doctrinally sound; it does not tolerate evil men and tests those who call themselves apostles - and they are not. It hates the practices of the Nicolaitans (2:6), the heretical group that advocates Christian compromise and promotes the view to their fellow Christian that there is nothing wrong with a prudent conformity to the pagan practices (2:14-15).¹⁴

As suggested by Stefanovic (2002:113) the presence of the heretical group of Nicolaitans in the church in Ephesus threatened to destroy the integrity and purity of Christian faith and conduct. So the question on how does John re-align his audience to mission and ethics and in particular the messages of the seven churches in Revelation two and three under such circumstances. Decock (1999:13) argues that:

The insistence on the works indicates very clearly that the symbolic world which John has displayed before the readers must be embodied and become real in concrete human living and in a human society, ethical response to the challenge of the symbolic world is both personal and social.

The investigation of the letters of the seven churches seems to be in order but one may ask the question, how the community of faith upholds the standards of integrity in such an atmosphere. Barclay (1976:68) explains that, “Nicolaitans were not prepared to be different; they were the most dangerous of all the heretics from a

¹³ Fiorenza, (1991:56) *Revelation vision of the just world, proclamation commentary*.

¹⁴ Stefanovic, (2002:111-113) *The Revelation of Jesus Christ, commentary on the book of Revelation*.

practical point of view, for if their teaching had been successful, the world would have changed Christianity and not Christianity the world”.¹⁵

My conclusion here is that the letters to the seven churches were to be circulated in all seven congregations. Cook (2011:32) suggests that, in these special messages to the seven churches in Asia Minor, the Lord gave each assembly an X-ray of its condition. Realignment of character was the response to the members of the communities of faith to their master Jesus. According to Decock (1999:14) the focus on the “works” of the members of the churches is not merely an interest in ethical requirements but these are seen as the means by which God’s works are “coming down” onto earth and are embodied in human works.

¹⁵ Barclay, (1976:1-68) *The daily study bible, The Revelation of John (vol 1) Chapter 1-5.*

2.3. General Historical criticism of Revelation: Author, Date and Place.

Introduction

At this stage a general historical criticism is investigated with an emphasis on the author, date and place of the book of Revelation. Du Toit (2009:136) explains that:

Context more precisely referred to as socio-historical context, social context, setting or life context or setting or situation is also crucially important for determining meaning. Unless we know the social or life setting of an utterance, multitudes of meaning are possible.

As I have noted on the previous section. It will not be repeated in this section because I have already discussed in previous section. The investigation regards to the authorship of the Book of Revelation was presented and the church fathers and scholars have agreed that the author of the Apocalypse was John the beloved disciple. This section of the research focuses more closely at the external and internal evidence. Barrette (1986:104) argues that “there is much disagreement among scholars as to who wrote the book of Revelation”. Burger and Hill (2012:1586) state that, “the author of Revelation identifies himself as John (Revelation 1:1, 4, 9, 22:8), a servant of Christ and a prophet to the churches in Roman Asia (1:3, 22:7)”. Barrete (1986.104) further suggests that, “many early fathers support this theory”. Stefanovic (2002:2) argues that:

Justin Martyr¹⁶ one of the early fathers that mentioned John as the author. Stefanovic further suggests that this claim was repeated by Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Hippolytus, Origen, Irenaeus and others- viewed the author of Revelation as the Apostle John, the son of Zebedee, the writer of the Fourth Gospel and the three epistles.

The significance of his name was necessary because the book of Revelation came from a foreign region (island of Patmos) and this would reassure people of its origin. Stefanovic (2002:2) further reveals that, “John speaks to them as their brother and fellow partaker in affliction and the kingdom of Jesus (1:9)”. This suggests that he knows well the churches of Asia and he is well known by them. Thus, his name is sufficient to provide the credentials of his book.

Burger and Hill (2012:1586) argue that, “the author of Revelation himself is John (1:1, 4, 9, 22:8), a servant of Christ and a prophet to the churches in Roman Asia”. I agree with

¹⁶ Stefanovic, (2002:2) *Revelation of Jesus, commentary on the book of Revelation.*

Stefanovic and the church fathers that John wrote his Revelation while on Patmos, a small rocky island in the Aegean Sea. The date of the book of Revelation composition is claimed to be during the persecution of Domitian. Dulling (2003:81) explains that, “there is no absolute certainty. The traditional viewpoint is as good as any, thus most of date the book of Revelation is about (AD 95-96)”.

2.4. The authorship question.

The question regarding the authorship the book of Revelation has been discussed at the beginning of this book. As a way of emphasis, Aune (1997:1) suggests that:

All biblical books, particularly those with an epistolary character, are written communications that link an author to an audience within the setting of a particular historical, social, and cultural context, so that all these factors should be taken into consideration as a basis for interpreting the text.

By this I want to emphasise the importance of investigating the author of the book of Revelation.

2.5. Internal evidence.

First, the internal evidence of the author of Revelation according to Aune (2002:1) tells us four times that his name is John. (See. Revelation 1:1, 4, 9, 22:8). This repetition of the author’s name, together with the frequent use of first person singular verb forms that regularly punctuate the vision, the narratives, serves to emphasise his role as a witness to the revelatory visions he narrates. Aune suggests that “while the final author-editor of Revelation was named “John,” it is not possible to identify him with any other early Christian figures of the same name”. Kistemaker (2001:21) states that, “three times in chapter 1 (vv. 1, 4, 9) and once in chapter 22 (v. 8) the author identifies himself as John. He speaks as a person with unquestionable authority who is well known to all the churches in the province of Asia (Western Turkey)”. I agree with Kistemaker when he says John was banished to the rocky island of Patmos to the west of the port city Miletus (near Ephesus) and taking into consideration that the writer uses only the name John. In his banishment, he pens the last book of the canon in an Aramaic type of Greek. Regarding the question concerning the time of John’s exile, consult the section on the date of the Apocalypse¹⁷. There is a lot of debate and no consensus has been

¹⁷ Kistemaker, (2001:20) *New Testament commentary*.

reached from the scholars about the authorship of the book of Revelation, based on the structure and how the book was written from a foreign land in the island of Patmos and the book is different from other books written in the New Testament.

2.6. External evidence

With regard to the external evidence on the book of Revelation, Kistemaker (2001:20) argues that, “the early church fathers are unable to confirm that a person called John the Presbyter existed. In fact, Dionysius expresses only an assumption, but I think that there was a certain other [John] among those that were in Asia.”¹⁸ By contrast, we believe that the only person named John who could address the churches with the authority revealed in the Apocalypse is John, the apostle of Jesus Christ. Near the end of the fourth century, Kistemaker (2001:20) further argues that, “it was Jerome who was the scribe for the last two epistles of John not for the apostle but for the presbyter; yet he affirms that the apostle wrote both the Gospel and the Apocalypse”. Further, in his advanced age, John could either identify himself as “the elder” (2 John 1; 3 John 1) or use his given name as he does in Revelation. No one but John could claim unchallenged authority in the church near the end of the first century. Kistemaker (2001:21) states that: “the external evidence remains firm, because the criticism of Dionysius rests chiefly on the dogmatic basis of the millennial dispute, a multiplicity of people with the name John, and an unconfirmed report concerning two graves purportedly belonging to John”. Finally Aune (1997:2) argues that:

The New Testament compositions that are attributed to John (generally understood by the ancient church to be John the Apostle, the son of Zebedee) are: the Gospel of John, 1, 2 and 3 John, and the Revelation of John. Critical scholars have agreed that the linguistic and theological differences between the Gospel of John and Revelation are so striking that the same author could not have written both works.

Rowland (1998:513) states that “external evidence concerning the apostle John and his relationship to Revelation comes relatively early in the Christian tradition”. Regarding the authorship of Revelation, the question is whether the writer was John the Apostle, another John the Presbyter, an unknown John the Apostle or whether it was a product of the Johannine community. It must be clear that the view and discussion that various scholars have advanced for diversity of authorship are insufficient to overthrow the

¹⁸ Kistemaker, (2001:20) *New Testament commentary*.

evidence of both external and internal authorship of Revelation. Aune (1997:2) argues that, “John the apostle the first clear testimony that the Apostle John, the son of Zebedee, was the author of Revelation is found in (*Justin Dial.81.4, who wrote ca.A.D.155*)”. Regarding the authorship of Revelation Christopher and Aune both agree to the view that Justin talks of John as one of the apostles of Christ who prophesied the apocalypse that came to him. He introduces himself as a fellow sufferer who was on Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus (Rev 1:9, 10). This could be a reference to the original John’s place of refuge after he fled from Jerusalem. I agree with most commentators of Revelation that the author of the book of Revelation was John. Baker (2000:78) states that, “the writer of the book of Revelation is described as one of the brethren who keep the testimony [i.e. the visions] of Jesus’ (Rev 19:10, translating literally) and the whole book is prefaced, like the other books of Hebrew prophecy, with the name of the prophet”.

What is unusual about the book of Revelation is that it gives two names. It was ‘the Revelation of Jesus Christ’, showing that Jesus was the original prophet, and it was authenticated and interpreted by John, ‘who bore witness to the testimony [of visions] of Jesus, to all that he saw’ (Rev 1:1-3 translating literally). John writes himself into the Book of Revelation as the interpreting elder who reveals the fulfilment of the earlier visions.

2.7. Historical-Geographical setting

The seven cities of the Roman Province of Asia mentioned in Revelation two and three, there was something written to the church in each city and a certain John who was writing from the island of Patmos addressed the letter.

The diagram: The New Testament commentary, Page 20. Location of the seven churches of the book of Revelation as indicated in the New Testament commentary.



Burge and Hill (2012:1587) argue that, “Asia was a Roman province where the imperial cult was popular and politically influential”. Furthermore, on my investigation, it has been discovered that when Asia Minor came under Roman rule in 133 BC, it was natural for the inhabitants to honour the Roman emperor as part of their ongoing practice of worshipping living monarchs. The seven churches to which the Book of Revelation is addressed (1:11) were all located in major urban areas if one considers the geographical setting of the seven churches. It must be noted at this stage that faithful Christians who were committed to monotheism and the worship of Christ, not Caesar, as Lord and God faced a crisis because they were pressurised into participating in the cultic life of the city. A lack of support for the cult often meant exclusion from the guild, economic hardship, and sometimes even confiscation of property, imprisonment, or death (Revelation 2:9–10; 2:13; 3:8).

2.8. Social-Scientific Criticism

First and foremost, let me note from the beginning that Du Toit (2002:419) argues that, “social-scientific criticism approaches the interaction between the biblical writings and the contexts in which they originated from a social angle”.¹⁹ Du Toit (2002:438) suggests that “a social-scientific analysis of both the social scripts influence and constrain social interaction and the situation and strategy of biblical texts”. The book of Revelation was written somewhere along the western coast of Asia Minor, probably in Patmos.²⁰ There is an interrelationship between the text and the situation of crisis that produced it.²¹ The social scientific criticism takes its shape during the time and situation when the Book of Revelation was written. The community that produced Revelation is a group that is under severe stress, not necessarily overt persecution, but certainly ostracism and social contempt. They feel threatened and insecure, and must also contend with religious stress. Such stress is produced not only by the external enforced worship of the Roman Emperor but with economic sanctions for non-conformists. There were probably also internal religious conflicts, symbolically referred to by means of ‘Nicolaitans’ (2:6, 16) and the Synagogue of Satan (2:9).²² An apocalyptic writing coheres with, and answers to, a situation of crisis. The book of Revelation contains indications that it was addressed to Christians being persecuted for the sake of their faith. This persecution resulted from the refusal of Christians to take part in emperor worship (13:4, 12-17; 14:9-12; 16:2; 19:20).²³ The question is which persecution the author had in mind. It is true that people within the Roman Empire were usually free to practice their own religion as long as they were willing to acknowledge the Roman gods and sacrifice to the Roman emperors. The Jews, who worshipped one God, were obviously not willing to take part in such practices. Their special position was acknowledged by the Romans. Furthermore, it is noted that some Roman Emperors insisted on being worshipped as gods. Refusal to do this could cause a great deal of trouble for Christians. According to early tradition, the persecution of Christians took place under Domitian and it is possible that Revelation was written during this time (95-96 CE).²⁴ Addressing a state of persecution and suffering, John emphasises that,

¹⁹ Du Toit, (2002:419) *Focusing on the message*.

²⁰ Van den Heever and Eben Scheffler, (2001:227) *From Jesus Christ to Christianity*.

²¹ John, (1994:95) *Revelation*.

²² *Ibid*, p.13.

²³ *Ibid*, p.227.

²⁴ Van den Heever and Scheffler, (2001:232) *From Jesus Christ to Christianity*.

although the evil powers cannot be easily restrained and the Christian community will therefore suffer, this is only part of the picture. Contrary to how it seems, they can be assured that God is in control. This is, according to the author, the real but concealed state of affairs. He will defeat the evil powers and vindicate his people, the community. John's portrayal of Jesus is meant to sustain the Christian communities in their difficulties. Since God and Christ are in control, the community John is addressing is exhorted to endure, even unto death (Rev 2:10). Those who suffer as Christ had suffered and nevertheless remain faithful, will in the end be rewarded, while the unrighteous, worldly powers will be judged. In conclusion, social aspects of the communities take its shape under the pressing situation in the Roman province.

2.9. Summary

In order to summarise this section of the study, it must be noted that the messages to the seven churches suggests that John is faced not with one set of opponents throughout the province, but with different problems in various congregations. In Revelation it appears that cultural accommodation, Roman luxury, exotic entertainment, wealth, and economic prosperity posed greater threats to the integrity of the Christian community than the outside persecution which had created the unsettled state of the seven churches.

2.10. Literary arrangements of Revelation 2-3

The literary arrangement of Revelation two and three is very complex. The following sections explore some of the most representative proposals with regard to the structural organisation of the letters to the seven churches. Stefanovic (2002:25) argues that, "commentators and expositors have offered a variety of proposals as to what structural organisation of Revelation was intended to mean by the inspired author, but hardly two expositors share exactly same view". The following sections explore some of the most representative proposals with regard to structural organisation of the last book of the Bible. These proposals should be viewed as mutually exclusive and determinative. Although some offer more promising insights into the structural arrangement of Revelation than others, the proposals express a broad spectrum of interpretations about design and composition, as well as overall theme. Considered together, they unpack the intention of the writer much more than otherwise possible. Apocalyptic literature is an intensified form of prophecy, if

prophetic literature saw repentance as the ideal solution to the problem of sin and apostasy, then it is important to investigate the structure of the messages of the seven churches. Du Toit (2009:132) suggests that, “certain literary features provide us with significant criteria for the text demarcation”. Aune (1997:119) argues that:

The analysis of their form has closely related aspects, the determination of their internal literary structure and the determination of the external literary form or genre to which they have the closest generic relationship. In recent years a number of literary forms have been proposed as genres to which the seven proclamations have the closest phenomenological relationship: (1) Revelatory letter. (2) Prophetic speech forms. The seven proclamations never existed independently of Revelation but were designed specifically for their present literary setting by the author.

Furthermore, in my investigation the literary structure on the seven proclamations of Revelation chapters two and three, Aune (1997:119) argues that, “although each is addressed to an individual Christian congregation in south-western Asia Minor, they were intended to be read together and heeded by each of the congregations”. These letters have a clear stereotyped formula found at the end of each proclamation. ‘Let the one who has an ear hear what the Spirit declares to the churches’ and by the statement in Revelation 2:23, “And all the churches shall know that I am the one who searches both mind and heart.” Burge and Hill (2012:1586) explain that, “it was a practice of the early church to have seers report their visions and share them as a word of prophecy during public time of Christian worship (1 Corinthians 14: 29-33)”. The prophetic word was subject to the discernment of the church, but if it was found authentic, the congregation was then accountable to hear and obey it (Rev 1:3; 22:7).

It must be noted here that the author of Revelation was exiled to the island of Patmos, his particular vision was written down in the form of a letter, circulated to the seven churches of Asia Minor, and read aloud in a liturgical setting (1:3-4). Burger and Hill (2002:1586) argue that:

Revelation actually has a threefold genre, it is part Apocalypse (1:1), part prophecy (1:3; 22:7), and part letter (1:4-5; 22:21). These literary genres were never meant to be read as a road map to the future, neither do they restrict the relevance of Revelation only to those Christians living near the time of Christ’s return.

Schrage (1988:336) states that, “the community has not only a future but a past, something already received and heard”.²⁵ It suffices my investigation that the Book of Revelation was the response to the community of believers who were under a great deal of opposition and mission and ethics was the result of their dire situation. Burge and Hill (2002:1586) explain that, “whenever the author of Revelation discusses the future, its purpose is to encourage a response from the reader in the immediate moment.” The readers of this apocalypse are asked to repent, make costly commitments to mission and ethics under the difficult situation in which they find themselves. Schrage (1988:336) states that, “in the very act of looking to the future, the community can recall its beginnings (2:25)”. Burge and Hill (2002:1594) suggest that, “three verbs, each in the form of a command, unveil the process by which Christians recapture their first love: remember, repent, and do (the first things)”. “Remember from where you have fallen,” says Christ (2:5a). The first step toward restoration is to remember the starting point where the heart began to drift from God. In conclusion the letters to the seven churches share the stereotypical features which shall be discussed in the following section.

2.11. Literary aspects of Revelation 2-3.

This section investigates the literary aspect of the seven proclamations of Revelation two and three. Fiorenza (1991:18) argues that, “although scientific exegesis of Revelation claims to be objective and disinterested, it is nevertheless also practiced from within a community of interpretation and its socio-political location is the university with its preconceived notions of language and reality”. In relation to the literary aspects of the letters to the seven churches, it must be noted at this stage it will become chaotic if we continue with the investigation of the seven churches and we neglect the literary interpretation particularly with regard to Revelation chapters two and three. Aune (1997:119) comments that:

These letters to the seven congregations have two closely related aspects, the determination of their internal literary structure and the determination of the external literary form or genre to which they have the closest generic relationship.

In relation to the literary structure of the book of Revelation, argues that, the internal structure of the seven proclamations indicates that they share seven stereotypical

²⁵ Schrage, (1988:336-337) *The ethics of the New Testament*.

features, each of which must be discussed in some detail. Aune (1997:120) suggests that “*the Adscriptio, or destination, and the command to write are part of the literary setting of each proclamation; all the messages themselves only begin by the following formula the τάδε λέγει, “thus says,”*”.

Furthermore, Aune (1997:120-121) suggests that:

The *adscriptio*, ‘destination’, occurs in the dative before the *superscription*, ‘sender’ in each proclamation, e.g., (τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν τῷ δεῦνι ἐκκλησίας), “to the angel of the church at such and such.” The *adscriptio* cannot be understood as an epistolary feature, since that form (name of recipient in the dative followed by the name of the sender in the nominative) is limited to epistolary petitions, complaints and applications sent from an inferior person to a superior.

It appears that the structural design of Revelation is without significance for the understanding of the sweeping thematic progression of the book. The literary aspect of Revelation warns against any study interpretation of a passage or a section in isolation from the rest of the book. The interpretation of the text must agree with the general purpose of the whole book. The literary arrangement of Revelation is very complex. Commentators and expositors have offered a variety of proposals as to what the structural organisation of Revelation was intended to mean by the inspired author, but hardly two expositors share exactly the same view.²⁶ The following sections explore some of the most representative proposals with regard to the literary genre of the last book of the Bible. These proposals must not be viewed as mutually exclusive and determinative. The proposals express a broad spectrum of interpretations about the book’s design and composition, as well as its overall theme. Considered together, they unpack the intention of the author much more than otherwise possible. The book of Revelation is characterised by particular literary features. The author occasionally shifts from second-person singular pronouns and verbs to second and third person plural forms, for instance such when he addresses a particular group within a congregation those about to be arrested in Smyrna, Revelation 2:10; those who have succumbed to Balaam’s teaching at Pergamum, Revelation 2:14; those who have not accepted the teaching of the Nicolaitans Revelation 2:15 are just such examples. Aune (1997:110) articulates that,

²⁶ Stefanovic, (2002:25) *Revelation of Jesus Christ, commentary on the book of Revelation*.

“Those in Thyatira who have not accepted Jezebel’s teaching, Revelation 2:20-22[those who follow Jezebel are explicitly addressed in 2:24 :(Ὑμῖν δὲ λέγω), ‘but to you (plural) I say’]”. It is important to note that, several times the author forgets or (temporarily abandons) the literarily device he has adopted in addressing each of the proclamations to the angel of a particular church and addresses a congregation directly in the secondperson plural form (Revelation 2:13, 20).

Aune (1997:120) elaborates that:

The author occasionally shifts from second- person singular pronouns and verbs to second –and third person forms, such as when he addresses a particular group within a congregation (those about to be arrested in Smyrna, 2:10; those who have accepted Jezebel’s teaching, 2:20-22[those who follow Jezebel are explicitly addressed in 2:24: ὑμῖν δὲ λέγω, “but to you (plural) I say]).

Aune (1997:120) explains that:

The command to write, expressed by the aorist imperative (γράψον) is located at the beginning of each proclamation between the adscription and (Τάδε λέγει) formula.” The command to write is part of the ‘write and send’ formula (variation of the Old Testament ‘go and tell’ formulas; since the complete formula (γράψον)... καὶ (πέμψον), ‘write...and send,’ has already been applied to all seven proclamations. Since the object of the verb (λέγει) is found in each proclamation, is (Τάδε), the entire message introduced by (Τάδε λέγει) whichalso functions as the object of the aorist imperative (γράψον); such divine commands are even more frequent in Revelation two and three.

As I have indicated before that the seven stereotyped features in each of the seven proclamations in Revelation two and three as has been previously discussed. The first one is the *Adscriptio*, I will not repeat it here, since we have discussed it at the beginning of this section. As I have indicated above that the command to write was also discussed in the above section. The author begins by ‘Thus says, (Τάδε λέγει) formula. (Τάδε) was an obsolete form of Hellenistic Greek that had archaic associations similar to the obsolete English phrase “thus says”. This intentional archaism had two associations for the readers of Revelation. The speaker, i.e., the subject of the verb λέγει, is the exalted Christ identified by a series of descriptive titles that are (with the exception of Revelation 3:14) connected with the vision in Revelation 1:9-20 (See. 2:1, 1:16; 2:8, 1:17-18). Four times the attributes of Christ

are introduced with the substantial participle (*ὁ κρατῶν*) in Revelation 2:1. (1997:121). Aune states that ‘since each proclamation ends with the proclamation formula introduced by (*ὁ ἔχων*), this has the effect of framing and therefore introducing a greater degree of symmetry into the structure of the proclamations. The cumulative effect of these titles is to unify the seven proclamations as a pronouncement of the exalted Christ who commissioned John to write Revelation 1:9-20. The *narratio*, the so-called (*Οἶδα*) clause, “I know” clause, introduces the *narratio*, “narrative,” section of each of the seven proclamations. This clause is not identical to the central message of each church proclamation but provides a brief narrative of the situation of each congregation (including the past and present) a sort of diagnosis of the positive and negative behaviour of each congregation. “Let the one with an ear hear what the spirit says to the churches.” This phrase is placed at the conclusion of each of the seven proclamations; this formula functions as a proclamation formula. Stefanovic (2012:77) argues that:

Each of the messages opens with the address, ‘to the messenger of the church in... write’ every church is known by its name. Christ addresses the church individually”. Second, the message to each church begins with the phrase ‘Thus says’ this is followed by a brief description of Jesus Christ as the sender of the message. Third, the description is followed by Jesus’ appraisal of the church.

This section begins with the formula: ‘I know’, In five of the seven churches Jesus addresses the church with the words “I know your works” while the messages to Smyrna and Pergamum have the words ‘I know your affliction’ and ‘I know where you dwell,’ respectively. Decock (1999:13) argues that:

It will be important to focus also on “the two lines of action” since the Apocalypse challenges the churches with regards to their works: the first, fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh letter open with an expression, “I know your works” the works also appear in letters in 2:5,6,19, 23, 26, 3:2, finally the theme of judgment according to their works is expressed in 2:23;14:13;18:6, 20:12;13:22:12.

This difference is due to the peculiar circumstances of these two churches. Fourth, the appraisal is followed by words of counsel. After analysing the spiritual condition of each church Christ advises them to change their condition. Fifth, each church is urged to hear what the spirit says to the churches. “The one, who has an ear, let him hear”.

Finally, each message concludes with a word of promise to the overcomer. In conclusion when the proclamation formula concludes with an oracle, it functions as a prophetic signature. Aune (2006:123) suggests that:

The proclamation formula is formulated in the third person (as is introductory *τάδε λέγει*), ‘Thus says’ formula and appears to introduce a new speaker, the Spirit, since the promise to the victor formula, which follows it in Revelation 2:7b is formulated in the first person: to the one who conquers I will give the crown of life.

Finally, Aune (2002:124) states that, ‘*the promise to the victor formula*’. This formula exhibits variety in form and structure and placement”. It is placed after the proclamation formula in the first three proclamations (2:7b, 11b, 17b) but before it in the last four (2:26-27, 3:5, 12, 21) suggesting that the formulas are closely related. John was intent on including a present substantial participle from the verb, “to conquer” at the beginning of the promise of victory formula, though he used three very different syntactical constructions to do so: (a) to the one who conquers I will give him (Rev. 2:7, 17).

2.12. Conclusion

In conclusion the structure of Revelation is formed by the author’s presentation to his audience; the use of technical terms demonstrates John’s familiarity with the local setting and supports the argument found in (Rev. 2.1-3.22), which contains genuine letters to real situations. Because the author of Revelation was exiled on the island of Patmos, his particular vision was written down in the form of a letter, circulated to the seven churches of Asia Minor and read aloud in a liturgical setting (1:3-4).²⁷ It is stated that one thing is certain: every Christian community represents a living self-contained unity, and in spite of its various different individual members, and their personal responsibility, it can be the subject of a single criticism. Hence praise and blame are not aimed at individual Christians within separate communities, but also communicated to them as a body. The readers of this apocalypse are asked to repent, make costly commitments, and with haste join Jesus in his mission. We have observed another important literary strategy of Revelation, the identification-description pattern. Whenever a new key player in the book is introduced, he is first identified in terms of a personal description or historical role and activities.

²⁷ Burge and Hill, (2002:1586) *The baker illustrated Bible commentary*.

John moves into the description of the player's function and the activities that are especially important to the vision. This literary strategy is first evident with reference to Revelation 1:9-3:22. The identification of the resurrected Christ is provided in Revelation 1:9-20 with a list of his various characteristics of Christ portraying different aspects of his ministry to the churches. John describes their historical role and function. The principle of the identification/description literary strategy enables the interpreter to find sound information that the inspired author imbedded in the text.

Chapter 3

Literature Review

3.

3.1. Introduction

At this stage the study will look at a vivid analysis and description of the book Revelation on how mission and ethics are understood particularly from the seven proclamations of chapters two and three. Broadly speaking, there are several key ways that people approach the book of Revelation related to how the mission and ethics of this book are articulated. Character formation plays a major role in understanding mission and ethics in the book of Revelation. This chapter covers the preliminary selection of the passage, theoretical framework with special reference to mission and ethics. It also articulates the definition of mission and ethics. Furthermore, it covers the lessons reflecting mission and ethics. The conclusion of this chapter alludes to the influence of messages from Revelation on the subject of mission and ethics for contemporary Christians.

3.2. Theoretical framework (With special reference to mission and ethics)

The seven letters are structured in the form of a common plan. At this stage let us look at the theoretical framework of the book of Revelation. By locating our interest in the letters to the churches, the relevance for the audience raises questions about the community that gave rise to the book, both in its geographical, social and political contexts and its world of ideas²⁸. Both areas have received considerable attention. When you consider the letters to the seven churches of Revelation, Kok (2002:1-11) states that:

We cannot begin to understand that process of moral formation until we see that inextricable from the process by which distinctive communities were taking shape. Making morals means making community. Others have described in more general terms the location of early Christian communities in Greco-Roman and Jewish Diaspora contexts of the first century.²⁹

Kok (2002:1-11) suggests that “within this context in which distinctive communities

²⁸ Pattemore, (2004:3-4) *The people of God in the Apocalypse, discourse, structure and exegesis*.

²⁹ Ibid, (2004:4) page 4.

took shape, conflict was a natural group dynamic reality”.³⁰

There is a common consensus that all commentators agree when investigating ethics and mission of communities of faith. The same dynamics within the context of the churches of the New Testament share the status as whether to stand against all compromise or to renounce their faith. Kok (2002:1-11) argues that, “closer investigation reveals that it is not true that early Christians agreed on the boundaries of ethos and its dynamic relationship, with regard to identity in the early stages of the Christ movement.” Wolter (2006:203-2015) cited by Kok, (2002:1-11) distinguishes between three different contexts in which the conflict and questions regarding the dynamic relation between identity and ethos occurred, intra-congregational social life, extra-congregational social life and extra-congregational private life.³¹

In my opinion, the theoretical framework of the seven churches within the contexts of mission and ethics emanates on the basis of intra-congregational social life (1:9.10). Here, we find the author identifies himself with tribulation. He is writing to the Christians in a Roman province of Asia (Rev 1:4, 11), providing practical counsel for the problems they faced.

Internal-congregational social life in the churches in Asia (Rev 1:9) here, I refer to the problems that occurred within the communities of believers. The churches were facing an increasing number of problems, both external and internal.³² My argument here is based on the problems of an internal nature that troubled the churches in Asia.

Furthermore, in my investigation as the seven churches indicate, the Christians in those churches, while the majority of members were faithful, some individuals, including church leaders, were not faithful. It makes perfect sense to argue that this way of conduct had some natural consequences that led John into exile in the island of Patmos, where he was commanded to write to the churches in Asia. In addition in other churches- such as Thyatira, Sardis and Philadelphia- the majority of believers were in apostasy.³³ In Sardis, “just a few names” had “not defiled their garments” (Rev.3:4), the church in Philadelphia was left with but “little strength” (Rev 3:8). The whole church in Laodicea appeared to be in apostasy, and nothing good was found in this state. The

³⁰ Kok, (2002:1-11) *Mission and Ethics in 1 Corinthians ; Reconciliation, corporate solidarity and others – regard as missionary strategy in Paul*, HTS Teologiese Studies/ Theological Studies 68(10, art. # 1222, 11, pages.

³¹ Kok, (2002:11) *Mission and ethics in 1 Corinthians; Reconciliation, corporate solidarity and others – regarded as missionary strategy in Paul*, HTS Teologiese Studies/ Theological Studies 68(10, art. # 1222.

³² Stefanovic, (2002:5-9) *Revelation of Jesus Christ, a commentary on the Book of Revelation*.

³³ *Ibid*, p.7.

basic social congregational life is that the Christians in Asia were wrestling with and deeply involved in the custom of food being offered to idols and sexual immorality (Rev.2:14-15, 20). These two issues threatened the unity of the churches in Asia because they were related to the popular demands of the society in Asia. The Christians in Asia are faced at least with two problems with regard to their involvement in pagan religious festivals. It is worth arguing that these festivals contributed to the ethos of believers. Stefanovic (2002:7) argues that:

Temple prostitution was a part of many ancient pagan religions; sexual intercourse with the temple prostitutes was for the fertility of the land and prosperity of society, anyone who wanted economic, political, or social status in society had to meet these religious demands.

Involvement in the pagan religious festivals called for a compromise to Christian belief and values. The ethical standard of life was the reason why John wrote the messages to the seven churches in Asia. The churches in Asia were expected to respond to the inward problems. Some Christians responded to the demand with a decisive “no.”³⁴ Some groups, for commercial prosperity, advocated a compromise. These opponents of John are referred to by different names (Rev.2:6 and 20).

One of the major motivations of ethics and mission in the seven proclamation letters of Revelation chapters two and three is found within an internal congregational context. Boxall (1998:203) suggests that, “John is faced not with one set of ‘opponents’ throughout the province, but with different problems in various congregations”. The problems in the seven proclamations are caused inwardly by the teaching of the Balaamites (‘the ruler of the people’) in Pergamum, from the Nicolaitans (Conqueror of the laity, ‘the people’) in Ephesus and Pergamum and the empire and by the Jews in Diaspora.

Stefanovic (2002:111) argues that, “the identity of the Nicolaitans is unknown to us”. Most of the scholars are tracing back this group from the period of the early Christian writers such as Irenaeus³⁵ and Hippolytus,³⁶ the Nicolaitans were heretical followers of Nicolas (Gr. Nicolaos) of Antioch, one of the seven deacons of the early church (Acts 6:5) who ended up as a heretic. Their presence in the church “threatened to destroy the

³⁴ Stefanovic, (2002:7-10) *Revelation of Jesus Christ, commentary on the book of Revelation*.

³⁵ Irenaeus *Against Heresies*: 1.26.3; 3:11 (*The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 1:352-429).

³⁶ Hippolytus *Refutation of all Heresies*: 7.24 (*The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 5:515).

integrity and purity of Christian faith and conduct”.³⁷ They gained adherents among some members of the church in Pergamum, in the message of the church of Pergamum, the Nicolaitans are clearly related to the heretical group which is referred to those “who hold the teaching of Balaam” (2:14-15). It could be that the Nicolaitans were the same people as those in Pergamum.

It must be concluded that these groups fostered accommodation during the time of John and his audiences suffered from both within and without, inside were the heretical group, and outside was the persecution by the Roman Empire.

This was the motivation for the kind of ethics and mission found throughout the community of faith. Lastly, it is also important to note that, character is shaped by the ethos or behaviour of people.

Bauckham (1993:122) states that, “clearly a church which listens to the Nicolaitans or imitates the Balaamites cannot bear faithful witness to the truth and righteousness of God”. Furthermore, he argues that, “the churches must be exposed to the power of divine truth in the Spirit’s words of prophecy, if they are to be the lampstands from which seven Spirits can shine the light of truth into the world”.

External- congregational social life of the churches in Asia: A number of problems arising from outside of the church disturbed and troubled the Christians in Asia in John’s day. First, the Christians in Asia were faced with pagan opposition and accusations because they did not participate in social activities. Christians were accused of atheism for worshipping only their God (whoever did not worship the emperor was considered an atheist by the Romans). They were charged with cannibalism in relation to the Lord’s supper where they were thought to be eating human flesh and drinking human blood. Stories were circulated that they were sacrificing children at their services. As a result, the Christians were gradually losing their legal status within society. A further external problem that the churches faced was persecution. A serious threat to the church was the development of the imperial cult of worship of the emperor. Revelation 2:13 reports the death of a person in Pergamum named Antipas who suffered martyrdom by Roman authorities for his faith.

Under such hostility the believers were to respond to the opposition and persecution coming from the Roman emperor. Stefanovic (2002:6) suggests that “another suffering was due to conflicts with Jews, towards the end of the first century, the relationship

³⁷ Stefanovic, (2002:111) argued that some heretical groups fostered accommodation in the seven letters of Revelation.

between the Christians and Jews was characterized by antagonism and hostility”. The ethical attitude of the believers was the only way of influencing the opposition. Their identity was influencing the ethos of the community and mission (*missio-Dei*) was the result. Moreover, in my view the seven churches expressed their ethical identity in responding to the problems within and without in order to maintain their community ethos.

3.3. Mission and ethics

At this stage ethics will be discussed regarding the relation it has to mission, in particular to the seven proclamations of Revelation two and three. In relation to the condition of the seven churches let me note that Van der Watt (2006:628) states that, “believers had to respond to a situation of depressing crisis in which they were besieged from different fronts by hostile society”. Furthermore, their involvement in witnessing and behaviour resulted in suffering, being alienated and forced into exclusiveness, since they took a stand against idolatry and immorality. They had to deal with, and meaningfully respond to, poverty, discrimination, persecution and experience of loss. In my view these dynamics led the believers to respond ethically which consisted mainly of witnessing and martyrdom.

On the other hand one may be tempted to ask the question, does it make sense to examine New Testament ethics and particularly the seven proclamations in Revelation two and three. The answer may be derived from the chapters selected. Van der Watt (2006: 628) suggests that, “the ethical response of the believers consisted mainly in witnessing and martyrdom. Their martyrdom was seen in the perspective of Christ’s passion that has become the ethical model to the believers”. Christ’s passion as a slaughtered Lamb indicates the way in which Christ establishes God’s kingship on earth. This defined their witness as a witness concerning the ultimate victory of God over evil through the deeds of Jesus. This witness as ethical activity cannot be achieved without the guidance and power of the Spirit. However, their witnessing and behaviour resulted in their suffering, since they took a stand against idolatry and immorality.³⁸

The basis of my motivation is derived from the seven letters in the book of Revelation and in particular chapters two and three. The dynamics of mission and ethics has a

³⁸ Van der Watt, (2006:628) *Identity, ethics, and ethos in the New Testament, a community of character: toward a constructive Christian social ethics.*

strong connotation of repentance, patience and works, as it is emphasised in the letters to the seven churches. They cannot be separated. In this scenario the author of the apocalypse address the seven churches in Revelation two and three as the person who is sent and embodies the presence and authority of the person who sends. The implied author calls himself John, and nature of his communication suggests that he writes from a position of leadership with respect to the people to whom he writes. Whether the author is John the apostle, the elder, the Baptist, or some other John, might in theory affect the mutual cognitive environment he shares with the audience and hence the audience's interpretation of the text.³⁹ Most commentators consider that John's social life is more important. He is usually considered to be a prophet of some standing among the communities to which he writes.⁴⁰ It must be stated clearly that God can send anybody on a mission, but most frequently it is to be an agent of his deliverance, or to be the mouthpiece for his message, or both. Wright (2010:209) argues that, "being chosen by God to be sent may seem to carry great honour and responsibility, but the more pressing reality was that it normally also involved suffering, rejection, persecution and sometimes death". The mission of God's people, then is not some external structure it is built by the church itself, sending out mission is a participation in the life of God. Furthermore, if the community has a mission to proclaim to the world, that community must be shaped by the gospel. Bosch (2014:2) states that, the church "has always needed apparent failure and suffering in order to be fully alive to its nature and mission". Adding to that view, the seven churches were more relevant to the mission because of internal and external challenges.

The fact is that the gospel summons people to repentance and radically changes personal and social ethic rules for those who want to benefit from the gospel and they must live an acceptable life before God.⁴¹

Hauerwas suggests that the characteristics of a Christian community is expected to be concerned about its own nature and witness - that of disciplined discipleship. I have argued that the seven letters of Revelation in the social context relates to social and political issues which motivated the mission and ethics in the book of Revelation particularly the seven proclamations.

Du Rand (2006:581) points out that, "two crucial elements for an understanding of

³⁹ Pattemore, (2004:52) *The People of the Apocalypse*.

⁴⁰ For discussions of authorship, generally adopting the view that John is an otherwise unknown prophet, see. Chapter 2.3 general and historical criticism on author, date and place

⁴¹ Wright, (2010:197) *The mission of God's people, a biblical theology of the Church's mission*.

witnessing (as mission) of the seven churches, the concept of witnessing according to Apocalypse is manifested in the *μάρτυρία* word group”. He further states that, “his second crucial element would probably focus on the semantic relation between ‘witness’ and ‘martyr’ that is between *μάρτυς* and martyrdom”. Furthermore, He argues that “religious and ethical witnessing takes place when someone testifies to the truth”. It can be in words or deeds. There is a unanimous consensus that the mission of the seven churches was motivated by the challenges which the believers had found themselves involved in. Further to that it was from the inward and the outward opposition that their characters were shaped into the likeness of their master.

3.3.1. The relation of mission and ethics in the book of Revelation: seven letters

To begin with, it must be stressed that, there is a dynamic relationship between ethics and mission. It is widely proposed that Revelation two and three is an example of the phenomenon of character formation and thus where we find the communities of faith. Ladd (1972:36) argues that “the letters are not structured in strict epistolary form; they are special messages addressed to the seven churches. The book as a whole is in the form of a letter”. Furthermore, there is a phrase that is repeated seven times, “He who has an ear, let him hear what the spirit says to the churches”. This suggests that the message in each letter is intended for a wider audience rather than the local church alone. It must be noted from this section that the seven letters are structured after a common plan. Each letter is introduced by a brief characterisation of Christ as he has been portrayed in the first chapter. This characterisation is adapted to the situation in the local church. The mission and ethics of revelation is deduced from the way Christ relates to each church. Each letter concludes with a word of promise, particularly to those who conquer.

The relation of mission and ethics can be traced from the major theme of the letters to the seven churches. Du Rand (2006:567) in remarks on the ethics and ethos of believers, he argues that, “the ethical role of the believers is determined by a call for endurance amid an intensive storm of opposition from the Roman imperial cult. The believers have directed their faith and hope towards the worship of Christ not Caesar, even if it involved martyrdom (Smalley 2005:3)”.⁴²

On further investigation of the seven churches Ladd (1972:337) suggests that, the

⁴² Du Rand, (2006:567) *Identity, ethics and ethos in New Testament studies, a community of character: toward a constructive Christian social ethics.*

letter to Ephesus (2:1-7), the great significance of the first letter is that Ephesus was quite certainly one of the cities to which Paul addressed the circular letter which we call Ephesians⁴³. The one who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden candlesticks.

Although the Book of Revelation focuses on the Apocalypse it does reveal the involvement of the characters of the audience which the author was addressing. Let me note that the good works of the Ephesians may be emanated from the mission they have consistently propagated amidst the common practices in Asia. Moreover, the good works of the Ephesians consisted in their firm opposition to false teachers who had arisen in Ephesus (see. Acts 20:29, 30), and their steadfast refusal to be led away by their teachings.

Therefore it is important to note that the character of the believers is identified by the language used in the seven letters. Note that in Revelation 2:2. “Works” is a broad term indicating not only good deeds but the entire course of life and conduct. The character of the believers is shaped by the (ἔργα) “works” they are engaging themselves with. Ladd (1972:38) argues that, “two nouns, “toil and patient endurance”, stand in opposition to “works”. According to Du Rand (2006:567) when he elaborates on the reason for taking the ethos of resistance, suggests that “some exegetes propose an ethos of resistance in the Apocalypse”. As a basis for my motivation in the letters to the seven churches, John exhorts his hearers to be steadfast in faith and behaviour and he fortifies their courage. Du Rand (2006:567) emphasises that, “the ethical role of believers is determined by a call for endurance amid an intensive storm of opposition of the Roman imperial cult”. The challenges of the seven churches were internal and external conflicts caused by the inward and outward groups who fostered accommodation within the Christian community. Du Rand (2006:567) argues that, “the ethical success of a community is judged by their works (2:19) which refers to ‘the total outcome of religious and moral action’”.

In connection with the loss of love which was considered a trivial matter; Ladd (1972:39) suggests that, “it is treated as though it involved a fall from Christian life. The Ephesians are warned to “remember” the fervour of their first experience, to repent because they have fallen into sin, and “do the works” they did at first, i.e., works of love”.

⁴³ As the RSV indicates in Eph. 1:1 the words of address “who are at Ephesus” are not found in the best Greek texts.

At this stage, then an important question arises. Who were the false teachers who were resisted at Ephesus? Are they the same group defined as “Nicolaitans⁴⁴”? John refers again to these false teachers in the letter to Pergamum where he gives us more information about them, who are the Nicolaitans? Ladd (1972:40) explains that:

These constituted a heretical sect in the early church about which we know nothing apart from the references in Revelation. Ancient church fathers, beginning with Irenaeus, speculated that they formed a heretical sect which was founded by Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch (see: Acts 6:5) who was one of the seven. But we have no sure information to this effect.

In the end, it’s worth it to note that each of the seven letters concludes with this admonition to hear what the prophets write. Ladd (1972:40) finds the following closing remarks, “in these admonitions John addresses his exhortations not only to the local church but the entire Christian community. The emphasis upon hearing rather than reading points to the fact that the contents of the letters to the seven churches were designed to be read in public worship”.

It is interesting and worth noting that the letter concludes with a promise to him who conquers. Ladd (1972:40) suggests that “this note of victory resounds in each of the seven letters”. The conqueror is promised that he will eat of the tree of life, this connotation is found on the last chapter (22:14) which becomes the biblical way of expressing the promise of eternal life.

Bearing in mind the possibility of continuity with the relation between mission and ethics the letter to Smyrna (2:8-11) will be examined. In appealing to this church, the character of Christ is stressed in these words, “These things saith the first and the last, who was dead, and lived” (2:8). The commendation for this church and consequently the correction can more properly be regarded as encouragement. “Fear not” (2:10) is the watchword for Smyrna. The prediction of persecution is accompanied with an application of the character of the Lord to the existing situation. The challenge follows the same theme: “He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death” (2:11). The victor will be delivered from the peril of destruction which awaits the wicked (21:8). The character of Christ supplies just such a weapon “the sharp two-edged sword.” The sword was a symbol of power by which he could meet the Roman authority, and it was also a symbol of the word of Christ, whose penetrative truth

⁴⁴ Nicolaitans: These constituted a heretical sect in the early church about which we know nothing apart from the references in Revelation.

could expose, dissect, and slay all falsehood. The commendation of the church at Pergamum betrays a moral laxity which had crept into it. The teaching of the Nicolaitans was an exaggeration of the doctrine of Christian liberty which attempted an ethical compromise with common practice. Whereas in the Ephesian church the Nicolaitans were known by their works, in Pergamum they were known by their teaching. And it is possible that the same group was represented in Thyatira by “the woman Jezebel, who...who seduces my servants to commit fornication and to eat things sacrificed to idols” (2:20). In Ephesus they are outside the church, known by their works, in Pergamum they are still an alien sect, but few grasp their teaching; in Thyatira their doctrines are propagated by a person within the group who is at least tolerated as one of them. The last of the seven churches is introduced by Christ in the character of “the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God” (3:14). In the church of Laodicea he sees nothing in it worthy of commendation. In conclusion these letters tell us specific facts about the local communities and their experiences.

3.3.2. Lessons reflecting mission and ethics from the book of Revelation.

Let me first indicate at this stage the lessons reflecting the mission and ethics of the Book of Revelation which was derived from the ethical response of the community of believers under such pressing conditions found in Asia Minor.

Reddish (2001:25) suggests that, “the ethical role of the believers is determined by a call for endurance amid an intensive storm of opposition of the Roman imperial cult”. The core lessons of mission and ethics are derived from the survey of the seven letters in Revelation two and three. It could be explained by an intensive investigation into the seven letters within the phenomena of a socio-historical genre.

Du Rand (2006:567) argues that, “the ethical success of the community is judged by their ‘works’ (2:19) which refers to ‘the total outcome of religious and moral action’”. Everyone will be requited according to their ‘works’ (2:23; 29:12; 22:12). The expectation of the end provides very strong motives for ethical ‘works’. The victor, who overcomes tribulations and struggles through belief and ethical ‘works’, is promised a reward (2:7, 17; 3:5, 12, 21). From the above-mentioned lessons of the ethical conduct of the church, it is evident that most of the attention on the church is derived from the churches struggle to resist common practice. Therefore, it is proper to conclude this portion, as follows: the character of the church is shaped by inward

and outward opposition and witnessing becomes a result of the purity of its believers.

3.3.3. The influence of messages of Revelation on mission and ethics of contemporary Christians.

Let me point out from the beginning that the influence of the messages of Revelation on mission and ethic is developed by the progressive and integrated fashion throughout its entire scope. Slater (1999:149) observes that, “seven proclamations letters of Revelation 2-3 assume the lordship of Christ, the, ‘one like a son of man’, to give directions and to judge these communities”.⁴⁵ He further states that the letters are natural extensions of Revelation 1:13-20. Slater (1999:149) suggests that, “Revelation 1:13-20 presents the task, Revelation 2:1-3:22 comprises of the task itself. To study the letters in isolation from the call and mission of John, or vice versa, misses a vital part of the total vision”.

Mission and ethics are inseparable in Revelation. Both describe the connection between Christ and the community he is addressing in Revelation. First, as stated previously, every letter assumes the lordship of Christ. Christ is God’s divine agency figure who sends God’s message through John to the churches (1:9-20). He is a Son of God (2:8), possesses the Spirit of God(3:1), maintains a faithful and true witness to God and rules the universe(3:14). Slater (1999:150) argues that, “Christ has supra-human powers”. I agree with Slater that the seven letters were written to strengthen the communities of faith, the fact that Christ introduces himself according to the situation or experience of a particular church. He is omniscient, able to see the past, present and the future (2:20-23). Yet Christ does not force anyone to repent (3:20). As their Lord, Christ evaluates the behaviour of the churches and applies different therapeutic strategies in order to correct different situations. He exhorts (2:5, 7, 9-11, 12, 17, 19; 3:13, 18, 22), chastens and warns (see. 2:4-6, 14-16; 3:1-2, 15-15), praises (2:2-3,6,13; 3:4,4,8) and promises to save (2:7,10,11,17,26,28; 3:5,12,26-28; 3:5, 12-13,21). His preview of the community is complete; his authority to act is unquestionable. Last, faithful Christian witnessing is the key issue in the letter and each letter expounds what form a faithful Christian witness should take in each context, whether facing inward or outward pressures.

⁴⁵ Slater, (1999:149-150) *Christ and community*.

3.3.4. Evaluation and concluding summary

My conclusion at this stage in the evaluation of the seven letters, one should note an important element with regard to a specific situation in the church. Finally, however, all seven messages end with encouragement and an eschatological promise. Whether a church's need is repentance or simply for endurance, all are invited to 'conquer' so that they may inherit the eschatological promises. The following lessons can be abstracted from the messages to the seven churches in Asia. Aune suggests that:

The central section of each of the letters to the seven churches has a basically parenetic or hortatory function. Each Christian community addressed, or constituent groups within those communities, is encouraged to fully accept the norms and values of the Christian faith.

He further explains that, those who deserve praise for their obedience and faithfulness are assured salvation and blessing if they persevere.

According to Aune (1997:273) the following patterns in the seven messages is identified as (1) praise (if appropriate), (2) censure (if appropriate; often both praise and censure are present), (3) demand for repentance, which is sanctioned by (4) the threat of judgment, which is rewarded by (5) the promise of salvation. The basic pattern which suggested, however, finds expression in each letter. Incidentally, I agree with Fiorenza (1991:53) that the seven letters of Revelation indicates that some of the churches have already experienced discrimination and harassment from their Jewish co-religionists and particularly from their Asian-Roman neighbours and provincial authorities.

Our sociological examination of the letters has indicated some other possible social details. Slater (1999:150) explains that, "six of the seven letters addressed the issues internal to the churches, only the church of Smyrna is exempted from internal oppression". He further suggests that Christians in Smyrna have been misrepresented to the Roman authorities as a social menace, and John anticipates the Christians' eventual imprisonment. My position at this stage is that the letters were written to strengthen the communities of faith under the oppression from both an internal and external religio-political situation (2:10).

3.3.5. Summary

The important lessons that one can learn from the seven proclamations in Revelation two and three which are related to mission and ethics are: first and foremost, the letters were written primarily to strengthen the inner spiritual lives of the churches. Slater (1999:149) in relation to the letters to the seven churches suggests that, “a faithful witnessing is a central issue and that co-regency with Christ and or God plays a key role in maintaining the sacred cosmos by relating Christ and community in Revelation”. However, in this instance, witnessing (mission) becomes a response of the communities of faith in Revelation two and three.

3.4. Preliminary selection and Greek demarcation of the passage

At this stage the preliminary selection of the passage has been completed. This chapter has attempted to give a brief overview of the Greek demarcation of the passage as it is stated in Du Toit (2009:124).

Revelation 2: 1-29 (KJV)

Greek text of Revelation 2-3 (interlinear Greek-English New Testament)

2.1. *Τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Ἐφέσῳ ἐκκλησίας γράψον·*

Τάδε λέγει ὁ κρατῶν τοὺς ἑπτὰ ἀστέρας ἐν τῇ δεξιᾷ αὐτοῦ, ὁ περιπατῶν ἐν μέσῳ τῶν ἑπτὰ λυχνιῶν τῶν χρυσῶν·

2. *Οἶδα τὰ ἔργα σου καὶ τὸν κόπον καὶ τὴν ὑπομονήν σου καὶ ὅτι οὐ δύνη βαστάσαι κακοῦς, καὶ ἐπέρασας τοὺς λέγοντας ἕα υτοὺς ἀποστόλους καὶ οὐκ εἰσὶν καὶ εὗρες αὐτοὺς ψευδεῖς,*

3. *Καὶ ὑπομονήν ἔχεις καὶ ἐβάστασας διὰ τὸ ὄνομά μου καὶ οὐ κεκοπίακες.*

4. *Ἀλλὰ ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ ὅτι τὴν ἀγάπην σου τὴν πρώτην ἀφήκες.*

5. *Μνημόνευε οὖν πόθεν πέπτωκας καὶ μετανόησον καὶ τὰ πρῶτα ἔργα ποιήσον· εἰ δὲ μὴ, ἔρχομαί σοι καὶ κινήσω τὴν λυχνίαν σου ἐκ τοῦ τόπου αὐτῆς, ἐὰν μὴ μετανοήσης.*

6. *Ἀλλὰ τοῦτο ἔχεις, ὅτι μισεῖς τὰ ἔργα τῶν Νικολαϊτῶν ἃ κἀγὼ μισῶ.*

7. *Ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις. Τῷ νικῶντι δώσω αὐτῷ φαγεῖν ἐκ τοῦ ζύλου τῆς ζωῆς, ὃ ἐστὶν ἐν τῷ παραδείσῳ τοῦ θεοῦ.*

8. *Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Σμύρνῃ ἐκκλησίας γράψον·*

Τάδε λέγει ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὁ ἔσχατος, ὃς ἐγένετο νεκρὸς καὶ ἔζησεν·

9. *οἶδά σου τὴν θλιψὶν καὶ τὴν πτωχείαν, ἀλλὰ πλούσιος εἶ, καὶ τὴν βλασφημίαν ἐκ τῶν λεγόντων Ἰουδαίους εἶναι ἑαυτοὺς καὶ οὐκ εἰσὶν ἀλλὰ συναγωγή τοῦ σατανᾶ.*

10. *μηδὲν φοβοῦ ἃ μέλλεις πάσχειν. ἰδοὺ μέλλει βάλλειν ὁ διάβολος ἐξ ὑμῶν εἰς φυλακὴν ἵνα πειρασθῆτε καὶ ἔξετε θλιψὶν ἡμερῶν δέκα. γίνου πιστὸς ἄχρι θανάτου, καὶ δώσω σοι τὸν στέφανον τῆς ζωῆς.*

11. *Ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις. Ὁ νικῶν οὐ μὴ ἀδικηθῆ ἔκ τοῦ θανάτου τοῦ δευτέρου.*

12. *Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Περγάμῳ ἐκκλησίας γράψον·*

Τάδε λέγει ὁ ἔχων τὴν ῥομφαίαν τὴν δίστομον τὴν ὀξεῖαν·

13. *οἶδα ποῦ κατοικεῖς, ὅπου ὁ θρόνος τοῦ σατανᾶ, καὶ κρατεῖς τὸ ὄνομά μου καὶ οὐκ ἠρνήσω τὴν πίστιν μου καὶ ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις Ἀντιπᾶς ὁ μάρτυς μου ὁ πιστὸς μου, ὃς*

ἀπεκτάνθη παρ' ὑμῖν, ὅπου ὁ σατανᾶς κατοικεῖ.

14. ἀλλ' ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ ὀλίγα ὅτι ἔχεις ἐκεῖ κρατοῦντας τὴν διδαχὴν Βαλαάμ, ὃς ἐδίδασκεν τῷ Βαλὰκ βαλεῖν σκάνδαλον ἐνώπιον τῶν υἱῶν Ἰσραὴλ φαγεῖν εἰδωλόθουτα καὶ πορνεῦσαι.

15. οὕτως ἔχεις καὶ σὺ κρατοῦντας τὴν διδαχὴν [τῶν] Νικολαϊτῶν ὁμοίως.

16. μετανόησον οὖν· εἰ δὲ μὴ, ἔρχομαί σοι ταχὺ καὶ πολεμήσω μετ' αὐτῶν ἐν τῇ ῥομφαίᾳ τοῦ στόματός μου.

17. Ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις. Τῷ νικῶντι δώσω αὐτῷ τοῦ μάννα τοῦ κεκρυμμένου καὶ δώσω αὐτῷ ψῆφον λευκὴν, καὶ ἐπὶ τὴν ψῆφον ὄνομα καινὸν γεγραμμένον ὃ οὐδεὶς οἶδεν εἰ μὴ ὁ λαμβάνων.

18. Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Θυατείροις ἐκκλησίας γράψον·

Τάδε λέγει ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ, ὁ ἔχων τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς αὐτοῦ ὡς φλόγα πυρὸς καὶ οἱ πόδες αὐτοῦ ὅμοιοι χαλκολιβάνῳ·

19. 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.

20. ἀλλὰ ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ ὅτι ἀφεῖς τὴν γυναῖκα Ἰεζάβελ, ἣ λέγουσα ἑαυτὴν προφητικὴν καὶ διδάσκει καὶ πλανᾷ τοὺς ἐμοὺς δούλους πορνεῦσαι καὶ φαγεῖν εἰδωλόθουτα.

21. καὶ ἔδωκα αὐτῇ χρόνον ἵνα μετανοήσῃ, καὶ οὐ θέλει μετανοῆσαι ἐκ τῆς πορνείας αὐτῆς. 22. ἰδοὺ βάλλω αὐτὴν εἰς κλίνην καὶ τοὺς μοιχεύοντας μετ' αὐτῆς εἰς θλίψιν μεγάλην, ἐὰν μὴ μετανοήσωσιν ἐκ τῶν ἔργων αὐτῆς,

23. καὶ τὰ τέκνα αὐτῆς ἀποκτενῶ ἐν θανάτῳ. καὶ γινώσκονται πᾶσαι αἱ ἐκκλησίαι ὅτι ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ ἔραυνῶν νεφροὺς καὶ καρδίας, καὶ δώσω ὑμῖν ἐκάστῳ κατὰ τὰ ἔργα ὑμῶν.

24. 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,

25. πλὴν ὃ ἔχετε κρατήσατε ἄχρι[ς] οὗ ἂν ἦξω.

26. Καὶ ὁ νικῶν καὶ ὁ τηρῶν ἄχρι τέλους τὰ ἔργα μου, δώσω αὐτῷ ἐξουσίαν ἐπὶ τῶν ἐθνῶν 27. καὶ ποιμανεῖ αὐτοὺς ἐν ῥάβδῳ σιδηρᾷ ὡς τὰ σκεύη τὰ κεραμικὰ συντριβεται,

28. ὡς κἀγὼ εἴληφα παρὰ τοῦ πατρός μου, καὶ δώσω αὐτῷ τὸν ἀστέρα τὸν πρωϊνόν.

29. Ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις.

3.1. Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Σάρδεσιν ἐκκλησίας γράψον·

Τάδε λέγει ὁ ἔχων τὰ ἑπτὰ πνεύματα τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τοὺς ἑπτὰ ἀστέρας· οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα ὅτι ὄνομα ἔχεις ὅτι ζῆς, καὶ νεκρὸς εἶ.

2. γίνου γρηγορῶν καὶ στήρισον τὰ λοιπὰ ἃ ἔμελλον ἀποθανεῖν, οὐ γὰρ εὕρηκά σου τὰ

ἔργα πεπληρωμένα ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ μου.

3. μνημόνευε οὖν πῶς εἴληφας καὶ ἤκουσας καὶ τήρει καὶ μετανόησον. ἐὰν οὖν μὴ γρηγορήσης, ἦξω ὡς κλέπτης, καὶ οὐ μὴ γνῶς ποίαν ὥραν ἦξω ἐπὶ σέ.

4. ἀλλὰ ἔχεις ὀλίγα ὀνόματα ἐν Σάρδεσιν ἃ οὐκ ἐμόλυναν τὰ ἱμάτια αὐτῶν, καὶ περιπατήσουσιν μετ' ἐμοῦ ἐν λευκοῖς, ὅτι ἄξιοί εἰσιν.

5. Ὁ νικῶν οὕτως περιβαλεῖται ἐν ἱματίοις λευκοῖς καὶ οὐ μὴ ἐξαλείψω τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ἐκ τῆς βίβλου τῆς ζωῆς καὶ ὁμολογήσω τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ἐνώπιον τοῦ πατρὸς μου καὶ ἐνώπιον τῶν ἀγγέλων αὐτοῦ.

6 Ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις.

7 Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Φιλαδελφείᾳ ἐκκλησίας γράψον·

Τάδε λέγει ὁ ἅγιος, ὁ ἀληθινός, ὁ ἔχων τὴν κλεῖν Δαυὶδ, ὁ ἀνοίγων καὶ οὐδεὶς κλείσει καὶ κλείων καὶ οὐδεὶς ἀνοίγει·

8. οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα, ἰδοὺ δέδωκα ἐνώπιόν σου θύραν ἠνεωγμένην, ἣν οὐδεὶς δύναται κλεῖσαι αὐτήν, ὅτι μικρὰν ἔχεις δύναμιν καὶ ἐτήρησάς μου τὸν λόγον καὶ οὐκ ἠρνήσω τὸ ὄνομά μου.

9. ἰδοὺ διδῶ ἐκ τῆς συναγωγῆς τοῦ σατανᾶ τῶν λεγόντων ἑαυτοὺς Ἰουδαίους εἶναι, καὶ οὐκ εἰσὶν ἀλλὰ ψεύδονται. ἰδοὺ ποιήσω αὐτοὺς ἵνα ἦξουσιν καὶ προσκυνήσουσιν ἐνώπιον τῶν ποδῶν σου καὶ γνῶσιν ὅτι ἐγὼ ἠγάπησά σε.

10. ὅτι ἐτήρησας τὸν λόγον τῆς ὑπομονῆς μου, κἀγὼ σε τηρήσω ἐκ τῆς ὥρας τοῦ πειρασμοῦ τῆς μελλούσης ἔρχεσθαι ἐπὶ τῆς οἰκουμένης ὅλης πειράσαι τοὺς κατοικοῦντας ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς. 11. ἔρχομαι ταχύ· κράτει ὃ ἔχεις, ἵνα μηδεὶς λάβῃ τὸν στέφανόν σου.

12. Ὁ νικῶν ποιήσω αὐτὸν στῦλον ἐν τῷ ναῷ τοῦ θεοῦ μου καὶ ἔξω οὐ μὴ ἐξέλθῃ ἔτι καὶ γράψω ἐπ' αὐτὸν τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ θεοῦ μου καὶ τὸ ὄνομα τῆς πόλεως τοῦ θεοῦ μου, τῆς καινῆς Ἱερουσαλὴμ ἢ καταβαίνουσα ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ μου, καὶ τὸ ὄνομά μου τὸ καινόν.

13. Ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις.

14. Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Λαοδικείᾳ ἐκκλησίας γράψον·

Τάδε λέγει ὁ ἀμὴν, ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστὸς καὶ ἀληθινός, ἡ ἀρχὴ τῆς κτίσεως τοῦ θεοῦ·

15. οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα ὅτι οὔτε ψυχρὸς εἶ οὔτε ζεστός. ὄφελον ψυχρὸς ἢ ἢ ζεστός.

16. οὕτως ὅτι χλιαρὸς εἶ καὶ οὔτε ζεστός οὔτε ψυχρὸς, μέλλω σε ἐμέσαι ἐκ τοῦ στόματός μου.

17. ὅτι λέγεις ὅτι πλούσιός εἰμι καὶ πεπλούτηκα καὶ οὐδὲν χρεῖαν ἔχω, καὶ οὐκ οἶδας ὅτι σὺ εἶ ὁ ταλαίπωρος καὶ ἐλεεινὸς καὶ πτωχὸς καὶ τυφλὸς καὶ γυμνός,

18. συμβουλεύω σοι ἀγοράσαι παρ' ἐμοῦ χρυσίον πεπυρωμένον ἐκ πυρὸς ἵνα πλουτήσης,

καὶ ἱμάτια λευκὰ ἵνα περιβάλῃ καὶ μὴ φανερωθῇ ἡ αἰσχὺνὴ τῆς γυμνότητός σου, καὶ κολλ[ο]ύριον ἐγγρῖσαι τοὺς ὀφθαλμούς σου ἵνα βλέπῃς.

19. ἐγὼ ὅσους ἐὰν φιλῶ ἐλέγχω καὶ παιδεύω· ζήλευε οὖν καὶ μετανόησον.

20 Ἴδου ἔστηκα ἐπὶ τὴν θύραν καὶ κρούω· ἐάν τις ἀκούσῃ τῆς φωνῆς μου καὶ ἀνοίξῃ τὴν θύραν, [καὶ] εἰσελεύσομαι πρὸς αὐτὸν καὶ δειπνήσω μετ' αὐτοῦ καὶ αὐτὸς μετ' ἐμοῦ.

21 Ὁ νικῶν δώσω αὐτῷ καθίσαι μετ' ἐμοῦ ἐν τῷ θρόνῳ μου, ὡς κἀγὼ ἐνίκησα καὶ ἐκάθισα μετὰ τοῦ πατρὸς μου ἐν τῷ θρόνῳ αὐτοῦ.

22 Ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις.

Revelation 2-3. The passage of scripture is taken from King James Version (KJV).

1. "Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; these things says he that holds the seven stars in his right hand, which walks in the midst of seven golden candlesticks".
2. "I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tasted those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars".
3. "And you have persevered and have patience, and have labored in my name's sake and have not become weary".
4. "Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love".
5. "Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place unless you repent".
6. "But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate".
7. "He who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat in the tree of life which is in the midst of the paradise of God".
8. And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write, "These things say the first and the last, which was dead and come to life".
9. "I know your works, tribulation and poverty (but you are rich); and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not but are a synagogue of Satan".
10. "Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed the devil is about to throw some of you in prison, That you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days, Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life".
11. He who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the church. "He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death".

12. And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: “These things he who has the sharp two- edged sword”.

13. “I know your works, and where you will dwell, where Satan’s throne is, and you hold fast to my name, and did not deny my faith even in the days in which Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells”.

14. “But I have a few things against you, because you have those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and commit sexual immorality”.

15. “Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate”.

16. “Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth”.

17. “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches, to he who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it”.

18. And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write, “These things say the Son of God who has eyes like a flame of fire, and his feet are like brass”

19. “I know your work, love, faith, service, and your patience, and as for your works, the last are more than the first”.

20. “ Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow the woman Jezebel who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce my servants to commit sexual immorality and eat food sacrificed to idols”.

21. “And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality but she did not repent”.

22. “Indeed I will cast her into a sick bed and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds”.

23. “I will kill her children with death and all the churches will know that I am he who searches the mind and the hearts: and I will give each one of you according to your works”.

24. “ Now to you I say and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine, who have not known the depths of Satan, as they say, I will put on you no other burden”.

25. “But hold fast to what you have until I come”.

26. “And he who overcomes, and keeps my work until the end, to him I will give power

over the nations”.

27. “He shall rule them with a rod of iron; they shall be dashed to pieces like the potter’s vessels to shivers: even as I also have received from my Father”.

28. “And I will give him the morning star”.

29. “He who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches”.

Revelation 3:1-22.

1. And to the angel of the church in Sardis write, “These things say he who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: I know your works, that you have name that you are alive, but you are dead”.

2. “Be watchful and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God.”

3. “Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent, therefore if you will not watch I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you”.

4. “You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments: and they shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy”.

5. “He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name in the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels”.

6. “He who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches”.

7. And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: “These things says he who is holy, He who is true, He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens”.

8. “I know your works, see have set before you an open door, and no one shall shut it, for you have a little strength, have kept my word, and have not denied my name”.

9. “Indeed I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and they are not, but lie indeed, I will make them come and worship before your feet, and know that I have loved you”.

10. “Because you have kept my command to persevere I will also keep you from the hour of trials which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth”.

11. “Behold I am coming quickly, hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown”.

12. “He who overcomes I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go out no more, I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, New Jerusalem, which come down out of heaven from My God, and I will write on him my new name”.

13. “He who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches”.

14. And to the angel of the church of Laodicea write, “These things say the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of creation of God”.

15. “I know your works that you are neither cold nor hot, I could wish you were cold or hot”.

16. “So then, because you are lukewarm, neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of my mouth”.

17. “Because you say, I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked”.

18. “I counsel you to buy of me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich, and white garments that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see”.

19. “As many as I love, I rebuke, and chasten therefore be zealous and repent.”

20. “Behold I stand at the door and knock, if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with me”.

21. “To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with me on my throne, as I overcame and sat down with My Father on his throne”.

22. “He who has ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches”.

3.4.2. First Reading

This section attempts to investigate Revelation two and three and particularly the messages to the seven churches with a view to grasp the key words used by the author in conveying his message. It serves as the framework within the foundation of character alignment in the context of the seven churches of Revelation two and three.

3.4.3. Introduction

This investigation has further revealed the fact that the verbs repent, patience and works are the basis of an implicit character formation in Revelation two and three. I have already stated that this study will be an exegetical method which is also based on

the approach of Hauerwas cited by Hays (2006:12),⁴⁶ where he emphasises the formation of character-in contrast to conceptions of ethics that stress rules, principles, and decisions. This brings important remarks in a perspective of character formation which plays a major role in understanding identity, ethics, ethos and mission particularly from the open letters of the seven congregations in Revelation two and three. It is of vital importance to identify and to analyse the key words of Revelation two and three of the apocalyptic book of the New Testament. Furthermore, it will be difficult to discover the identity, ethics, ethos and mission if we neglect the authorship of the book of Revelation. Before identifying and discussing some key words and themes of the book of Revelation, it is vital that we consider briefly the relationship between the author and the seven congregations. These we believe will help us to be able to understand the identity, ethics, ethos and the mission of these texts.

3.4.4. Revelation 2:1-29, 3:1-22.

At this stage every word in Greek is identified and is interpreted, a word for word translation in Greek has been completed below. Du Toit (2009:124) suggests that, “a close reading of the text as if for the first time in order to identify difficult words, grammatical issues, idiomatic expressions and when they have been identified they need to be resolved, as far as possible, with the help of dictionaries, handbook on grammar and style etc.”⁴⁷

English Bible Verse	Greek Bible Word	morphology
1. Unto the angel	Τῷ ἀγγέλῳ	Dative, singular, masculine
2. of the church	ἐκκλησίας	Accusative, plural, feminine
3. write	Γράψον	Aorist, active, imperative, 2nd person, singular.
4. says	λέγει	Present, active, indicative, 3 rd person, singular
5. (one) holding	Ὁ κρατῶν	Present, active, participle, nominative, singular, masculine

⁴⁶ Hays, (2006:12) *Identity, ethics and ethos in New Testament Studies, a community of character: toward a constructive Christian social ethics.*

⁴⁷ Du Toit, (2009:124) *Focusing on the message.*

6. the seven stars	<i>τούς ἑπτάαστέρας</i>	Accusative, plural, masculine
7. in	<i>ἐν</i>	Preposition, dative
8. right hand	<i>δεξιᾶ</i>	Nominative, singular, feminine
9. walking	<i>Περιπατων</i>	Present, active, participle, nominative, singular, masculine
10. lampstand	<i>Λυχνιων</i>	Noun, genitive, plural, feminine
11. I know	<i>οἶδα</i>	Verb, perfect, active, indicative, 1 st person, singular
12. your works	<i>ἔργα</i>	nominative, plural, neuter
13. your labour	<i>τὸν κόπον</i>	Dative, accusative, singular, masculine
14. the patient	<i>τὴν ὑπομονήν</i>	Accusative, singular, feminine
15. put up with	<i>Βαστάσαι</i>	Aorist, active, infinitive
16. those who are evil	<i>κακούς</i>	Accusative, plural, masculine
17. have tested	<i>ἐπείρασας</i>	Aorist, active, indicative, indicative, 2 nd singular
18. apostles	<i>ἀποστόλους</i>	Nominative, masculine, plural
19. to be false	<i>Ψευδεῖς</i>	Accusative, plural, masculine
20. patience	<i>ὑπομονήν</i>	Accusative, singular, feminine.
21. borne hardship	<i>ἐβάστασας</i>	Verb, aorist, active, indicative
22. grown weary	<i>Κεκοπίακες</i>	Verb, perfect, active, indicative, 2 nd person, singular
23. love	<i>ἀγάπην</i>	Noun, accusative, singular, feminine
24. you have left	<i>ἀφῆκες</i>	Aorist, active, indicative, 2 nd person, singular.
25. you have fallen	<i>πέπτωκας</i>	Perfect, active, indicative, 2 person, singular
26. and repent	<i>Καί μετανόησον</i>	Aorist, active, infinitive
27. and do the works	<i>Καί τὰ ἔργα</i>	Accusative, plural, neuter
28. I will come	<i>ἔρχομαί</i>	Verb, perfect, middle, indicative, 1 st person, singular
29. and remove	<i>Καί κινήσω</i>	Verb, future, active, indicative, 1 st person,

		singular
30. lampstand	<i>Λυχνίσω</i>	Noun, accusative, singular, feminine.
31. its place	<i>Τόπου</i>	Noun, genitive, singular, masculine
32. you repent	<i>μετανόησον</i>	Aorist, active infinitive.
33. you hate the work of the	<i>μισεῖς τὰ ἔργα τῶν</i>	Verb, present, active, indicative, 2 nd person singular (nominative, plural, neuter)
34. Nicolaitans	<i>Νικολαίτων</i>	Noun, genitive, plural, masculine
35. which I also hate	<i>κἀγὼ μισῶ</i>	Verb, present, active, indicative, 1 st person.
36. I know your affliction	<i>οἶδάσουθλιψιν</i>	Perfect, active, indicative, 1 st person singular. (accusative, singular, feminine)
37. your poverty	<i>Τὴν πτωχείαν</i>	Accusative, singular, feminine
38. the slander	<i>Τὴν βλασθημίαν</i>	Noun, accusative, singular, feminine
39. fear nothing	<i>Μηδὲνφοβοῦ</i>	Accusative, adverb, singular, neuter. (Verb, perfect, present, middle, 2 nd person, singular.
40.that you may be tried	<i>πειρασθητε</i>	Aorist, passive, subjective, 2 nd person, plural.
41. affliction	<i>Θλιψιν</i>	Accusative, singular, feminine.
42. faithful	<i>Πιστος</i>	Nominative, singular, Masculine.
43. crown	<i>Στεφανον</i>	Accusative, singular, masculine
44.He who overcomes	<i>Νικάω</i>	Future, active,indicative,2 nd person, singular
45. Shall not be injured	<i>ἀδικέω</i>	Present, nominative, singular, masculine
46. the sword	<i>τὴν ῥομφαίαν</i>	Nominative, singular, feminine
47. Two edged	<i>Δίστομος</i>	Nominative, singular, feminine
48. you dwells	<i>κατοικεῖς,</i>	Press,active,indicative,2 nd person, singular
49. Did not deny	<i>ἀρνέομαιποῦ</i>	Present, middle, infinite
50. Antipas	<i>Ἀντίπας,</i>	Nominative, singular, masculine
51. My witness	<i>μάρτυς πρωτόμαρτυς</i>	Nominative, singular, masculine

52. Was killed	<i>ἀποκτέννω</i>	Future,active,indicative,1 st person, singular
53. Teaching	<i>Διδαχή</i>	Nominative. singular, feminine
54. Balaam	<i>Βαλαάμ</i>	Pronoun, name, indeclaration
55. a snare	<i>σκάνδαλον</i>	Nominative, singular, neuter
56. Sacrificed to idols	<i>εἰδωλόθυτος</i>	Nominative, singular, neuter
57. She mightily repent	<i>Μετανοέω</i>	Aorist, active, infinite
58.to commit fornication	<i>Πορνεύω</i>	Aorist, active, infinite
59. Manna	<i>μάννα</i>	Noun
60. I hate	<i>μισέω</i>	Present,active,indicative,3 rd person, singular
61. I will make war	<i>Πολεμέω</i>	Future,act,indicative,1 st person, singular
62. I will give	<i>δίδωμι</i>	Press, active, indicative, 1 st person, singular
63. pebble	<i>ψῆφος</i>	Accusative, singular, feminine

64. Eyes	<i>ὄφθαλμός</i>	Nominative, singular, masculine
65. Service	<i>διακονία δωροφορία</i>	Nominative, singular, feminine
66. Jezebel	<i>Ἰεζάβελ</i>	Pronoun, name, indeclaration
67. a prophetess	<i>προφήτις</i>	Nominative, singular, feminine
68. to mislead	<i>Πλανάω</i>	Nominative, singular, feminine
69. bondman	<i>δοῦλον</i>	Accusative, singular, masculine
70. commit adultery	<i>Μοιχεύω</i>	Present, active participle, accusative, plural, masculine
71. children	<i>Τέκνον</i>	Nominative, singular, neuter
72.authority	<i>ἐξουσία</i>	nominative, singular, feminine
73. Sardis	<i>Σάρδεις</i>	Accusative, plural, feminine
74. That thou livest	<i>ὅτιζάω</i>	Conjunct,vocative,2 nd person
75. dead	<i>Νεκρός</i>	Nominative, singular, masculine
76. watchful	<i>γρηγορέω</i>	Aorist,active,subjective,2 nd singular
77. strengthen	<i>Στηρίζω</i>	Aorist, active, infinitive

78. that remain	λοιπός	Accusative, singular, neuter.
79. you have received	Λαμβάνω	Press,active,indicative,1 st person, singular
80.shall be clothed	περιβάλλω	Aorist, middle, imperative, 2 nd person, singular
81. Philadelphia	Φιλαδέλφεια	Nominative, singular, feminine
82. Laodicea	Λαοδικεύς	Dative, singular, feminine
83. cold	ψυχρός	Nominative, singular, masculine

3.4.4. Demarcation and textual Structure of Revelation 2-3

At this stage a demarcation of the passage will be carried out. Du Toit (2009:125) suggests that “after the first reading we should check the demarcation of the passage in our Greek text”. Our New Testament documents are divided into chapters, periscopes, paragraphs and verse. Typically a chapter may consist of a number of periscopes, a periscope of a number of paragraphs and paragraphs a number of verses. (Du Toit: 2009:125).⁴⁸

There are a number of dynamics that one must consider under this section. For a sound exegesis, Du Toit (2009) argues that characteristically a chapter may consist of a number of pericopes; a periscope will consist of a number of paragraphs and a paragraph of a number of verses.

Aune (1997:119) suggests that “Revelation consists of major sections that form the structure of book.” The seven congregations may be divided in seven sub-units, which are grouped together into verses and paragraphs”. This chapter is important, after identifying the sub-units of the chapters I will then look at the parallelism in the messages of the seven proclamations. For demarcation of Revelation two and three, I basically follow Aune’s (1997:120) frame of work. For the demarcation of Revelation 2:1-29, 3:1-22

- 1 Revelation 2:1-7. The proclamation to Ephesus
2. Revelation 2:8-11. The proclamation to Smyrna

⁴⁸ Du Toit (ed.), (2009:125) *Focusing on the message*. The ideal would be a New Testament with divisions based on sound linguistic principles. This implies that not only present chapter divisions, but also their sub-unity down to the very verses should be reconsidered.

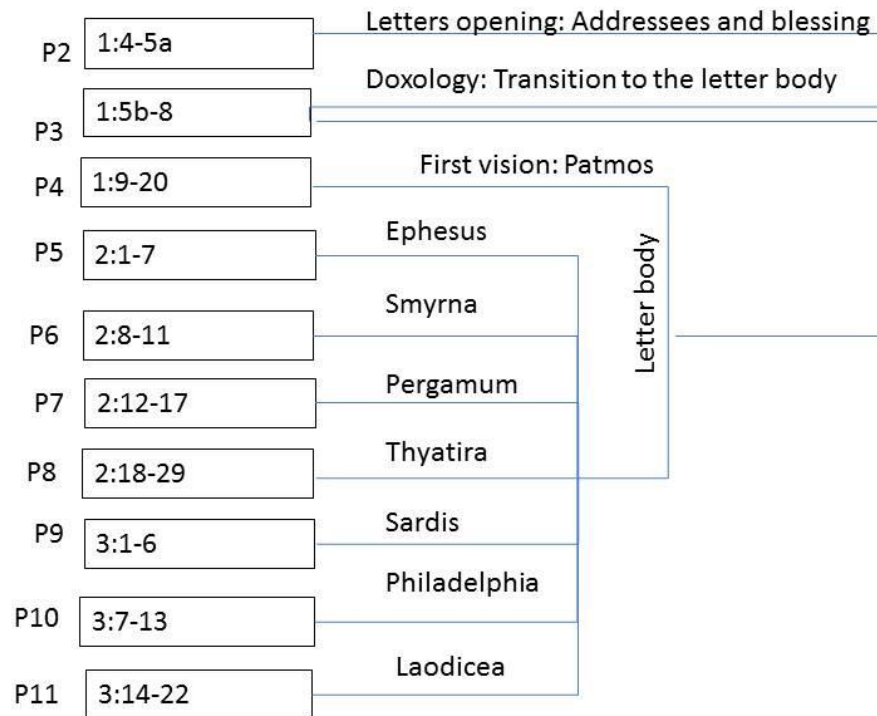
3. Revelation 2:12-17. The proclamation to Pergamum
4. Revelation 2:18-29. The proclamation to Thyatira
5. Revelation 3:1-6. The proclamation to Sardis
6. Revelation 3:7-13. The proclamation to Philadelphia
7. Revelation 3:14-22. The proclamation to Laodicea

Du Toit (2009:132) suggests that, “certain literary features provide us with significant criteria for text demarcation”. Thus, what we have here, is the following, Van Schaik (1988:19) suggests that, “what is usually called the first of these visions, is contained within a larger first main section of the book which is presented in the form of the letter”. This composition is discussed below chapters 1-3 (see diagram 1).

Part1. Revelation 1:4-3:22

Below is the summary on how the Book of Revelation can be demarcated particularly the seven churches. It must be noted that the entire Book of Revelation has 22 chapters but I will only reveal the structure of the first three chapters because they form the basic foundation of the book of Revelation which addresses the community of believers. Botha, deVilliers and Engelbrecht (1988:20) observes the diagram below to emphasise the division of the seven proclamations of Revelation 1-3. The “first” vision should therefore be seen as part of this larger composition in chapters 1-3⁴⁹.

⁴⁹ Botha, de Villiers and Engelbrecht, (1988:17-35) *Reading Revelation*.



The table above is a discription of the composton of the messeges of the seven churches. The main aim of this portion of my investigation is to divide the letters of the seven proclamations into paragraphs, and pericopes. It is important to note that these letters form a strong foundation of the book of Revelation. The investigation on the demarcation of the letters to the seven churches as defined by Aune (1997:119) suggests the following stereotype features in the letters in Revelation two and three of the seven proclamations.⁵⁰ It must be noted at this stage that the Book of Revelation has some common literary forms within the composition. Furthermore, regarding the demarcation and structural setting related to the seven communities of faith in Revelation two and three there is more to be discovered in these letters.

Ladd (1972:36) suggests that, “the seven letters are structured after a common plan.” Bratcher and Hatton (1993:39) states that, “In this letter the formal addressee is ‘the angel of the church,’ singular, whereas the actual addressee of various churches, plural”. The seven messages may be grouped together by the virtue of common structural elements. Botha, deVilliers and Engelbrecht (1988:23) suggest that, “these

⁵⁰ Aune, (1997: 119) *Word biblical commentary: Revelation 1-5*.

similarities do not, however, take on a rigid, stereotyped form”. Furthermore, all seven letters contain the following elements:

- Instruction to write
- Announcements of sender
- Diagnosis of the situation
- Warning to listen
- Promise to those who triumph.

Several features of them are worth noticing:

Bauckham (1993:122) explains that “we may notice a dominant concern with truth in the message”. The churches are commended for not denying (2:13; 3:8). They are reproved for having a false reputation which hides the truth of their condition (3:1) or for deceiving themselves about their condition (3:17). The prophet Jezebel is charged with deceit (2:20). There are those false apostles, who say they are apostles but are not (2:2), just as there are those who lie, saying that they are Jews but are not (2:9; 3:9). Every message, starts with the opening ‘ I know...’, Jesus Christ addresses the churches as the one who knows the real truth of their condition, despite misleading appearances (2:9), false reputation (3:1), false confidence (3:17) and slander (2:9). Those who were probably claiming that outward participation in idolatry was permissible because what counts is only one’s inner integrity, he reminds that he sees the truth of hearts and minds (2:23). He walks among the lampstands, observing their real condition (2:1), and his eyes of flame penetrate the hidden truths of motives, thoughts and feelings (2:18) Bauckham (1993:122). Thus the function of prophecy addressed to the churches is to expose the uncomfortable truth.

Furthermore, the seven letters of Revelation is composed of important verbs which are repeated throughout the letter “a call to conversion”. Botha (1988:23) argues that, “a call to conversion is lacking only in the message to Thyatira where the idea of conversion is contained in the elements of threat and reward”.

3.5. Summary.

Some general remarks may be noted as I conclude this section; these letters were written from the island of Patmos and it was necessary for the letters to have a common structure. Furthermore, the letters are not structured in strict epistolary form, they are special messages addressed to the seven churches. The book as a whole is in the form of

a letter.⁵¹ Furthermore, the phrase repeated seven times, “He who has an ear let him hear what the Spirits says to the churches” suggests that the message in each letter is intended for a wider audience rather than for the local church alone. The seven letters are structured after a common plan. Each letter is introduced by a brief characterisation of Christ as portrayed in the first chapter. Usually this characterisation is adapted to the situation in the local church. The author Barnes (1975:59) states that:

They all begin with a reference to some of the attributes of the Saviour, in general some attribute that had been noted in the previous chapter, and while they are adapted to make a deep impression on the mind, perhaps each one was selected in such a way as to have a special priority in reference to each particular church.

3.6. Textual context ⁵²and structure of Revelation 2-3

Du Toit (2009:135) argues that “before moving to the main exegetical phase, the text-critical status of a given passage should be considered.” You may notice earlier that I refer to the seven “letters” of Revelation two and three in quotation marks. This is exactly because each of these messages are worthy of careful consideration, letters in antiquity have a pretty standard opening and closing format such as has been found in the letters of Paul, James (Acts 15:23-29), and in the opening of Revelation itself (Rev.1:4-6) but the messages in Revelation present themselves not as letters but as something much more formal and stunning. What they are exactly will require some careful observation and discussion.

The letters to the seven congregations are rightly applied in their context and will transform the interpretation of mission and ethics of the New Testament.

It is widely proposed that Revelation two and three is at the beginning of the chapters of Revelation from which all the narratives of the book is a build up between chapter one and chapter four.

The research will be narrowed to chapters two and three of the book of Revelation with an intensive investigation into the relation of mission and ethics in the book of Revelation. There are a number of reasons why the book of Revelation has been chosen to articulate the relation between mission and ethics.

Aune (2006:213) argues that:

⁵¹ Ladd, (1972:36) *A commentary on the Revelation of John*.

⁵² Song, (2003:141) *The preterist understanding of Revelation*. The textual context of Revelation.2-3 refers to the position of Rev 2-3 within the book of Revelation in general, within Rev 1-4 in particular.

There is now widespread agreement that the seven proclamations existed independently of Revelation, but were designed specifically for their present literary setting by the author-editor at a final stage in the composition of the entire work, they were clearly intended to complement one another and to be read and heeded by the other congregations.⁵³

The letters to the seven churches are structured with a common structure. Let me note that at this stage, the larger picture of the syntactical relationships of the various words and word groups are to be investigated.⁵⁴

3.7. The structural Analysis of the text

It must be noted from the beginning that in this section I will be analysing the structure of Revelation two and three, the messages to the seven churches. Fee (2002:41) suggests that, “this portion in the exegetical process helps to visualise the structures of the paragraph and the flow of the argument.” Here, the big picture is revealed, the syntactical relationship of the various words and word groups are identified.

The seven messages of Revelation two and three are very carefully structured both as a whole and individually as a whole; there are elements in each and main themes which help us to interpret the individual message. For example, in the messages to the four churches: Ephesus (Rev 2:1-7, message # 1); Pergamum (Rev 2:12-17, message #3), Sardis (Rev 3:1-6, message #5) and Laodicea (Rev 3:14-22, message #7). The Lord brings indictments against them and calls them to repent (see Rev 2:5, 16, and 3:3, 3:18). The message to the church of Smyrna (Rev 2:8-11, message #2) is parallel to the message to Philadelphia (Rev 3:7-13, message #6) in both churches the Lord does not call for repentance but announces his immanent judgement and excommunication.⁵⁵

Furthermore, each message has a very unusual and formal structure. Evaluating word order is a matter of comparing that of the text under study to establish patterns.

Aune (2006:213) suggests the following form/ structure/setting of the seven letters found in Revelation two and three:

1. The proclamation to Ephesus (2:1-7)
 - a. The *adscriptio*: to the angel of the church in Ephesus (v1a)
 - b. Command to write (v1b)
 - c. The *τάδε λέγει* formula (v1c)

⁵³ Aune, (2006:213) *Apocalypticism, Prophecy and Magic in Early Christianity*.

⁵⁴ Fee, (2002:42-43) *New Testament Exegesis*.

⁵⁵ www.Westminster.seminary.

- d. Christological predictions(1c)
 - 1. The one with seven stars in his right hand
 - 2. The one who walks in the midst of the seven golden menorahs
- e. The *narratio*: “I know your conduct” (vv2-4)
 - 1. Your deeds (v2a)
 - a. Your effort
 - b. Your endurance
 - 2. You do not tolerate the wicked (v2b)
 - a. You tested the so called apostles
 - b. You found them liars
 - 3. You have endurance (v3)
 - a. You have borne patiently because of my name(v3b)
 - b. You have not become weary (v3c)
- f. The *dispositio*: (vv 4-6)
 - 1. Accusation: you have abandoned your first love (v4)
 - 2. Remedy: remember your original state (v5)
 - a. Repent (v5b)
 - b. Do the deeds you did before (v5c)
 - 3. Threat: if you do not do so (v5d)
 - a. I will come to you
 - b. I will remove your menorah from its place
 - 4. Concluding positive feature (v6)
 - a. You have the Nicolaitans (v6b)

The form/structure/setting as suggested by Aune (1997:125) observes that, “the literary composition of the church in Smyrna”.

- 2. Proclamation to Smyrna (2:8-11)
 - a. The *adscriptio*: to the angel of the church in Smyrna (v8a)
 - b. The command to write (v8b)
 - c. The *τάδε λέγει* formula (v8c)
 - d. Christological predictions (v8d)
 - 1. The First and the Last
 - 2. The One who died and came back to life
 - e. The *narratio*: “ I know your conduct”(v9)
 - 1. Your tribulation (v9a)

2. Your poverty (though you are rich) (v9)
3. The slander you endured (v9c)
 - a) From those who claim to be the Jews but are not
 - b) From those who are a synagogue of Satan
- f. The *dispositio* (v10)
 1. Do not fear what you will suffer (v10a)
 - a) Satan will throw some of you into prison (v10b)
 - 1) Purpose: God is testing you.
 - 2) Length of time: you will suffer for “ten days”
 2. Admonition and promise (10c)
 - a) Admonition: Be faithful to death
 - b) Promise: I will give you the crown of life
- g. The proclamation formula (11a)
- h. The promise-to the victor formula: the one who conquers will not be harmed by a second death (11b).

Aune (1997:137) argues that “the seven proclamations are sharing the same features.” Furthermore, he commented on the author of Revelation, the writer is consistently repeating the same style of writing in all the messages. It shows that John is more acquainted with each church in Asia Minor; he knows the problems of each church.

3. The proclamation to Pergamum (2:12-17)
 - a. *The adscription*: to the angel of the church in Pergamum (v12a)
 - b. The command to write (v12a)
 - c. The *τάδε λέγει* formula (12b)
 - d. Christological predication: the One who has the sharp two edged sword (v12b)
 - e. The *narratio*: “ I know your conduct” (vv13-15)
 1. Difficult circumstances suggested: you live where Satan’s throne is located (v13a)
 2. Affirmation (v13b)
 - a) You hold my name fast
 - b) You did not renounce your faith in me.
 3. Difficult circumstances amplified: the instance of Antipas (v13c-d)
 - a) He was my faithful witness
 - b) He was killed among you

- c) He was killed where Satan dwells
- 4. Accusations (vv14-15)
 - a) Some hold the teaching Balaam (who taught Balak to lead Israel astray) (v14)
 - 1) Eat meat sacrificed to idols
 - 2) Practice fornication
 - b) You have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans (15)
- f. The disposition (v16)
 - 1. Command: repent (v16a)
 - 2. Threat if you do not repent (v16b)
 - a) I will come to you soon
 - b) I will make war against *them* with the sword of my month
- g. The proclamation formula (v17a)
- h. The promise-to the –victor formula (v17b)
 - 1. I will give them hidden manna
 - 2. I will give them a white stone with a new name known only to the recipient.

The proclamation to the church of Thyatira as suggested by Aune (1997:138)

The proclamation to Thyatira (2:18-29)

- a. The *adscriptio*: to the angel of the church in Thyatira (v18a)
- b. The command to write (v18a)
- c. The *τάδε λέγει* formula (v18a)
- d. Christological predictions: Christ is (v18a-c)
 - 1. The Son of God (v 18a)
 - 2. The One with eyes like fire (v18c)
 - 3. The One with feet like burnished bronze (v18c)
- e. The *narratio*: “ I know your conduct” (vv19-21)
 - 1. Your behaviour (v19a)
 - a. Love
 - b. Faithful
 - c. Service
 - d. Endurance
 - 2. Your recent behaviour is better than before (v19b)
 - 3. Accusation: “ I have this against you” (vv20-21)

- a. You have tolerated “ Jezebel” (v20)
 - (1) She calls herself a prophetess (v20a)
 - (2) She teaches and misleads my servants (v20b)
 - a) To fornicate
 - b) To eat meat sacrificed to idols
- b. Previous warnings to “ Jezebel” (v21)
 - (1) I Gave her time to repent (v21a)
 - (2) She refuses to repent of her fornication (v21b)
- f. The *disposition* (vv22-25)
 - 1. Threat of imminent retribution (vv22-23a)
 - a. I will throw “ Jezebel” into a sickbed (v22a)
 - b. I will afflict those who fornicate with her with great tribulation, if they do not repent (v22b)
 - c. I will kill her “ children” with the plague (v23a)
 - 2. Christological axiom: The revelation of Christ through judgment to the churches (v23bc)
 - a. Christ searches mind and heart (v23b)
 - b. Christ gives to each in accordance with their deeds (v23c)
 - 3. To those influenced by “Jezebel’s” teachings called the deep things of Satan (24-25).
 - a. I give you no other burden (v24c)
 - b. Hold what you have until I come (v25)
- g. The promise-to- the victor formula (vv26-28)
 - 1. Recipients (v26a)
 - a. Those who conquer
 - b. Those who keep my word until the end
 - 2. The reward (vv26b-28)
 - a. I will give them the kind of authority I received from my Father (vv 26b, 28a)
 - (1) I will give the authority over nations (v26b)
 - (2) They will rule over the nations with an iron sceptre as when ceramic pots are smashed (v27)
 - b. I will give them the morning star (v28b)
- h. The proclamation formula (v29)

The proclamation of the passage of the seven proclamations to the church of Sardis as suggested by Aune (1997:140)

5. The Proclamation to Sardis (3:1-6)

- a. The *adscriptio*: to the angel of the church in Sardis (v1a)
- b. The command to write (v1a)
- c. The *τάδε λέγει* formula (v1b)
- d. Christological predictions (v1b)
 1. The One who has seven Spirits of God
 2. The One who has seven stars
- e. The *narratio*: “I know your conduct” (v1c)
 1. You have a reputation for being alive
 2. You are actually dead.

The *dispositio* (vv 2-4)

1. Exhortation (v2a)
 - a. Be vigilant
 - b. Strengthen what remains and is on the point of death
 2. Accusation: I have found your conduct far from perfect in the sight of my God (v 2b)
 3. Exhortation: Remember (V3a)
 - a. What you received and heard
 - b. Obey that and repent
 4. Threat: What will happen if you do not watch (v3b)
 - a. I will come like a thief
 - b. You will not know at which hour I will come to you
 5. A few in Sardis have not soiled their garments (v4a)
 - a. Reward: They will not walk with me in white (v4b)
 - b. Reason: They are worthy (v4b)
 - g. The promise-to-the victor formula (v5)
- 2 They will be clothed in white (v 5a)
 - 3 I will not erase their names from the book of life(v5b)
 - 4 I will acknowledge them (v5c)
 - a. Before my father
 - b. Before the holy angels

h. The proclamation formula (v6)

Proclamation of the seven Churches to the church of Philadelphia.

6. The proclamation to Philadelphia (3:7-13)
 - a. The *adscriptio*: to the church in Philadelphia (v7a)
 - b. The command to write (v7a)
 - c. The *τάδε λέγει* formula(v7b)
 - d. Christological predictions (7b)

5 The holy one

6 The true one

7 The One who has the key of David

- a. The One who opens so that no one can shut
- b. The One who shut so that no one can open
- e. The *narratio*: “ I know your conduct” (v8)
 1. Because you have limited strength (v8c)
 - a. I have placed before you an open door (v8b)
 - b. No one can shut this door (v8b)
 2. You have kept my word (v8d)
- f. The *dispositio*: (3:9-11)
 1. Your “Jewish” adversaries (v9)
 - a. Their description (9a)
 - (1) They are a synagogue of Satan
 - (2) They claim to be Jews but are lying
 - b. Their fate (v9bc)
 - (1) They will come and grovel at your feet
 - (2) They will learn that I loved you
 2. The coming time affliction (v10)
 - a. You have obeyed my command to endure (v10a)
 - b. I will keep you from the time of affliction (v10bc)
 - (1) It will come on the whole world
 - (2) It will afflict the inhabitants of the earth
 3. Promise: I am coming soon (v11)
 - a. Exhortation: Keep what you have (v11b)
 - b. Reason: So that no one takes away your wreath (v11b)

- g. The promise-to-the victor formula (v12)
 - 1. I will make them pillars in the temple of my God (v12a)
 - 2. They will never leave the temple of my God (12b)
 - 3. I will inscribe names upon them (v12c)
 - a. The name of my God
 - b. The name of the city of my God (v12d)
 - (1) Called the New Jerusalem
 - (2) It descends from heaven from my God
 - c. My new name (v12e)
 - h. The proclamation formula (v13)
7. The proclamation to Laodicea (3:14-2)
- a. The *adscriptio*: to the angel of the church in Laodicea (v14a)
 - b. The command to write (v14a)
 - c. The *τάδε λέγει* formula (v14b)
 - d. Christological predications (v14b)
 - 1. The masters Workman
 - 2. The faithful and true witness
 - 3. The origin of God's creation
 - e. The *narratio*: "I know your conduct" (vv15-17)
 - 1. The "cold" and "hot" metaphors (vv15-17)
 - a. You are neither "cold" nor "hot" (v15a)
 - b. I wish you were either "cold" or "hot" (v15b)
 - c. I will vomit you from my mouth (v16)
 - (1) Because you are "tepid"
 - (2) Because you are neither "cold" nor "hot"
 - 2. Your imagined condition: a hybris soliloquy (v17)
 - a. I am wealthy (v17a)
 - b. I have become rich (v17a)
 - c. I need nothing (v17a)
 - 3. Your true condition: a denunciation (v17b)
 - a. You are wretched
 - b. You are pitiable
 - c. You are poor

- d. You are blind
- e. You are naked
- 4. The *dispositio* (vv18-20)
 - 1. Admonition using shopping metaphors (v18)
 - a. Buy purified gold from me that you be rich
 - b. Buy white garments from me
 - (1) That you might be clothed
 - (2) That shame of your nakedness might not be public
 - c. Buy medication from me
 - (1) to apply to your eyes
 - (2) to regain your sight
 - 2. Christological axiom (v19)
 - a. Those whom I love (v19a)
 - (1) I chastise
 - (2) I discipline
 - b. Because of this love (v19b)
 - (1) Be earnest
 - (2) Repent
 - 3. Christ as outsider: the visitor metaphor (v20)
 - a. The visitor calls: I stand before the door knocking (v20a)
 - b. Will the visitor be acknowledged? (v20b)
 - (1) If any one hears my voice
 - (2) If anyone opens the door
 - c. The visitor is admitted (v20b)
 - (1) I will come in to visit him (v20c)
 - (2) I will share a meal with him
 - (3) He will share a meal with me (v20c)
 - f. The promise-to-the-victor formula (v21)
 - 1. They will sit with me on my throne (v21a)
 - 2. Just as I sat down with me on my throne (v21b)
 - g. The proclamation formula (v22) Aune (1997:141-122).

First and foremost, it must be noted at this stage that the book of Revelation has a unique structure. This portion of the research quantifies my investigation above. The

imperatives to note are the format of the seven messages in chapter two and three and they are addressed to John and the recipient churches by Jesus. First, each of the messages opens with the address: “to the messenger of the church.....write”. Every church is known by its name. Christ addresses the church individually. Second, the message to each church begins with the phrase “thus says” which suggests that this oracle comes from Christ as the speaker. When he speaks, the church is to listen and obey. “Thus says” is followed by a brief description of Jesus Christ as the sender of the message. The foundations of the messages are delivered from Rev 1:9-20. The characteristics used were relevant and particularly suited to the situation of each of the local churches and specific problem(s) each faced.⁵⁶ Third, the description of the church and let me note this at this stage that this section begins with the formula: “I know”. Five of the seven churches Jesus addresses with the words “I know your works,” while the messages to Smyrna and Pergamum have “I know your affliction” and “I know where you dwell,” respectively. This difference is due to the peculiar circumstances of these two churches. Fourth, the appraisal is followed by words of counsel. After analysing the spiritual condition of each church, the church is either called to repent and to change its ways, or it is encouraged to remain firm in faith and obedience. Fifth, the church is urged to hear what the Spirit says to the churches. “The one, who has an ear, let him hear”. This phrase suggests a wider audience than a single church. Sixth, each message concludes with a word of promise to the overcomer. Two different proposals are suggested for the structural pattern of the seven messages of Revelation two and three. The imperative verbs in the rest of the book are generally commands addressed to John by an angelic being. The desire or cognition case frame includes “knowledge of persons and incorporates the idea of evaluating another’s character and behaviour”.⁵⁷ Two observations are to be made concerning the lexical analysis of the book of Revelation. This is my evaluation of the word order in Revelation two and three of the seven proclamations; this is what I have observed. In Revelation 2:1 “τάδε λέγει ὁ κρατῶν τοὺς ἑπτὰ ἀστέρας ἐν τῇ δεξιᾷ αὐτοῦ, ‘Thus says the one who holds the seven stars in his right hand’ τάδε.

Aune (1997:141) argues that, “a neuter plural accusative form from the demonstrative pronoun ὁ δε was obsolete in Koine Greek even though it is found seven times in

⁵⁶ Stefanovic, (2002:77) *The Revelation of Jesus Christ, commentary on the book of Revelation*.

⁵⁷ Langacre, (1992:169-242) He defined a case frame as a set of verbs with characteristic accompanying nouns in particular roles.

Revelation (2:8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14)”. The form is found, however, over 250 times “thus says the Lord”.⁵⁸

Beasley-Murray (1992:73) articulates that, “the Lord is announced as he who holds seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands”.

This serves as a reminder that the churches, whose life derives from their fellowship with Jesus, are being upheld by him and subject to his power and their conduct falls beneath his searching scrutiny as he moves among them on earth.

Furthermore, in my investigation in to the structure of Revelation, the opening phrase (Rev. 2:1) “ὁ περιπατῶν ἐν μέσῳ τῶν ἑπτὰ λυχνιῶν τῶν χρυσοῶν,” “who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands”, Aune (1997:141) states that, “this participial phrase refers back to the description of the vision of the exalted Christ in Rev. 1:12–13, where the seven golden lampstands are interpreted as the seven churches in 1:20”.

The only added feature here is the fact that Christ is said to *walk* in the midst of the lampstands, which can only be an allegory for the unseen presence of Christ among the Christians of the seven congregations.⁵⁹

This is a reference to the presence of Christ in *all* the congregations, a fact reiterated at the close of each of the seven proclamations by the refrain. In (Rev 2:7) “Let the person with an ear hear what the Spirit announces to the *churches*”. These seven churches share the admonition from Christ. Wiersbe (2008:34) suggests that, “First love” can be restored if we follow three instructions that Christ gave. First, the church of Ephesus must remember (literally “keep on remembering”). Second, they must repent – change of minds, third do the first works which suggest restoration which leads to character formation of the community of faith. The term *οἶδα*, “I know,” occurs immediately following the Christological predications in each of the seven proclamations (2:2, 9, 13, 19; 3:1, 8, 15), five times within the stereotypical phrase *οἶδα τὰ ἔργα σου* (2:2) or *οἶδα σου τὰ ἔργα* (2:19; 3:1, 8, 15).

Furthermore, on investigation of the structural analysis of the seven proclamations of Revelation two and three, the sentences are structured in a particular word order. The Christian communities were to respond by resistance from their influence and ethical conduct for it to become relevant to the community.

(Rev 2:7) “ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ Πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις,” “Let the person with an ear hear what the Spirit announces to the churches”. This formula occurs at the

⁵⁸ Aune, (1997:141) *Word biblical commentary: Revelation 1-5*.

⁵⁹ Aune, (1997:141) *Word biblical commentary: Revelation 1-5*.

conclusion of each of the seven proclamations (2:11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22) and occurs in a variant form in Rev 13:9. The mission and ethics of Revelation take the center stage from the messages of the seven proclamations. These chapters define the nature and purpose of the entire book of Revelation. Jones (2008:33) argues that, “those messages were true in respect to the churches in the cities to which the letters were addressed”. Second, the letters were directed to individuals. ‘He that hath an ear let him hear what the spirit says unto the churches.’

3.8. Conclusion

In conclusion let me summarise this chapter by articulating that, the analysis of the structure of the seven proclamations of Revelation two and three has been examined within the context of the situation in Asia. Let me conclude that the structural analysis of the messages from the seven churches which addresses the mandate of a particular church and the promise to those who overcome.

Furthermore, in the church of Ephesus, we read from this church that those who overcome are granted to eat from the tree of life which is in the midst of the paradise of God (2:1-7).

Praised for not bearing those who are evil, testing those who say they are apostles and are not, and finding them to be liars, hating the deeds of the Nicolaitans, having persevered and possessing patience. Admonished to do the first works and repent for having left their first love.

The letter to the church of Smyrna, we have discovered from reading it, is that those who are faithful to death, will be given “the crown of life” those who overcome shall not be hurt by the second death (2:8-11). This church is praised for being “rich” while impoverished and in tribulation. Last, the church is admonished not to fear the “synagogue of Satan”, nor to fear a ten-day tribulation of being in prison. The Pergamum: from this church, those who overcome will be given the hidden manna to eat and a white stone with a secret name on it (2:12-17). The Lord is praised for holding “fast to my name” not denying “my faith” even in the days of Antipas, “my faithful martyr”. This church is admonished to repent for having held the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, eating things sacrificed to idols, committing sexual immorality, and investing in the “doctrine of

Nicolaitans”. The investigation articulates that regarding the church of Thyatira, we read that, those who will overcome until the end, will be given power over the nations in order to dash those pieces with the rule of rod made of iron; they will also be given the “morning star” (2:18-29). The church is praised for their works, love, service, faith, and patience. The church is admonished to repent for allowing a “prophetess” to promote sexual immorality and eating food offered to idols. The church of Sardis, “who overcome will be clothed in white garments, and their names will not be blotted out of the Book of life; their names will also be confessed before their Father and his angels” (3:1-6). From the letter to the church of Philadelphia it is discovered that those who overcome will be made a pillar in the temple of God having the name of God, the name of the city of God “New Jerusalem and the Son of Gods new name” (3:7-15). The church is praised for having some strength, keeping “My word” and having not denied my name. The church is admonished to hold fast to what they have, that no one may take their crown. Laodicea, from this church, those who overcome will be granted the opportunity to sit with the Son of God on his throne (3:14-22). This church is admonished to be zealous and repent from being “lukewarm”, they are instructed to buy “gold refined in the fire” that they may be rich, in order to buy “white garments” that they may be clothed, so that the shame of their nakedness would not be revealed , to anoint their eyes with eye salve, that they may see.

All these churches displayed their ethical conduct and re-aligned their characters as the (ethos) community of faith. Villa-Vicencio & De Gruchy (1995:94) argues that:

The on-going struggle to be the true and faithful church in particular historical situations moulds not only character of the church but also the characters of those who make it, in this way, character and community are inextricably intertwined, each reciprocally shaping the other. So, based on the discussion, it is imperative to investigate the relation of ethic and mission in the Book of Revelation and in particular the seven churches.

Chapter 4

Research findings

4.1. Introduction

The researcher articulates the hypothesis using a conceptual model to identify mission and ethics in the book of Revelation particularly regarding the seven proclamations. This phase concludes when the findings of the research are reported. The second phase is the interpretation/application phase. In this phase, the aim shifts from the description of the seven proclamations to the character formation within the context of mission and ethics. Here one must test that the research questions are supported by the data. If the findings fit the model, then character formation which plays an important role in understating the relation of mission and ethics is confirmed, if not the relation of mission and ethics is disconfirmed and the approach must be modified or rejected.

4.2. Re-alignment of character formation in Revelation 2-3.

At this stage, it must be noted from the beginning that Hauerwas approach concerning character formation has been employed in this research. In relation to character formation as a model of approaching the book of Revelation, let me emphasise at this stage that it has become a basis of my motivation. Hays (2006:12) argues that, “the biblical narratives have the effect of shaping what he calls a community of character a body of people taught by God’s grace to live in non-violence and forgiveness”.⁶⁰ Furthermore, with investigation the second question of this research asks what mission and ethical lessons can be extracted from the book of Revelation. To answer this question, let me state clearly here that it will be impossible to make any assumptions from reading the book of Revelation and in particular the seven churches. Villa-Vicencio & De Gruchy (1994:94) states that, “the ongoing struggle to be the true and faithful church in particular historical situations moulds not only the character of the church but also the characters of those who make it up”.

The seven proclamations of Revelation two and three share the same social ethics, ethos, identity, and mission. John is faced with inward and outward opposition (Nicolaitans, Balaam, and Jezebel) as well as constant persecution; under such pressing

⁶⁰ Hays, (2006:12) *Identity, ethics and ethos in the New Testament, a community of character: toward a constructive Christian social ethics.*

conditions, how does the author of Revelation re-align the characters/identity of the believers in the letters to the seven churches? A proper understanding of character formation in the letters of the seven proclamations, based on the church bears witness to the ongoing violence, immorality and injustice of the Roman Empire⁶¹. Du Rand (2006:569) proposes an ethos of resistance in the Apocalypse. John exhorts his hearers to be steadfast in faith and behaviour. The ethical role of the believers is determined by a call to endurance amid an intensive storm of opposition from the Roman imperial cult. The fundamental question is how does the formation occur? Hays (2006:14) suggests the following “it occurs through the example of the lives of the saints (by which Hauerwas means all our fathers and mothers in the faith) and through church’s liturgy, especially Eucharist”. Hays (2006:14) state that, “as we participate in that community, we are shaped by that story to become a peaceful people, forgiven and forgiving”. Furthermore, in my findings let me note that, re-alignment of character in the Book of Revelation two and three is more concerned about the response of the believers during the persecution that led them to be steadfast and truthful Christians. The ethics of character plays a pivotal role in the community of faith because it guides the moral life of the believers.

Hauerwas (1981:94) argues that, “the character and community are inextricably intertwined, each reciprocally shaping the other”. The precise nature of the Christian community is understood by their response to the norms and behaviour that is contrary to the standard of behaviour in a given community.

Further, investigation regarding this concept of character formation has become the basis of my motivation for this research. From a spatial viewpoint the church and the community where it belongs is the central attraction in the narration in Revelation two and three. In connection with Revelation (2:1) “these are words of Him Who holds seven stars and walks in the midst of the seven candlesticks”. Aune (2006:227) describes that Christ is seen as he “who has seven spirits of God, namely the seven stars”. An allusion from Revelation depicts him as someone who is acquainted with each church. The communities are threatened with persecution from without and from within. The character of the one who addresses the congregations never leaves or steps directly into action in the narrative. This is similar to what we discovered when examining the community situations addressed by John.

⁶¹ Du Rand, (2006:569) *Identity, ethics and ethos in the New Testament, a community of character: toward a constructive Christian social ethics.*

Hauerwas (1981:93) argues that, “the community shapes my character and, reciprocally, my character contributes to the kind of community of which I am a member”.

Each message has a common sixfold format with only minor differences from the messages.

The letter begins with a title describing Christ as the author and sender of the letter (Rev 2:1; 1:1-12-13, 16, 20) ‘Thus says he who holds the seven stars in his hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands’. It is fitting that the series of the letters starts with this description for it connotes Christ’s lordship over the seven churches and also over the entire universe.⁶² The letter continues by depicting Christ as an omniscient, omnipresent divine agency figure. This depiction is a myth aimed at securing their continued allegiance and fidelity to Christ. Furthermore, Christ commends the Ephesians for their endeavours, their steadfastness and resisting evil (v.2). He reiterates their steadfastness and abiding devotion to be recognised as his followers (v.3). If their character was complacent or lax, it would be difficult to explain the commendations of their steadfastness and resistance of evil. These words indicate that the social circumstances are opposite, a setting in which Christians have had to withstand some type of social threat to their spiritual well-being. Character formation takes its shape during the threats from the social setting of the churches. This confirms that these were genuine letters to a specific community. Whether the pressures are from pagans, or Jews, or from both groups, Christ becomes the role model for those Christians in enduring repression in Pergamum. In the letter to the church in Thyatira (Rev 2:18-29) there is an extensive discussion of an internal struggle between John and ‘Jezebel’, the heart of the letter begins in (Rev 2:19) with a commendation to the Christians. Slater (1999:133) suggests that, “their virtues include love, fidelity, service and steadfastness. Since John describes both the Balaam- Balak and Jezebel movements in similar terms, it is possible that both were prophetic movements that rivals John’s ministry”.⁶³ Ladd (1979:52) stresses that, “both groups fostered accommodation in Thyatira”. In my opinion there is insufficient data existing to support this hypothesis. Murray (1992:73-107) argues that, “several commentators identify the Jezebel movement with Nicolaitans”.⁶⁴ Slater (1999:133-135) depicts that, “John employs various maintenance techniques to persuade people to continue their Christian practices”. These maintenance strategies are

⁶² Slater, (1999:116-117) *Christ and community, a socio-historical study of the Christology of Revelation*.

⁶³ Slater, (1999:133-135) *Christ and community, a socio-historical study of the Christology of Revelation*.

⁶⁴ Beasley-Murray cited by Slater (1999:134) *Christ and community, Revelation*, p.90, Charles, *Revelation*, 1, p.70; Ladd, *Revelation*, p, 52

aimed at the character formation of the believers in Thyatira. For the church in Sardis (3:1-6) the body of letter begins forthrightly, ‘I know your works; that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.’ Sardis has traded on its name, not its works (Rev 3:1). If the church in Sardis does not change, most of the names of its constituents will not be recorded in the book of life. Indeed they do not confess Christ’s name on earth; Christ will not confess their names in heaven. For these reasons, I favour the interpretation that Christ censures them for their unchallenging and accommodating attitude toward local religio-political social pressures. Christ also exhorts them to live up to their reputation. Character formation takes its shape in the attitude of believers. Nevertheless, the mixing of exhortation and condemnation serves as a powerful maintenance strategy to ensure proper, faithful Christian character which is re-aligned in Sardis. Philadelphia was the youngest of the seven cities of Asia. It supported the pagan cult of Dionysus, but the main problem faced by the church was from the Jews rather than pagans. Regarding Smyrna on the other hand, the letter reflects the fact that it contained a substantial colony of Jews who were aggressively hostile to Christianity and who exercised considerable influence with the civil authorities. The church of Philadelphia (3:7-13) and the letters to Smyrna and Philadelphia are complementary. They must be read side by side. Kiddle (1999:142) identifies the following seven parallels:

Both confirm the faithfulness of each community, both communities must confront slanderous allegations from the synagogue, each church faces Roman persecution, each describes the Jewish opponents as Satanic, Christ promises spiritual security to both, a final reward, in the form of a crown, awaits the faithful from the church, although both churches have socially inferior statuses, their lowliness actually enhances their spiritual status.⁶⁵

Furthermore, Slater (1999:143) accepts these observations but correctly stresses that, though two contain similar features, they have different emphases. In my investigation, it is clear that the letter to Smyrna focused upon political tensions; the one to Philadelphia discussed theological issues.⁶⁶ The Philadelphians are exhorted to maintain their present level of faithfulness in order that they might sustain their place in the sacred community. Character formation takes shape under repressing conditions

⁶⁵ Kiddle cited in Slater, (1999:142-143) *Christ and community, a socio-historical Study of the Christology of Revelation*.

⁶⁶ Krodel cited by Slater, (1999:143) *Christ and community, a socio-historical Study of the Christology of Revelation*.

in Philadelphia. My findings at this stage are that the community must re-align their characters in their relationship with Christ in order to receive their reward. With regard to the letter to the church of Laodicea (3:14-22), the key concern is not external pressure upon the church but loss of religious zeal within it. Sharing Christ's throne is another example of the connection between Christ and the community in Revelation.

The purpose of this letter's maintenance strategy, the promise of co-regency, is to encourage the Laodiceans to follow Christ with their entire being and, in so doing, obtain spiritual goodness. We note that witnessing is a central issue and that co-regency Christ and/or God plays a key role in maintaining the sacred cosmos by relating Christ and community in Revelation. However, in this instance, the central concern is not local oppression but religious laxity. The re-alignment of character takes shape in their conduct in order to keep their relationship intact. Stefanovic (2002:78) argues that, "the character of the believers is motivated by their works and their allegiance to Christ who is their model of suffering.

These Christians are called to a life of victory and loyalty to Christ".⁶⁷ This suggests that there was a specific ethos of behaviour which all churches and believers must strive to attain, that is character formation. The character formation forms a narrative of the community of faith in Revelation two and three, the letters to the seven churches.

Furthermore, Hays (2006:93) argues that, "the first task of the church is to be faithful to those narratives, and faithfulness consists in being the kind of community capable of remembering the narratives and living in a manner appropriate to that remembering".

Du Rand (2006:567) states that, "without the Christian community that is to say, there can be no Christian ethics".⁶⁸ In such circumstances there will be no identity. It is true that the church of Ephesus did not tolerate those who called themselves apostles and proved them to be liars; this suggests that the church proposed an ethos of resistance. John exhorts his hearers to be steadfast in faith and behaviour and he fortifies their courage by revealing that the character formation of the believers is the basis of an acceptable ethos of resistance.

The community of faith in Revelation two and three were to resist cult worship and

⁶⁷ Stefanovic, (2002:78) *The Revelation of Jesus Christ, commentary on the book Revelation*.

⁶⁸ Du Rand, (1981:567) *Identity, ethics and ethos in the New Testament, a community of character: toward a constructive Christian social ethics*.

that aggravated conflict because of their faithfulness to God's principle. Furthermore in my investigation, Du Rand (1981:566) articulates that, "the ethical role of the believers is determined by a call for endurance amid an intensive storm of opposition of the Roman imperial cult".

The believers have to direct their faith and hope towards the worship of Christ and not Caesar, even if this involved martyrdom. This may link up to the view which states that the Book of Revelation can function as a call to a non-violent lifestyle. Therefore it is proper to note that the ethical success of a community is judged by their 'works' which refers to 'the total outcome of religious and moral action.

In this sense the community of Ephesus is criticised because they had abandoned the love they had at the beginning (Rev 2:5). My conclusion here is that the victory for those who overcome tribulations and struggles through belief and ethical 'works' are promised a reward (Rev. 2:7; 17; 3:5, 12, 21). Through suffering of all sorts within and out with the Christian communities, re-alignment of character takes its shape in the letters to the seven churches.

4.3. Ethics of character and community in Revelation 2-3.

Ethics of character takes its shape in the messages to the seven churches in Revelation two and three. It is, however important to note that for John the revelatory received the messages while living on an island of Patmos (Rev.1:9, 10). The church of Ephesus (Rev 2:2), "I know your works, namely, your labour and endurance." Both "labour" and "endurance" are parallel to the previously mentioned "works". It is further suggested that "labour" means "hard work" or labour to the point of weariness and exhaustion.⁶⁹ The church of Ephesus was reminded of their first love that was based on their work ethic of character. Hays (2006:569) emphasize that, "ethical 'works' are determined by social awareness". He sees the book of Revelation above all else as a political resistance document, refusing to acknowledge the legitimacy of the earthly Roman rulers, the ethics of character takes its shape from the political events of the authors own time.⁷⁰ It is clear that the messages reflected a specific situation within the churches. Fiorenza (1991:20) states that, "an investigation has proven that the messages to the seven churches represent the spiritual environment within which the church perennially finds

⁶⁹ Rienecker, (1976:815) *A linguistic key to the Greek New Testament.*

⁷⁰ Hays, (2006:569) *Identity, ethics, and ethos in the New Testament, a community of character: toward a constructive Christian social ethics.*

itself living and struggling.⁷¹ The church struggle is against all pretensions of power. The use of the word “repent” in (Rev 2:5) the aorist imperative suggests a decisive turning around”. Repentance denotes an ethical conduct of character, a turning around and a facing in the opposite direction. In (Rev 2:16) we read “repent therefore” but if not, I am coming to you quickly and I will make war against them with the sword of my mouth”. The word “repent” denotes the same meaning as the Greek aorist imperative suggests a decisive action of turning around. The implied ethics of character and community is derived from the verb which is used 6 times in Revelation two and three. Wiersbe (2008:33-59) defines that, “the word repent in (Rev 3:3) ‘keep remembering, therefore, how you have received and heard, and keep it and repent’, the aorist imperative suggests a decisive turning around to be made” (Rev 2:5). The Christians in Sardis must bring to mind their previous status and make a decisive turn-around from their present condition.⁷² In (Rev 3:19) we read, “as many as I love, I love, I disciple and reprove, therefore, be zealous and repent”.

The fact that Christ is about to spew the lukewarm Laodiceans out of his mouth indicates that they still have an opportunity to repent (Rev 3:19). Also in (Rev 9:20) Wiersbe (2008:58) denotes that “the same meaning of repentance (Rev 16: 9, 11) has the same connotation of turning-around in conduct”. The community is judge by their ethical works as believers. As I consider the letters to the seven churches, repentance, steadfastness, labour, patience and suffering becomes the basis of motivation of identity, ethics and ethos of believers resulting in mission. Therefore, I agree with Hauerwas on the idea that there can be no Christian ethics that can be understood without Christian community. In conclusion the communities of faith in Revelation two and three bear witness against the violence, immorality and injustice of the Roman Empire, identity; ethics and ethos forms a standard of the seven communities.

4.4. The Mission perspective in Revelation 2-3.

Regarding the missional perspective in Revelation two and three, in the first chapter of this thesis where this was my discussion. I have articulated in chapter one of this research the questions. What mission and ethics lessons that can be extracted from the Book of Revelation? What relevant methods can be employed in dealing with mission

⁷¹ Fiorenza, (1991:20) sees the Apocalypse’s presentation as ‘theo-ethical rhetoric’, performing ‘a symphony of images’ to evoke participation within the community.

⁷² Stefanovic, (2002:136) *The Revelation of Jesus Christ, commentary on the book of Revelation.*

and ethics in the book of Revelation particularly regarding the messages to the seven churches? The book of Revelation demonstrates that the letters to the seven churches assume the lordship of Christ ‘the one who holds seven stars in his hand’ (Rev 1:20) to give direction and judge these communities. We cannot study the letters in isolation from the commission of John, or the mission of the community of believers, this misses a vital part of the total vision. The letters were written primarily to strengthen the inner spiritual lives of the churches. The response of the churches was to witness for Christ. Furthermore, as stated previously, every letter assumes the lordship of Christ. It suffices my findings that Christ is God’s divine angel who sends God’s message through John to the churches (Rev 1:9-20). He is a son of God (2:18), possesses the Spirit of God (3:1), maintains a faithful and true witness to God and rules the universe (3:14). When we talk of mission in Revelation two and three, we see this universal covenant where people are participating in witnessing through suffering e.g. in the church of Ephesus, there is a phrase in (Rev 2:6), “I will remove your lampstand from its place.” In the Bible, the lampstand emblem defines the role of the church as God’s witness to the people of the world (Rev 1:12). The warning to the church in Ephesus that Christ will remove their lampstand from its place parallels the saying in (Mark 4:21-25) and (Luke 8:16-18) where those who fail to shine their light will have their light-bearing role taken from them.⁷³ The missional involvement of the Christian church in Ephesus is motivated by the opposition of the Nicolaitans. Nicolaitans means “the one who conquers the people”. Their presence in the church gained adherents among some members of the church in Pergamum. It could be that it was the Nicolaitan heretical group that fostered accommodation. With reference to the missional church we read further in (Rev 2:9 and 3:9) that the unbelieving malignant Jews of Smyrna and Philadelphia are called the synagogue of Satan and that (3:9) also applies to the Jews.⁷⁴ The church finds expression in the testimony of suffering (marturia) for Jesus Christ in the world. The believers bore witness for God against the heretical groups within the Christian communities. It must be noted that John as a witness on earth, testified to him. It was because John faithfully passed on this testimony of Jesus to the churches that he was banished to Patmos (1:9). Therefore, as a servant of Christ he was commissioned to be a witness to the churches (1:1-2). The believers were strengthened in their task of being God’s witness to the world (Rev 2-3). All the believers as witnesses became a witness

⁷³ Stefanovic, (2002:111) *The Revelation of Jesus Christ, commentary on the book of Revelation*.

⁷⁴ Du Preez, (1970:158) *Mission perspective in Revelation*.

for Jesus under the social pressures in the Roman province. Finally, all believers are called to witness as a community of faith. The combined testimonies of the church is found on the following passages such as to the church of the Ephesians who failed to repent and do its first works, Christ will come in judgment of them: ‘I will remove your lampstand from its place’ in Revelation (2:5), God’s witnessing people are referred to as lampstands. If it does not exercise its call to shine, it loses the very essence of its existence; consequently, it will have its witnessing lampstand removed from its place, just as Israel did in the Old Testament.⁷⁵ Furthermore, in my findings of the church in Smyrna, Rev 2:10 ‘stop fearing’ in Greek, the present imperative suggests a continuous and ongoing attitude or action. The action here suggests that the church was motivated to witnessing for Christ, while there were external problems in Asia. The believers are to witness for Jesus against the surrounding suffering caused by the Roman Empire. Philadelphia wearied not of waiting for God in spite of troubles and afflictions. The church is not only preaching the word of Christ with patient endurance but also reflected it in her life, and so this church found an open door among the most hardened Jews. Philadelphia was included as an instrument in Gods judgement of grace and nations, particularly the Jews, because later some of the Jews from the very synagogue of Satan appeared as witnesses for the King of the church (v9). Eventually, by this very fact Philadelphia proves that in difficult circumstances perseverance in waiting for the coming of him who has to come is not a passive waiting but unconquerable missionary zeal indeed. In Rev 3:10, we find words written about the Gentiles, that say, “they will come and bow before your feet”, the true church in mission (*missio-Dei*) will influence the whole world in faithfulness (ethical life and witness until all people recognise the truth and the meaning of existence. In conclusion, it can be said that the universal people of God are seen as the struggling church on earth (*Ecclesia militans*) in the seven churches of Asia Minor.⁷⁶

4.5. God’s Mission and the Church’s response

You may have noticed earlier that I refer to the seven “letters” of Revelation two and three in quotation marks. Exactly what these messages are is worth careful consideration. The seven letters to the churches in Revelation two and three are an expression of God’s mission and a testimony (Marturia) for Jesus Christ in the world, a

⁷⁵ Stefanovic, (2002:115) *The Revelation of Jesus Christ, commentary on the book of Revelation*.

⁷⁶ Du Preez, (1970:158) *Mission perspective in Revelation*.

testimony which in its context (like the Greek word in the original) bears strong character. The churches in Asia were to witness for Jesus Christ amidst social and religious pressures. The true church witnesses for God against unbelief, always exhorting steadfastness, repentance, conversation before the final judgment.

First and foremost, the book of Revelation depicts that the author of the book was in the island of Patmos (1:9) for the word of God and the Testimony of Jesus Christ. John as a witness, his testimony was really God's own testimony concerning his Son. It was because John faithfully passed on this testimony of Jesus to the churches, which is the reason he was banished to Patmos. There, as the servant of Christ, he was commissioned to be a witness to the churches (1:1-2) in order to strengthen them in their task of being God's witness to the world (Rev 2-3). Kirk (1999:36) argues that, "the gains made by God's church in overcoming injustice, oppression and violence of all kinds are not to be equal with the salvation which is offered in the Gospel of Jesus Christ". This means that God's mission is carried out in both the world and the church. The following aspects within Christian communities shaped God's mission in the messages to the seven churches: love, works, justice, repentance, suffering, steadfastness, endurance, resistance, faithfulness and martyrdom resulted in God's mission in the letters to the seven churches response in Revelation two and three. In Revelation (2:4) for the church of Ephesus the aspect of the 'first love' is the motivation for God's mission of Christ. To the church of Smyrna (2:8-11) the term "affliction" The Greek *thlipsis* basically means "pressure," the burden that crushes. The members of the church are to respond under serious tribulation, under pressure. First, the pressure comes from outside, namely from the demands of emperor worship and the malignant slander of the Jews. Second, the members are in extremely poverty stricken circumstances. What we have seen in Smyrna God's church witnesses through the sacrifice of losing their lives.

Furthermore, "witnessing takes place when someone testifies to the truth".⁷⁷

Du Rand (2006: 581) suggests that, "it can be in words or deeds". It is clear that suffering becomes a church response to mission. The missional church witnesses through martyrdom particularly in Asia Minor. The recipient of the Book of Revelation received it while on the island of Patmos as a participant in suffering (Rev 1:9; 10). Du Rand (2006:581) explains that, "the original usage of (*μάρτυς*) martyrdom indicates to witness in a court of law with no expectation of death". The second usage of the word

⁷⁷ Du Rand (2006:580-581) *Identity, ethics, and ethos in the New Testament, a community of character: toward a constructive Christian social ethics.*

means, a man who testified to his faith in a law court to suffer death as a penalty for his witness.

The following (third) usage of the word would mean that death is regarded as part of the witness. In fourth usage (*μάρτυς*) becomes equivalent to ‘martyr’ while this idea is uppermost.

Du Rand (2006: 585) argues that, “witnessing as ethical activity cannot be achieved without the guidance of the Spirit”. In the messages to the seven churches the following verses reveals that the ‘seven Spirits’ (Rev 1:4; 3:1; 4:5; 5:6) are the fullness of God’s power sent out into all the earth.⁷⁸

Summarising the above findings from this investigation proves that, God’s church is witnessing through offering life as a church response. The church must witness in a sinful and essentially antagonistic world, thus witnessing is associated with taking up of the cross, and suffering becomes part of witnessing.⁷⁹ Du Preez (1970:165) states that, “such suffering is both inward (the daily crucifying of self) and outward, as for instance where there is mockery and persecution (Rev 1:9, 2:8-11) and a martyr’s death (2:3).

Although being God’s witness does not necessary mean that every believer dies a martyr’s death (Rev 1:9), yet it means that a witness must be prepared to seal his/her testimony by the shedding of blood, as is seen from the often-mentioned martyrdom as a witness for Jesus in Revelation (Rev 2:13;6:9;12:11;17:6;20:4). Jesus endowed his disciples with the power to work miracles, and told them that although they do this they will still be persecuted by wicked men; He would from time to time send his angels to deliver them; their lives could not be taken until their mission was to be accomplished; then they might be required to seal with their blood the testimonies which they had borne.⁸⁰

Finally at this stage let me conclude my investigation by pointing to the fact that God’s mission is centred on the faithfulness and steadfastness of those who bear witness to the world. The true church must respond with faithfulness, steadfastness and willingness to suffer for God’s mission on earth.

4.6. Conclusion

In conclusion let me articulate to the fact that there is a dynamic relation between

⁷⁸ Du Rand, (2006:585) *Identity, ethics and ethos in the New Testament, a community of character: toward a constructive Christian social ethics.*

⁷⁹ Du Preez, (1970:152-16) *Mission perspectives in Revelation.*

⁸⁰ White, (2000:189-190) *Early Writings.*

mission and ethics. I agree with Hauerwas (1981) cited by Vicencio & De Gruchy (1994:96) “a democratic form of community discipline is envisaged, a kind of “tough love” by which members are constantly being shaped into a holy people”. The effect of this process is two-way-inwardly on the vigour of the internal relationships, and outwardly on wider society in which such an explicitly Christian community must be a challenging presence.⁸¹ Ethics according to Hauerwas is thoroughly and distinctively Christian. My finding is that ethics is motivated by the norms and moral practices which govern the society which shapes the identity, ethics, ethos and mission. In the context of revelation two and three the messages to the seven churches, the use of the word repent (Rev 2:5) establishes that the recipients of these letters must be truthful, steadfast and repent in order to carry out God’s mission to the world.

⁸¹ Vicencio & de Gruchy, (1994:96) *Doing ethics in context of South African perspectives*.

CHAPTER 5

Summary, conclusion, and recommendations

5.

5.1. Introduction

First and foremost, let me state the overall findings in the messages to the seven churches of Revelation two and three. There is a dynamic relationship between mission and ethics in the book of Revelation particularly with regard to the seven churches. Several commentators have reached a consensus regarding the authorship of the messages to the churches to which these messages were written. Suggested findings have proven that there is a dynamic relation between mission and ethics in Revelation two and three. It suffices my attempt to conclude my investigation on mission and ethics in the book of Revelation particularly concerning the messages of the seven churches.

5.2. Summary

The book of Revelation and in particular the messages to the seven churches in chapters two and three contains an indication that it was addressed to Christians being persecuted for the sake of their faith. This persecution resulted from the Christian's refusal to take part in Emperor Worship⁸² (Rev 1:9, 10, 2:10; 13; 13:4, 12-17; 14:9-12; 16:2; 19:20). There were probably also internal religious conflicts, symbolically referred to by different names (Rev 2:6 and 20). In Ephesus they were known as 'Nicolaitans' (Rev 2:6), in Pergamum as Balaamites (Rev 2:14), and Thyatira as the followers of a prominent and influential woman in the church named Jezebel (Rev 2:20). We read in the messages to the seven churches that the opponents of John's audience all fostered accommodation. The mission and ethics takes its shape within the communities of faith under pressing conditions. The primary purpose of this research is built around the research questions stated in chapter one as follows: How could the relationship between mission and ethics in Revelation be envisioned? The primary purpose for John writing Revelation, therefore, defines the question stated above. The letters were written to strengthen the communities of faith in their condition and problems. Confronted with

⁸² Van den Heever and Scheffler, (2001:227) *From Jesus Christ to Christianity*.

the growing hostility from Rome, as well as the invading heresy and increasing apostasy within the church, the Christians in Asia were concerned about their identity and existence. The research investigates the identity, ethics and mission of the Christian community in Asia. In such conditions the character of the believers was shaped for God's mission to the world. Furthermore, in my investigation the second question is: what mission and ethics lessons can be extracted from the book of Revelation? I agree with Hauerwas cited by Vicencio & De Gruchy (1994:94) who argues that, "the ongoing struggle to be the true and faithful church in particular historical situations moulds not only the character of the church but also the characters of those who make it up".

In this way, character and community are inextricably intertwined, each reciprocally shaping the other.⁸³ My conclusion is that there is a dynamic relation between identity, ethics, ethos and mission. Finally, the aspect of mission and ethics, identity and ethos within the letters to the seven churches is motivating the believers to repentance, steadfastness, faithfulness, suffering and witnessing through martyrdom. This idea of a limited number of people who remain faithful, even when the majority did not and has a special mission is a recurring theme of the letters to the seven churches.⁸⁴

5.3. Deliberating on the objectives of the research study.

Fascination with the messages to the seven churches in the book of Revelation has prompted me to investigate mission and ethics in Revelation. Using the messages the author wanted to communicate with his readers and convey the task to which he intended to summon the seven churches to carry out. The first objective is using the Book of Revelation to define mission and ethics made by the seven proclamations. The study offers a comprehensive study of the whole range of ethical expectation that John of Patmos had for the Asian Church. The second objective is to reflect mission and ethics from the book of Revelation. In response, the various ecclesiological tasks and functions of the churches is the key to mission, ethics, ethos, and mission. A deliberate effort is made to show how the various tasks of the churches are related to one another. The final objective is to indicate the way the messages from Revelation influence the mission and ethics of contemporary Christians. I have argued cogently that they unified under the mandate to maintain faithfulness to Jesus, their crucified, risen Lord, who

⁸³ Vicencio & De Gruchy, (1994:94) *Doing ethics in context South African perspectives*.

⁸⁴ Bruinsma, (2009:31) *The Body of Christ, a biblical understanding of the church*.

himself was the witness par excellence. Therefore attention is given to contemporary Christians in order to fulfil the task of repentance, steadfastness, and faithfulness. The study concentrates on the internal and external evidence of John's apocalypse but pays more attention to the mission and ethics in the book of Revelation.

5.4. Recommendations

My first step with regard to recommendations is that the book of Revelation and the churches in particular that the messages to the seven churches were written for, with the purpose of strengthening the church under Roman hostility must not be interpreted apart from the socio-historical setting. It was originally sent as a letter in a prophetic, apocalyptic style to real people in real places, namely, to the seven churches which were in the Roman province of Asia (Rev 1:11).

My second recommendation is to consider the question: how can the prophecies of Revelation be relevant to us today when the book was originally written for those in another place and time, with a different culture and life setting, and in a different language? Character formation by Hauerwas plays a pivotal role in this research with a view to grasp the meaning of mission and ethics in the book of Revelation. Therefore, the aspects of identity, ethos, ethics, and mission cannot be avoided in the book of Revelation particularly the messages to the seven churches in Revelation two and three. Finally, character formation rightly employed becomes a basic principle for investigating the relation between mission and ethics in the book of Revelation.

5.5. Conclusion of the lessons of the study and lessons learned

In conclusion the concept of identity, ethos, ethics, and mission according to the book of Revelation is manifested in the response from the Christian communities to the surrounding challenges in Asia Minor. It must be kept in mind that all who desire to be part of Christ's witness on earth must be faithful. The identity of believers in the letters to the seven proclamations in Revelation two and three would be ineffective without the faithfulness of the believers. At this point let me note that an ethos of resistance would be inevitable without an historical-social crisis and the persecution from Roman hostility. Du Rand (2006: 589) argues that, "the ethical climax of the contribution of the faithful witness lies in their resistance to the demands of Rome". During the time of crisis and persecution, from an ethical point of view, the believers could, on the one hand, compromise and collaborate with opposing forces, or could resist and face the

consequences.⁸⁵ Furthermore, with my investigation, witnessing for God's mission became a spiritual response of faithfulness, steadfastness, and patience in Christ's suffering.

5.6. The concluding thought

At this stage let me conclude by indicating that having cursorily examined the epistolary framework of the book and discover that its prophetic messages are addressed to, "the seven churches that are in Asia" (Rev 1:4). We can and must affirm that the church has the responsibility of nurturing and judging the ethos of political and economic life. Its responsibility is that of improving the moral climate of society, elevating standards and sensitizing consciences. Presumably, the churches were suffering persecution because of their refusal to participate in the veneration of the emperor. The investigation focuses, on the basis of a strong case built from research, that the author of the messages of the seven churches addresses issues concerning moral and spiritual matters in an integrated manner and mostly highlighting the central importance of identity, ethics, ethos, and mission. Ethics of character and community within the context of the seven churches certainly offers a powerful and attractive alternative.

Taking a contemporary/historical approach to the book of Revelation, the study examines the mission and the ethical task of the church. The mandate of the church is to maintain a faithful witness to Jesus Christ. This faithful witness is to encompass both word and deed. As a result this study analyses the aspect of missional and ethical conduct, identity and ethos in Revelation.

5.7. The implications for further research

Witness or mission is a broad and inclusive task that the church is called to perform, for further investigation on how the author would re-align mission and ethics as a central task for contemporary Christians. Since the concept of the church is complex and multifaceted. How does the book of Revelation envisage the meaning of mission and ethics?

The implication for further research is: to what extent does the book of Revelation implicitly define the meaning of identity, ethics, ethos, and mission? With regard to the

⁸⁵ Du Rand, (2006:589) *Identity, ethics and ethos in the New Testament, a community of character: toward a constructive Christian social ethics.*

mission and ethics of the book of Revelation, can it be derived from the entire book of Revelation? So far, the role of character in ethics has been discussed, hence all attempts have been made to explain the precise meaning of identity, ethics and ethos of the book of Revelation particular the seven churches, character formation has been articulated within the aspect of mission. It is a complex concept. Further research must be carried forward.

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