

CHAPTER III. THE PROMISE STATEMENT GIVEN TO THE CONQUERORS OF THE SEVEN CHURCHES

III.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I will examine the promise statements in Revelation chapters 2-3, which constitute the main part of this dissertation. The content of the previous chapter would be helpful in understanding the current discussion that one is dealing with. The letters to the seven churches of Asia Minor (chaps. 2-3) form a distinct unit in the book of Revelation. They are closely related to the visions in chapter 1⁴⁰ and 4-22.⁴¹ Owing to the connection of chapter 1 and chapters 4-22 with chapters 2-3, most commentators nowadays (Wall, 1991:66-69; Beasley-Murray, 1992:70-72) try to show that the letters are inseparable from the rest of the work. Thus, more attention has been drawn to connect many thematic and linguistic links by ways of words and ideas (cf. Court, 1979:20-28). One should keep in mind that the seven letters were written within a specific historical and sociological time period and should, therefore, be studied alongside it. In addition, Ulfgard (1989:1) points out that in order to understand a part of Revelation one must consider its place within the context of the whole book.

⁴⁰ To the Ephesus church (2:1; cf. 1:12,16), to the Smyrna church (2:8; cf. 1:17-18), to the Pergamum church (2:12; cf. 1:16), to the Thyatira church (2:18; cf. 1:14-15), to the Sardis church (3:1; cf. 1:16), to the Philadelphia church (3:7; cf. 1:18), to the Laodicea church (3:14; cf. 1:5). See Michaels (1997:66-68).

⁴¹ For more information regarding this argument, see Farrer (1964:70-86). Through this argument, chapters 2-3 became closely related to chapter 1 and chapters 4-22 as a whole. It becomes possible to determine that Revelation is an Apocalypse that is to be broadly understood as an 'epistle' owing to the presence of an introduction (1:4) as well as a conclusion (22:21). It is not easy to consider the development of the letter, owing to the antiquity of the origin of the form of the letter. If one starts with the Hellenistic empire, which was built by Alexander the Great, it is very helpful, owing to the fact that during this time, the epistolary communication reached a high point of progress (Doty, 1973:1). He insists that this development could be derived from a wide range of reasons and ties between distant geographical parts of the empire. In contrast to the characteristic features of the Greek letter, which was constructed with an introduction, a body or text and a conclusion (cf. Doty, 1973:11-15), the Pauline letters generally consist of five sections: 1. Opening (sender, addressee, greeting) 2. Thanksgiving or Blessing (often with intercession and/or eschatological climax) 3. Body (introductory formulae; often having an eschatological conclusion and/ or an indication of future plans) 4. Paraenesis 5. Closing (formulaic benedictions and greeting; sometimes mention of the writing process) (Doty, 1973:27). Michaels (1997:64) regards these seven letters as "oracles of a prophet." It was thus called as a prophetic message to each church. (cf. Bauckham, 1993b:2; Beale, 1999:225). Beale (1999:225) suggests that each letter can typically be divided into seven sections: "1. command to write to an angel of a church, 2. Christ's self-description derived from the description in ch. 1 and introduced by the formula "these things" (τὰ ὅσα λέγει), 3. commendation of the church's good works, 4. accusation because of some sin, 5. exhortation to repent with a warning of judgment or an encouragement, 6. exhortation to discern the truth of the preceding message ("he who has an ear..."), and 7. promise to the conquerors."

If one regards this letter as a prophetic message or oracles of a prophet, what kinds of images did they ponder when John's audience heard it? Upon the initial reading of this prophetic message, what was the response of the audience to these promises? Who were the 'conquerors' (e.g. Rev. 2:7; 2:11; 2:17; 2:26-27; 3:5; 3:12; 3:21) in every letter? What was the audience's understanding of John's statements? In order to understand these kinds of questions, one must consider various elements with which one will deal more thoroughly later.

These various elements would be based on a number of literary, cultural, and socio-historical elements⁴² (cf. Wilson, 1996:195). An adequate model for the interpretation of the NT shows a text's genre, rhetoric, structure and function. The symbols and social structures of the NT differ greatly from our own.⁴³ The writings are framed linguistically by the socio-historical setting in which they were written (Johnson, 1986:6). Therefore, in this section I intend to locate and define the situation of the seven churches. I deem that the

⁴² It is very helpful to examine the historical background in Asia Minor and Palestine in order to understand the context of this section. One must go back to Alexander the Great. His dream was to change the whole world to become a Hellenized world. In order to achieve his dream, he intended more than revenge in order to have a priority of cultural hegemony (Johnson, 1986:24). In an endeavour to execute his dream, he started three policies of Hellenization as follows: 1. The city-state, the *polis*, was itself the first method of Hellenization because it was the climax of the Greek culture that can express a Hellenization and that religious activity can organize. Alexander used the *polis* as a means of disseminating the Greek culture. 2. A second method used as part of the process of Hellenization was language. This was the most powerful method to disseminate the Greek culture. 3. The third method of Hellenization was that of religious syncretism. Local gods, such as Baal ha Shemaim, the high god of the ancient Canaanite mythology, were systematically identified with their Greek counterparts, such as Zeus Olympus. Alongside the Hellenistic culture, Hellenization took place outside of Palestine, while within Palestine three factors in particular accounted for the diversity within the first-century Palestinian Judaism. First was the pervasive presence, and persuasive forces of the Hellenistic culture. Second was the reality of the Greek, then the Roman and the political hegemony. Third was a traditional interconnection drawn between religious and socio-political realities (Johnson, 1986:24-26, 43, cf. Cary & Haarhoff, 1966:306-348, Klauck, 2000:12-80). One should, therefore, keep in mind that the New Testament writing, especially Revelation, must be understood first of all within their first-century Mediterranean setting and in particular within the matrix of first-century Judaism.

⁴³ According to Johnson (1986:12-18), a symbolic world is based on the every-day life, and it is the system of meanings that defines the behaviours of individuals and communities in the real world. He absolutely regards symbolism as an element, which forms a basis for historical facts. Thus, Johnson (1986:13) states that symbolism, in terms of its historical, cultural and linguistic insight, may provide a valuable contribution in the following: "The symbols pervade every level of the group's life. They affect spatial and temporal arrangements and the rituals that mark them. They are built into that special language the group shares." Du Rand (1993a:243) explains symbolism as follows: "Symbolism is the figurative form and content through which the message of Revelation as divine communication may be intelligibly illustrated and conveyed. In Revelation symbolism does not merely exhibit meaning (Dulles); it also elicits meaning. .. Symbolism simply guides the reader to references and knowledge, enticing him to become involved in establishing the meaning." He also divides symbols largely into three categories as follows: 1. allegorical symbols, 2. hyperbolic symbols, 3. numerical symbols (:244). For more information about a symbol, see Prevost (1991:25-41); Ramsay (1994:41-52); Beale (1999:50-69).

social-cultural angle is most important to present the situation of each church. In conjunction with the local situations, it is important to explore the characteristics and images of each city given by the author as these were well known to his audiences (Scobie, 1993:606). Accordingly, one should accept the likelihood that local references were the direct context for the promise statements in chapters 2-3. Ramsay (1994:28-29) who is known as the father of the local references is quite correct in stating the following:

The letters was written by one who was familiar with the situation, the character, the past history, the possibilities of future development, of those seven cities. ... He assumes always that the church is, in a sense, the city. The local church does not live apart from the locality and the population amid which it has a mere temporary abode. The church is all that is real in the city: the rest of the city has failed to reach its true self, and has been arrested in its development.

In conjunction with the background of the promise statements given to the conquerors, the promise statements (e.g. 2:7; 2:11; 2:17; 2:26; 3:5; 3:12; 3:21) focus on the communication between the audiences and the author. It is how the author harmonizes the various elements, in order to establish effective communication between himself and the audiences through local references and the situations of the audiences and other literary sources. That is, their relationship can be regarded as situational as well as literary (Hemer, 1986:18). Through this analysis one understands why the promise statements were given to the conquerors, that is the prominent theme of Revelation (Bauckham, 1993b:67-73). They were given to each of the churches respectively, in order to encourage and console his community under the conflict situation with the wicked ones (cf. Sweet, 1979:77). John is deeply concerned here with the specific needs of his audiences in order to solve the problems they faced regarding their eternal destinies.

In conjunction with the text itself, it is necessary to examine the language as the instrument through which the author intentionally wanted to deliver his message to his audiences. As Black (1988:5) pointed out, "The analysis of a language system is possible only by examining and comparing actual manifestations of language as represented by samples of speech or writing." One should know what the language in the text is saying, in order to

understand the nature and intention of the language. The reason for the importance of a language is based on the fact that “the most rudimentary forms of social organization depend on language” (Traugott & Pratt, 1980:2). The linguists, Traugott & Pratt (1980:2) explain ‘language’ in the following:

It is chiefly through language that human communities control and change their structures, and create institutions which embody community aspirations and shape community life. Without language, the accumulation of shared knowledge and customs which we call culture would be impossible.

In the case of Gadamer (1977:62), the use of language presupposes a consciousness of a language. Caird (1980:7)⁴⁴ classifies word use as follows: “(1) to talk about people, things and ideas (Informative); (2) to think (Cognitive); (3) to do things and to get things done (Performative and Causative); (4) to display or elicit attitudes and feelings (Expressive and Evocative); (5) to provide a means of communal solidarity (Cohesive).” Even though he recognizes the defects of this analysis, it offers us the crucial key to the interpretation of the language of the Bible. When one talks about language, the language that was used was intended to be a means of communication. It is true that the understanding of the language of Revelation would imply the understanding of the intention or framework of the author. In order to discuss the meaning of conqueror motif in the seven churches, let’s research the meaning of the word ‘conqueror’.

III.2. The Conqueror

The word *νικᾶω* appears twenty-eight times in the New Testament (cf. Moulton and Geden, 1978:665-666);⁴⁵ seventeen in the book of Revelation. Almost half of them are introduced in the seven letters commonly referred to as the conqueror statement. But, when one deals

⁴⁴ Caird (1980:56-57) insists that the intention affects meaning in the following three ways: 1. Words have the meaning the speaker wants to speak to the reader. The most important corollary of this is that the speaker’s intention determines whether his words are to be taken literally or figuratively. 2. The speaker’s intention delivers the style of language use. What one has to decide is whether the prophecy was intended as a prediction or as a warning. 3. A word has the referent a speaker intends it to have. When one says, one uses a language that indicates a language as a means of communication. For more information about language use, see Liles (1975:3-37); Gadamer (1977:59-68); Caird (1980:144-171; 201-271); Wendland (1985:44-82).

⁴⁵ The use of *νικᾶω* in the New Testament as follows: Lk. 11:22; Jn. 16:33; Ro. 3:4; 12:21 (x2); 1 Jn. 2:13, 14; 4:4; 5:4 (x2), 5; Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21 (x2); 5:5; 6:2 (x2); 11:7; 12:11; 13:7; 15:2; 17:14; 21:7.

with the use of conqueror (νικάω), it is necessary to investigate the meaning of conqueror in terms of its biblical, socio-historical, and cultural situations because the demand over conquest is closely linked with these situations.

In the New Testament, one can find out the νικ- word group like νίκη (1 Jn. 5:4) and νικος (Mt. 12:20; 1 Co. 15:54, 55, 57). In these verses, the use of νίκη (1 Jn. 5:4) and νικος (Mt. 12:20; 1 Co. 15:54, 55, 57) has the same meaning as νικάω. The word group noted above implies “victory” or “superiority,” whether in the physical, legal or metaphorical sense, whether in moral conflict or peaceful competition (Bauernfeind, 1967:4.942). Louw & Nida (1993:1.501) are of the opinion that “the closest equivalent of ‘to be victorious over’ is to defeat.”

Νικάω in the New Testament can be used for different objects. According to Vine (1966:3.151), νικάω can be used 1) of God (e.g. Ro. 3:4), 2) of Christ (e.g. Jn. 16:33; Rev. 3:21; 5:5; 17:14), 3) of his followers (e.g. Ro. 12:21b; 1 Jn. 2:13, 14; 4:4; 5:4-5; Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21; 12:11; 15:2; 21:7), 4) of faith (e.g. 1 Jn. 5:4), 5) of evil (e.g. Ro. 12:21), 6) of predicted human potentates (e.g. 6:2; 11:7; 13:7). The different uses of conqueror through Revelation imply that when one regards the conqueror motif, it must be understood in its own contexts. That is why the promise statement and fulfillment statement given to the conquerors through the texts are introduced with different perspectives.

Of the seventeen, seven (e.g. 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21) are closely related to exhortations and promises given to the conquerors of the churches conquering their own situations. In these situations, the use of ὁ νικῶν (τῷ νικῶντι) as the substantival participle implies a continuing characteristic of the conquerors (Beale, 1999:271) struggling for victory because the participle in Greek emphasizes the continuous characteristic. Thus, the exhortations and promises given to the conquerors through chapters 2-3 are provided to those who really were conquerors as the people of God.

An interesting thing that occurs in the seven letters is the change between the final two sayings of the letters. In the first three, the call to hear (Ὁ ἔχων... τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει; e.g.

2:2:7, 11, 17) precedes the promise statement given to the conquerors (Τῷ νικῶντι or Ὁ νικῶν; e.g. 2:7, 11, 17). And, in the last four letters, the promise statement given to the conquerors (Ὁ νικῶν; e.g. 2:26; 3:5, 12, 21) precedes the call to hear (Ὁ ἔχων... τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει; e.g. 2:29; 3:6, 13, 22). According to Bauckham (1993a:10), it may be that the author's intention to divide the letters into three and four patterns is simply to differentiate these three and four patterns as distinct from the three series of seven judgments. Kistemaker (2001:118; cf. Duff, 2001:31-35) is also of the opinion that "The first part of this sentence is an idiomatic expression and refers to the capability of a person to hear and an accompanying willingness to listen. The second part is a command to listen attentively and obediently to the words of the Holy Spirit."

Roloff (1993:46) also divides the hearing formula into two parts: first three and then the other four. He regards the first three as paying attention to the statements of conqueror, and the other four as paying attention to the main section of the book, which begins with 4:1. But, it must be situated within the congregation that the seven churches faced. One can connect the situation of the seven churches with the hearing formula (HF) and the statement to the conquerors. Enroth (1990:602) is correct to say that the hearing formula in its present context expects the exhortation to be victorious and that it emphasizes the rewards that follow from being faithful. It means that the irony of Christ's victory and reward through his death and resurrection becomes the pattern of the church's victory and reward through suffering and endurance (White, 2000:161-176). Therefore, the conquerors in the seven churches were those who overcome the problems they faced, just as Jesus Christ became conqueror through his death and resurrection.

Two references in 5:5 and 17:14 are connected with the conqueror, Christ. Here, the victory of Christ is ironically based on the blood of the Lamb, accomplished through his death on the cross. In the case of 17:14, the victory of Christ will be in the future. The reason for victory is also based on the blood of the Lamb (cf. Reddish, 1982:133-136). Just as the theme of conqueror applied to the people of God by keeping the word of God and enduring unto death, Christ is the conqueror par excellence through his death (Strand, 1990:237-254).

According to Aune (1987:244), τηρέω and ὑπομονή are the same words as νικάω. But these words are “a passive experience” expressed by νικάω (Aune, 1987:244). Νικάω in the motif of conqueror can be interchanged with other words that imply the meaning of victory. Of these, τηρέω and ὑπομονή are the prominent words that are closely connected with the word νικάω. Τηρέω in Revelation appears eleven times (e.g. 1:3; 2:26; 3:3, 8, 10 (x2); 12:17; 14:12; 16:15; 22:7, 9). The contexts in which they are used are closely related to the conquerors as the people of God. One of the prominent examples is 2:26. Christ promises to give authority over the nation (ὁ νικῶν καὶ ὁ τηρῶν ἄχρι τέλους τὰ ἔργα μου, δώσω αὐτῷ ἐξουσίαν ἐπὶ τῶν ἐθνῶν). Here, ὁ νικῶν καὶ ὁ τηρῶν, which are linked with a coordinating conjunction καί are used together to do the work of Christ (Gilbertson, 2003:112-113). Another example of τηρέω that is closely linked with ὁ νικῶν is introduced in 14:12. The saints, the other expression for conqueror, are those who kept (τηρέω) God’s commandments and faith in Jesus (Kistemaker, 2001:344-345).

Ὑπομονη (endurance) also has the passive meaning of the word νικάω. Ὑπομονη appears seven times in Revelation (e.g. 1:9; 2:2, 3, 19; 3:10; 13:10; 14:12). In these contexts, the ὑπομονη provides the expression of behaviour of the Christians, namely conquerors who suffered at the hands of the wicked ones. That is why ὑπομονη is connected with other words that show the meaning of conquest or victory, such as keeping the name of Christ, faith, the word of God, tribulation (Boring, 1989:96). In the seven messages, endurance (ὑπομονή) is a repeated word expressing the virtue of the conquerors (Hauck, 1967:4.588). It will also be the “final and supreme test of faith” (Hauck, 1967:4.588). One of the prominent examples is 13:10 in which Christ demands ὑπομονή καὶ ἡ πίστις τῶν ἁγίων in the midst of the persecution by the beast. Here, ὑπομονή καὶ ἡ πίστις are introduced with the lists of the saints as the conquerors.

In 4 Maccabees 17:4, 7, 11-12, ὑπομονη is closely related to the faithful people of God who keep his commandments. The word ὑπομονη is given to the people of God who suffered under the persecution to maintain their faith and relationship with God (cf. Louw & Nida, 1993:1.308). That is why the people who kept God’s commandments and endured persecution can be called conquerors. Thus, the use of νικάω, τηρέω and ὑπομονη is one of the prominent examples that show the theme of victory in terms of the conqueror motif in

Revelation (cf. Aune, 1997:75-76).

III.3. Structure of the seven letters

Whenever one discusses the seven letters, it is very important to remember that they have the same pattern, even though there is a small change in the pattern (cf. Roberts, 1988:17-35). Structurally, the letters have a strong internal similarity and are stereotyped in terms of formula and content (Fiorenza, 1985:51-52; Enroth, 1990:599). The stereotyped formula in the seven letters can be described as follows: Τῷ ἀγγέλῳ... γράψον, Τάδε λέγει..., οἶδα..., ἀλλὰ ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ..., μετανοέω..., Ὁ ἔχων... τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει..., Τῷ νικῶντι or Ὁ νικῶν. Even though there are small changes in these patterns that are built into the various situations of the seven churches, one can see structural unity in the letters of seven churches (contra Grove, 2000:193-210).

By and large, the letter can be divided into four parts: 1) christological implication, 2) body of the letters as judgment or encouragement, 3) Holy Spirit, 4) Conqueror (cf. Prévost, 1991:69-77). Aune (1990:182-204) suggests that the form of the seven letters is linked with an ancient royal and imperial edict as follows: 1) the *adscriptio*, 2) the command to write, 3) the *τάδε λέγει* formula, 4) the christological predications, 5) the *οἶδα*-clause, 6) the proclamation formula (*Dispositio*), 7) the promise of victory.

In the case of Shea (1983:71-84), the seven letters are related to the Old Testament and the ancient Near East as follows: 1) preamble, 2) historical prologue, 3) stipulations, 4) witnesses, 5) blessing and curse. Even though both Aune and Shea have their own distinctive ideas on analyzing the structure of the seven letters, one must avoid the forced framework that the text itself does not speak. Therefore, Grove (2000:193) is quite correct to say that if one applies the same interpretative method to the structure of the seven messages, it would be very dangerous by reason that one artificially applies the seven messages into a certain pattern.

Through this kind of argument one can recognize that although the section of the seven letters has certain formal similarities, these similarities do not bind on a rigid and

stereotyped form that reflects the various social, cultural and political situations of the seven churches. The structure of the seven churches is shown in the following table:

	Ephesus church (2:1-7)	Smyrna church (2:8-11)	Pergamum church (2:12-17)
1. Addressee	Address to the angel in Ephesus	Address to the angel in Smyrna	Address to the angel in Pergamum
2. Τάδε λέγει formula, christological title	Hold the seven stars and walk among the seven golden lampstands	The First and the Last, died and came to life again	Sharp double-edged sword
3. οἶδα formula-body	Hard work, endurance, but lost first love	Afflictions, poverty, and the slander	Keep my name and faith but follow the teaching of Balaam
4. Πνεῦμα-formula	Hear what the Spirit says	Hear what the Spirit says	Hear what the Spirit says
5. Promise-statements to Conquerors	The tree of life	The crown of life, not be hurt by the second death	Hidden manna, white stone

	Thyatira church (2:18-29)	Sardis church (3:1-6)	Philadelphia church (3:7-13)	Laodicea church (3:14-22)
1. Addressee	Address to the angel in Thyatira	Address to the angel in Sardis	Address to the angel in Philadelphia	Address to the angel in Laodicea
2. Τάδε λέγει formula, christological title	Eyes like blazing, feet like burnished bronze as the Son of God	Hold the seven spirits and the seven stars of God	Hold the key of David	Amen, faithful and true witness, and the ruler of God's creation
3. οἶδα formula-body	Love, faith service and endurance but accept the false teaching of Jezebel	Dead, repent but a few people who have not soiled their robes	Little strength but keep the word of Christ and have not denied Christ's name	Neither cold nor hot, wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked
4. Πνεῦμα-formula	Hear what the Spirit says	Hear what the Spirit says	Hear what the Spirit says	Hear what the Spirit says
5. Promise statements to the conquerors	Authority over the nations, the Morning star	White robe, the book of life	A pillar in the temple of God	Right to sit with Christ on his throne

The tables above show us that the situations and exhortations of the seven churches are

very different, even if there are similarities. Of these five sections, I will deal with the christological implication, the body, the Spirit, and the promise statements given to the conquerors because these sections are closely connected with the theme of conqueror that is the theme of this dissertation.

III.3.1. Τάδε λέγει formula- Christological implication

Chapters 2-3 suggest the structural unity by a series of varied titles and characterizations noted above, which provide literary links with the vision explained in 1:9-20 (Duff, 2001:32). The introductory christological titles that appear in 1:9-20 reflect the specific problems and situations the seven churches faced according to their own situations. It is necessary to consider the christological implications that appeared in 1:9-20 in order to understand the seven prophetic messages of chapters 2-3. As Hartman (1997:137-138) observes, the explanation of the one like a Son of man is closely linked with the content behind that which follows. Its importance is stressed by the fact that features from the vision reappear in the seven messages of chapters 2-3. It is true that the christological titles in each letter are drawn from the chapter 1:9-20 and the christological titles in 1:9-20 are fully developed in chapters 2-3 (Filho, 2002:215-218). In conjunction with the social, cultural, and political situations, the seven churches reflect christological implications, which show various life situations of the Christians.

The church of Ephesus: In the case of the church of Ephesus, Jesus appears holding the seven stars in his right hand and walking among the seven golden lampstands (Rev. 2:1). The presentation of Christ in 2:1 is drawn from 1:13, 16, and 20 (Aune, 1997:142). This feature of Christ can be connected with the problem of the church of Ephesus. Jesus' feature implies the light of the divine presence in this church (Mounce, 1977:77) or the presence of Christ in all Christians (Aune, 1997:142). Falling from the divine presence (2:5), the life as the conquerors will be lost. But if Christians are grasped in the hands of Christ, they can be called conquerors because they regain their former love. According to Beasley-Murray (1992:73), this church is supported by Christ and subject to his almighty power and his scrutiny. Even though the church of Ephesus has a problem, this christological introduction, implying Christ's lordship over the church (cf. Wall, 1991:66-

69), would give them encouragement and confidence that they are in hands of Christ, and God is in control. Christ knows everything of this church (Bauckham, 1993b:123).

The church of Smyrna: Christ is introduced with a description of 2:8 as the First and the Last, who died and came to life again (ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὁ ἔσχατος, ὃς ἐγένετο νεκρὸς καὶ ἔζησεν). The presentation of Christ is drawn from 1:17 (ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὁ ἔσχατος) and 1:18 (ὁ ζῶν, καὶ ἐγενόμενῃ νεκρὸς). These titles provide Christ's eternal life and divine status (Rudolph, 2005:152). According to Slater (1999:102), Christ is on the same level with God. The christological title of 2:8 explains the situation of this church and provides a meaningful message for this community. The church of Smyrna that was in an antagonistic environment must face internal and external oppression from Jews and the suffering of persecution, and poverty (Michaels, 1997:72-75). The use of the christological title in which Christ has the "divine sovereign over history" (Beale, 1999:239) as the First and the Last (ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὁ ἔσχατος) might be a proper message to the community who faced severe trials, imprisonment, and possibly death (cf. Homcy, 1995:193-201). That is why Christ can be called the conqueror who died and came to life again (ὁ ζῶν, καὶ ἐγενόμενῃ νεκρὸς; cf. Wilson, 1996:47). The believers who endure their situation to the point of death (2:10) can be called conquerors like Christ.

The church of Pergamum: In this church, Christ appears as having the sharp, double-edged sword (ὁ ἔχων τὴν ῥομφαίαν τὴν δίστομον τὴν ὀξεῖαν: 2:18). The presentation of Christ is derived from 1:16 in that a sharp double-edged sword comes out of Christ's mouth. The sharp double-edged sword coming from Christ's mouth can be linked with Isaiah 11:4 and 49:2 in that with the rod of his mouth and the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked and the earth. In contrast with the physical sword as the instrument of destruction of the wicked in the Old Testament, the sharp double-edged sword in the church of Pergamum was the image of Christ's justice (Beasley-Murray, 1992:84), indicating the predominance of God's word against the teaching of Balaam and the teaching of Nicolaitans. John regards these teachings to be a significant danger to the conquerors that were against the teaching of Balaam and the teaching of Nicolaitans. He provides the argument between the conquerors and those holding the false teaching. The image of the sharp double-edged sword reflecting God's justice to the conquerors could be encouraging and consoling to

those who suffered under the hostile world because of the name of Christ. The ultimate power over life and death lies in the hands of Christ (Kistemaker, 2001:128).

The church of Thyatira: Christ is introduced as Son of God whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze (2:18). This verse (2:18) can be connected with 2:26, indicating the destructive judgment (Beasley-Murray, 1992:90) to the Jezebel and her children. The image of Christ is drawn from 1:13-15 even though a son of man in 1:13 is changed into the Son of God in 2:18. This change is based on the church's situation in the light of author. As Wall (1991:77) suggests, the figure of Christ reinterprets the earlier a 'son of man' title from Daniel with the more definitive the 'Son of God' title in order to give new perspective to the Thyatira Christian. The Christ's feature here is suitable for the church's situation. When one looks into the social, cultural, and religious situations of Thyatira, it was famous as the worship place of Apollo Tyrimnaeus.

The conquerors in Thyatira are those who are not affected by the presence of Jezebel and by compromise. Christ can see the internal identity of Jezebel (Aune, 1997:203-206). Therefore, one can consider that the christological presentation as Son of God (cf. Ps. 2:7; Da. 10:6) reflects the characteristic of Christ, implying the judgment of Jezebel and her children and the salvation of the conquering Christian (Rudolph, 2005:314; cf. Duff, 1997:116-133). In other words, it reveals that the conquerors are those who are not involved and compromised in work of Jezebel.

The church of Sardis: Christ appears as holding the seven spirits of God and the seven stars (3:1). It is derived from 1:4 in that it mentions the seven spirits and 1:16 in that mentions the seven stars. Like other churches mentioned above, the introduction over Christ provides a proper meaning for the situation of the church of Sardis. The church is described as spiritually dead, even though it is regarded as physically alive (Rudolph, 2005:315). 'Alive and dead' explain the characteristic of the life style of this church. Christ is introduced as holding the seven spirits of God, implying the fullness of the Holy Spirit and the seven stars, indicating the messenger of the church. It would give new life and spiritual revival to the church that was spiritually dead before, because Christ holds the seven spirits and the seven stars as mediator to give life and to proclaim the word of God

(Kistemaker, 2001:150). According to Thompson (1998:79), in this church, the conquerors are those who participated in the transformation of the righteous from the death to life.

The church of Philadelphia: As Gilbertson (2003:57) insists, the purpose of the book of Revelation was to deal with the present experience of the communities to whom the letters were delivered. In the church of Philadelphia, it reflects also the present experience of the church. Christ who holds the key of David (3:7) is described as holy and true. It is drawn from 1:18. Holy and true (ὁ ἅγιος, ὁ ἀληθινός) in 3:7 (cf. Rev. 6:10: ὁ ἅγιος καὶ ἀληθινός; 19:11: πιστός καὶ ἀληθινός] indicate divine attributes and authority (cf. Kistemaker, 2001:157). These designations suit the church of Philadelphia that is blameless in the sight of God. On the one hand, Christ as holy and true promised to become a pillar in the temple of my God (3:12), implying security of the faithful church. On the other hand, Christ who holds the key of David revealed the absolute control over the people who lie by claiming to be Jews even though they are not (3:9). In the midst of a conflict between Christians and Jews, the Christians as the conquerors kept Christ's word of endurance (ἐτήρησας τὸν λόγον τῆς ὑπομονῆς μου). The endurance can be linked with martyrdom, which is one of the characteristics of conqueror (Collins, 1996:207-212). In this situation, Christ's features as holy and true, and the key image of his absolute control or authority can give encouragement and confidence to the Philadelphia Christians under their given situations. Stevenson (2001:241) is of the opinion that christological titles in this letter show the divine authority to grant access to God and his kingdom.

The church of Laodicea: The presentations of Christ as Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation are not as much a verbatim development in 1:9-20 but connected with 1:5 as faithful witness (ὁ μάρτυς, ὁ πιστός). The self-description of the Amen, the faithful and true witness in 3:14a can be an expansion of the faithful witness in 1:5 (Beale, 1998:273-294), on the basis of Christ's ministry, death, and resurrection. As Slater (1999:149) insists, 'witnessing' is a central theme and a key word to maintain the sacred universe by linking Christ and Christian. In the second part of 3:14, the ruler of God's creation is related not to the original creation, but to his new creation through his ministry, death, and resurrection. The problems that the church of Laodicea had were self-satisfaction or self-sufficiency and compromising of the church with its environment. As

Beasley-Murray (1992:104) explained, this figure as the characteristic of Christ contrasts strongly with the self-satisfaction and spiritual tepidity of the church of Laodicea. As the Lord of church, Christ expected them like himself to be faithful and true witnesses to the hostile world and to be a new creation through Christ's ministry, death, and resurrection.

III.3.2. Οἶδα formula – the body

The body of the seven letters begins with the οἶδα-clause (e.g. 2:2, 9, 13, 19; 3:1, 8, 15). That is, usually the οἶδα formula begins with οἶδα τὰ ἔργα σου or οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα (I know your works). In the church of Smyrna, one finds the change of the οἶδα formula as follows: 'οἶδά σου τὴν θλίψιν καὶ τὴν πτωχείαν' and in the church of Pergamum, 'οἶδα ποῦ κατοικεῖς, ὅπου ὁ θρόνος τοῦ σατανᾶ'. The so-called οἶδα formula describes the situation of seven churches which they faced (cf. Boring, 1989:85-97). In the case of four churches (e.g. Ephesus, Pergamum, Thyatira, and Sardis), the οἶδα formula has two responses from Christ: positive and negative, namely praise and blame. In these letters, the call for repentance (μετανοήσον: e.g. 2:5, 16, 21; 3:3) is followed by a threat from Christ (e.g. 2:5, 16, 22-23; 3:3). But in the case of the church of Laodicea, the οἶδα formula only has a negative response from Christ, namely blame. As with the four churches mentioned above, to the church of Laodicea, the call for repentance (μετανοήσον: 3:19) is given for their being lukewarm and for their attitude to wealth (Duff, 2001:32-35).

In the case of both the churches of Smyrna and Philadelphia, the οἶδα formula only has a positive response from Christ. There are no calls for repentance and threats to the churches of Smyrna and Philadelphia. While to the conquerors in the churches of Smyrna and Philadelphia, exhortation, encouragement, and endurance are given, to the evil forces, the eschatological threats are given (cf. Duff, 2001:43-47). Even though the οἶδα formula begins with the body parts of the seven churches as positive and negative elements, the interesting thing is the location of the οἶδα formula in the seven letters. According to the five churches, that is Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, and Philadelphia, the οἶδα formula begins with a word of praise, whereas the churches of Sardis and Laodicea begin with a word of blame. It means that the churches of Sardis and Laodicea are the worst of the other churches that begin with blame. These various forms of the letters reflect that

they would not be regarded as stereotypical (cf. Wilson, 1996:143-170) but would be considered as the product of the situation of the seven churches (cf. Corsini, 1983:114-115; Shea, 1983:81-84). When one describes the body part of the seven churches, it can't be separated from the situation of the seven churches like the christological title of the previous section. Therefore, Aune (1990:191) is quite correct to say that the οἶδα-clause makes it clear that Christ is aware of the conduct and factions of seven churches.

III.3.3. The Spirit in the seven churches

The references to the Spirit of God in Revelation can be categorized into three parts: ἐν πνεύματι (e.g. 1:10; 4:2; 17:3; 21:10), ἐπὶ πνεύματα (e.g. 1:4; 3:1; 4:5; 5:6), and τὸ πνεῦμα (e.g. 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22; 14:13; 19:10; 22:17; cf. Bauckham. 1993a:150-173). But in this section, I will try to limit the use of the Spirit of God to the seven churches.

The use of τὸ πνεῦμα as the singular form in chapters 2-3 is compared with ἐπὶ πνεύματα as the plural form. The form of τὸ πνεῦμα is connected with the christological title that speaks to each church through the christological implications and the body sections. The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy (Rev. 19:10), implying the words and works of the Spirit. Thus, “the purpose of prophecy is to confirm Christ’s own witness and to testify to Christian faith through the saints” (Lampe, 1984:1.246). It means that the words and works of Christ to be sent to the seven churches are linked with the words and works of the Spirit (Mazaferri, 1989:300-303). Just as the christological titles that appear in the introductory parts are closely connected with the situations of the seven churches, the words and works of the Spirit also connect with the real problems that surrounded them (cf. Smalley, 1994:152-154) and guarantee what Christ said in the beginning of the seven churches. According to Bauckham (1993b:118), the Spirit provides the prophetic words of Christ to his people in order to become conqueror. Therefore, the word of the Spirit (e.g. 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22) at the end of the seven churches guarantees the divine message about Christ’s words that proclaim the salvation and judgment (cf. Jeske, 1985:452-466). The prophetic ministry of the Spirit is to ensure the truth on this earth and to reveal the eschatological blessing in terms of a heavenly perspective (Bauckham, 1993b:125). Aune

(1990:195; contra Beasley-Murray, 1992:76) links the Spirit with the exalted Christ talking to the seven churches. However, the statement of the Spirit guarantees the promise statements given to the conquerors and the judgment statement to the defeated.

III.3.4. Summary

From the island of Patmos (Rev. 1:9) John sent his letter to the seven churches in order to solve various problems they faced. First of all, one should remember that the structure of the seven letters, consisting of the parts of the christological implication, the body, the Spirit, and the conqueror, indicates the close relationship between chapter 1:9-20 and chapters 2-3 which were based on their own situations (Slater, 1999:108-116). It means that the description of Christ at the beginning of the seven churches can be connected with the social, political, and religious situations of the seven churches. As Duff (2001:32) stated, these letters give us our best picture of the situation of the various Christian churches. Thus, the christological description, the body, the Spirit, and the conqueror must be regarded within the common rhetorical situations of the seven churches as a whole. In order to reveal the meaning of the conqueror motif, it is necessary to consider the background of the seven cities, the reward given to the conquerors, and the conquerors as the faithful people of God who were in parts of Asia Minor. This will make the theme of conqueror easier to understand according to the intention of John.

III.4. The promise statement given to the conquerors of the church of Ephesus

The church of Ephesus is the one of the five churches blamed by Christ. The reason for the blame is that they have forsaken their first love amongst one other. For this, Christ who walks among the seven golden lampstands in 2:1 threatens to remove the lampstands from their place if they do not repent (2:5). If they repent, they would be called as the conquerors who will receive the tree of life, implying the eternal life as reward. Thus, the hearing formula (e.g. 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22) that the Spirit says to the church of Ephesus confirms that the conquerors would receive the tree of life as the promise of salvation, and the rest of the people, who are not conquerors, would be judged. As a prophetic message, the form of the Ephesus letter should be regarded as written within the

situation of Ephesus (cf. Hartman, 1997:138-140).

III.4.1 The city of Ephesus

Under Augustus, Ephesus was made capital of the province of Asia as the new centre of the Roman city.⁴⁶ Through the passage of time, Ephesus was regarded as the place that had experienced more change than any other city of Asia. It was accordingly called “the city of change” (Ramsay, 1994:151; cf. Wood, 1975:4; Knibbe, 1995:145; Kistemaker, 2001:109-111; contra White, 1995:27-65). The city of Ephesus itself underwent several changes of site and orientation as well as physical geography (Hemer, 1986:35).⁴⁷ If one accepts the statement of Ramsay and Hemer that Ephesus was the city of change, the statement of Revelation 2:5 (“Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lamp-stand from its place”) would be easily understood by the audiences who listened as a message to the Ephesus church. The message sent to the Ephesus church was familiar to the people who lived in the city of change. At that time, Ephesus was famous, at the apex of its wealth and influence in the Hellenistic and Roman periods and became a popular and privileged city in Asia Minor.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ According to Barclay (1957:11-19; cf. White, 1995:40-41): 1. Ephesus was a city which was the greatest commercial centre. In commerce and in wealth there were few cities to surpass it, 2. Ephesus was the greatest political centre. She enjoyed the title ‘Supreme Metropolis of Asia’, 3. Ephesus was the greatest religious centre. Its greatest glory was the Temple of Diana, 4. The character of the people of Ephesus was notoriously bad. As the important social, political, and religious centre, Ephesus remained “the first and greatest metropolis of Asia” (White, 1995:34).

⁴⁷ In accordance with Ramsay, Hemer also connects many local and contemporary references to the situation of the church. According to Hemer (1986:16), a whole context in seven churches reveals correspondences with a city and its letter in which verbal and situational parallels have appeared to each other. In contrast to Ramsay and Hemer, Beckwith (1967:451) insists that the connection of the local reference of the church should be rejected: “This promise, like the epithet of Christ in v.1, does not have specific reference to the circumstances of the Ephesians, it is applicable to all alike; and it is placed appropriately in this introductory epistle as fundamental to the promises in all the others.” Even though it is true that the Bible as canon does have permanent truth to all the people who lived before and all people who are living at present, it could not be underestimated that the Bible sent to the first-century Christian community is deeply rooted to their original “*Sitz im Leben*.”

⁴⁸ Since Seleucid’s times, a Jewish community had possessed its citizenship and special and guaranteed status in the city (Hemer, 1986:37-38). The reason that the Jews who lived in the city of Ephesus were granted by the Roman authority is because the Romans supported the Judaism as “a *religio licita*.” Reasons for this support are that firstly, the Hellenistic monarchies generally supported the Jews in their Empires. Secondly they are part of an exchange of *beneficia* and often result from gratitude or mutual esteem between two leaders. Thirdly, toleration was an important principle for the Roman administration. As long as the

Another important characteristic of this city is its significance as a religious centre. The religious characteristic of Ephesus was heightened as the place for the leading divinity of Asia Minor – Artemis of Ephesus (Arnold, 1989:14). The fact that images of Artemis Ephesus are widespread in the Roman world has great bearing on the issue of the general knowledge of the iconographic peculiarity of Artemis of Ephesus. Artemis of Ephesus is considered as the champion of mercy, not so much in a ritual context as in an everyday action and life (Thomas, 1995:96). About the spread and the effect of the Artemis cult, not only in Ephesus but throughout all of Asia (cf. Ramsay, 1994:167), Arnold (1989:20-21) points out the following:

The influence of the Ephesus Artemis extended beyond the religious sphere into a domination of Asia life and culture. The temple wielded tremendous power through its function as a banking and financial center. Large amounts of money were deposited and borrowed from the Artemision. The cult also obtained a sizeable income from the large amount of property owned in the environs of Ephesus.⁴⁹

The city of Ephesus was also a place in which Artemis and many other major or minor

Jewish communities and their religion were thought to be politically innocuous and morally unobjectionable, they could be treated with tolerance. Fourthly, the political fidelity and support of the Jews in strategic Palestine and beyond was important (Trebilco, 1991:10-11). These strong Jewish influences in Asia Minor would be attractive to outsiders and even had a significant influence on the local Christians. In conjunction with Revelation, one can see that the life style of the Jews that appeared in the seven churches might influence Christians surrounded by Jewish practices or involved in synagogue life. Thus, the problems of the assimilation and compromise in the seven churches, which were influenced by a pagan environment in Asia Minor, are without any doubt the result of a local situation.

⁴⁹ The influence of Artemis in Ephesus is also illustrated in Acts 19:23-40. One can regard the cities of the Mediterranean world as the leading cities of the great political, cultural, and social changes that occurred during the six and a half centuries from Alexander to Constantine (Meek, 1983:11). As a strategic missionary it is not surprising that Paul preached the gospel in Ephesus city, which was the strategic location of the city, both in terms of the land routes as well as the most important city Paul sought to evangelize (Witherington III, 1998:563). These facts show that Ephesus had been the centre for Paul's evangelistic work as a missionary. Witherington III (1998:583) explains the importance of the position of this episode in Acts 19: "In the first place, from a rhetorical point of view, it prepares the reader or hearer for the troubles Paul is to encounter in the following chapters (cf. the riot in Jerusalem in Acts 21) by already arousing and appealing to the deeper emotion (*pathos*). In the second place, this narrative provides us with the final confrontation between Paul as a free man and pagan religion and shows how God continues to work his plan, even in the face of stiff opposition from one of the most powerful and widespread of pagan cults." In Acts 19:11-40, four stories of Paul's ministry are explained. The first (Acts 19:11-12) is Paul's miraculous performance, the second (Acts 19:13-17) rivaling magicians and exorcism, third (Acts 19:18-20) the newly won believers and burnt magical books, fourth (Acts 19:23-40) the story of the riot of the silversmiths. This story (Acts 19:23-40) reflects the milieu of Ephesus and attests to Luck's knowledge of the Ephesian political and religious situation.

deities were worshipped and praised (Aurenhammer, 1995:252). As I mentioned above, since the conquest of Alexander the Great, it is not surprising that the Greco-Roman world adopted religious syncretism as their policy to maintain their state power, because the one tool of Hellenization was religious syncretism. There was no exception for this in the Greco-Roman time.

They were also interested in divine power or supernatural power about which this emphasis was typical of the entire Hellenistic world. They thought that the supreme powers would intervene in the affairs of men without limit. The Greeks and Romans asked the gods for “positive gifts, increase of crops and flocks, victory over enemies, recovery from illness, wise advice on the difficult problems of life” (Cary & Haarhoff, 1966: 309). On the basis of this framework, in which their patron gods would protect them from their opponents and from evil powers, they longed for access to supernatural power. Therefore, a keen interest in supernatural power was especially characteristic of the adherents of Artemis and those who practiced magic in the Hellenistic world. The worshippers of Artemis in particular extolled their goodness as supreme in power, a ‘cosmic’ power they believed to be superior to that of any other deity, astrological fate, and evil spirits. Also, in many respects, characteristics of the nature of her power are very similar to Hellenistic magic⁵⁰ (Arnold, 1989:34-39). Thus, it could not be ignored in Ephesus city that some local gods and supernatural powers were thought of as the supreme rulers of the universe (Trebilco, 1991:127-144). As a result of this research, the influence of the city of Ephesus on the rest of Asia Minor should not be underestimated.

⁵⁰ Under the influence of religious syncretism, in Greco-Roman times one can find the influence of magic and astrology in the life of people who lived in Asia Minor. In ancient times, it was not possible to separate the relationship between religion and supernatural power such as magic, astrology, exorcism, because they were intermingled. Without doubt, the Ephesus city, which was the centre of the Artemis cult also had a direct link with the magical practices of that time. Witherington III (1998:578) lists a variety of regular features in ancient magic in the following: 1. complicated rituals, 2. magic spells and recipes, 3. the reciting of various names for various gods or even nonsense syllables in hopes of landing on a combination of sounds or names that will force a god to do one’s bidding, 4. the reliance on a professional technician who demands payment and relies on secrecy, 5. syncretism, 6. coercion and manipulation as opposed to personal relating and supplication. Even though many people suggest the influence of magic and astrology in Greco-Roman times, as far as the activities of Paul are concerned, Paul rejected the influences of these features in Acts 19. Klauck (2000:209-249) properly explains the difference between magic and religion (cf. Arnold, 1989:14-40).

III.4.2. The social situation of the church of Ephesus

One mainly discussed the social and political situations of the first Christians in the light of persecution, but what one should avoid is to simplify the meaning of Revelation, by merely regarding it in terms of persecution (Friesen, 2005:351-356). That is why I have researched the ‘dating and the social and political situations’ in order to demonstrate various contexts in which Revelation was written. In this section, I intend to address this problem briefly.⁵¹

In the church of Ephesus, one could not find any evidence of persecution, but they were blamed for having forsaken their first love amongst one another. In the midst of such a pagan social and cultural situation, the church of Ephesus was praised for its work, toil and endurance. They didn’t accept wicked men and false apostles (Rev. 2:2-3) and hated the practices of the Nicolaitans (Rev. 2:6). Their problem did not come from external sources, but from within. The problem from within is ‘ὅτι τὴν ἀγάπην σου τὴν πρώτην ἀφῆκες: You have forsaken your first love’ (Rev. 2:4). Here, conquering and judgment are divided according to their works, toil, endurance (τὰ ἔργα σου καὶ τὸν κόπον καὶ τὴν ὑπομονήν; 2:2) and forsaking their first love (Slater, 1999:116-117).

III.4.3. Tree of life (ξύλον τῆς ζωῆς)

Even though the promise statements given in the seven letters are different in every case, it should be accepted that the general tone and character of the letter were adapted to suit the need of the city (cf. Hemer, 1986:37; Ramsay, 1994:179). The expression ‘the tree of life’, which is in the garden of God, is symbolic and couldn’t be described according to its visible meaning. But it might be a more hopeful task to inquire as to what meaning the Asian Christians would take from the phrase in a sort of syncretism of Jewish and native Asian thought (Ramsay, 1994:179). One should ask why the promise of the symbol of the tree of life, which was given to the conquerors, was applied to the church of Ephesus.

⁵¹ Minear (1967:47-51) regards the Revelation as not mainly concerned with persecution, but mainly concerned with derelictions, self-deception and false-teachings. When one considers only chapters 2-3, one can easily find derelictions, self-deception and false-teaching, but here, one can also locate the proof of persecution. Whenever one reads the book of Revelation, one needs the balance of both sides. Fiorenza (1985:192-199) also mentions the rhetorical situation as characterized by exigency and urgency. On the basis of this fact, she doesn’t miss the element of possible harassment, persecution and suffering of individual Christians.

III.4.3.1. Artemis cult as the tree of life

In Ephesus as a religious centre in the first century, Artemis, or Diana (her Roman name) was eagerly worshipped by many people. People called upon Artemis as “Savior, Lord, Queen of the Cosmos” (Arnold, 1989:21, cf. Hemer, 1986:48). In ancient literature, there is some evidence of the holy place of Artemis as a tree-shrine. In the Artemis cult, the tree with its image was closely identified with the presence of the goodness within her *naos* (cf. Court, 1979:25, Knibb, 1995:143)⁵². In Tacitus (Annals, 3.61), this tree was connected to the sacred tree of Ortygia where it was adhered to as the mythical birthplace of Artemis (Knibb, 1995:144; Wilson, 1996:34, 199). The Ephesus city as the mythical birthplace of Artemis offered a fixed focal point of religious interest. “This fixed focal point ‘was a place of salvation for the suppliant’ of Artemis, ‘surrounded by an asylum a bow-shot or more in radius, enclosed by a boundary wall’ (Court, 1979:25; cf. Hemer, 1986: 48)⁵³.

When one thinks of Sacred trees and animals to be connected with the deities (cf. Cary & Haarhoff, 1966:312-319), it is not surprising that the Artemis-shrine of Ephesus, which was made of a tree, was extolled by the people as a supreme god, or a tree goddess and a timeless symbol of fertility (Knibb, 1995:143). She was the “σωτηρία” or “σωτεία” for the salvation of people.⁵⁴ For this reason, the Ephesian Artemis was considered, even in the

⁵² Hemer (1986:41-50) suggests the date of the palm or tree as the characteristic symbol of Artemis on the basis of the coinage and the numismatic evidence in the Anatolian periods of the city. This was however rejected because his evidence regarding the use of the tree on a coin was all according to pre-Roman dating from 400-350 B.C. In contrast with Hemer, Wilson (1996:199) states “It is doubtful whether John’s audience would be familiar with the symbolism of pre-Roman coinage because it was no longer in circulation.”

⁵³ One aspect of the temple captured the imagination of Roman-period writers more than any other: “the inviolability of the sanctuary” (Thomas, 1995:98, cf. Witherington III, 1998:587). As the place of security, it was refuge to the people who perpetrated serious crimes. Thus, the safety which it afforded the suppliant was “σωτηρία” (Hemer, 1986:48). If asylum provides a security and salvation to the people who looked for their own refuge, the tree of life, which was in the garden of God, would provide a complete contrast with the asylum of Artemis, which provided visible security and salvation in this world (cf. Court, 1979:25). This matter will be dealt with in more detail at some later stage.

⁵⁴ One of the characteristics of Artemis is the cosmic power that she has. She has authority and control over the cosmos world (Arnold, 1989:22). She deeply involves the demonic realm, the spirits of nature, and the fate of people – death, disease, pain, birth, health and so on. Thus, when they say salvation from what, it doesn’t relate to the point of view of Christianity to get eternal life or be saved. When one considers the frame-work of ancient times, the salvation in the Artemis cult as well as the pagan religion means salvation from disease, disaster, or death in this life. Thus to them, Saviour or salvation had to do with health or other matters of this earth in contrast with the concept of Bible about salvation. Salvation in the Bible connects with “God’s gracious act of forgiving sins through Jesus which causes the moral, mental, emotional, spiritual,

first century after Christ, to be in some sense a deity of the whole province of Asia. Ephesus was, according to the estimation of the world, a very famous city, due to her goddess Artemis. The imperial or Asklepios worship in the city of Ephesus should also not be underestimated (Ramsay, 1994:151-171). In the Ephesus city, having some religious background, depended on various religious syncretism, to live as a Christian at that time seemed like a big adventure or gamble. Tacitus (Annals, 15:44) describes this tragic fact about having been a Christian during this period:

And there were sacred banquets and nightly vigils celebrated by married women. But all human efforts, all the lavish gifts of the emperor, and the propitiations of the gods, did not banish the sinister belief that the conflagration was the result of an order. Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus... Accordingly, an arrest was first made of all who pleaded guilty; then upon their information, an immense multitude was convicted, not so much of the crime of firing the city, as of hatred against mankind.

In these circumstances, to be a Christian being branded a *superstitio*, could and would have significant social, as well as religious repercussions for the individuals involved, inclusive of their family members (cf. Witherington III, 1998:824).

In conjunction with the Ephesus city in the dominant polytheistic or imperialistic religious culture, Artemis built as a tree-shrine provided the contrasted image with ‘the tree of life’, which was in the garden of God for the conquerors’ salvation. The “wooden statue” of Artemis (Knibb, 1995:153) would not guarantee people’s life. It is “dead wood” (Hemer, 1986:43).⁵⁵ Such a promise between the tree of life and the tree of Artemis in its historical,

and sometimes even physical transformation of an individual” (Witherington III, 1998:837).

⁵⁵ By and large, the word for tree can be related back to two Greek-words; on the one hand is “δένδρον”, on the other hand is “ξύρον”. Δένδρον and ξύρον indicate these kinds of characters as follows: 1. to denote idolatrous worship (e.g. Isa. 57:5; Jer. 2:27; Ezk. 6:13); 2. to denote promises of God’s blessing, God’s wrath and God’s providence (e.g. Ezk. 47:12; LXX, 1Ch. 16:33; LXX); 3. to denote the expression of the tree of life (Embry, 1986:3.865-866). Generally, while δένδρον indicates a living or growing tree, ξύρον indicates

social, and cultural situations provided a complete contrast with the threat of the Ephesus church. Thus, the image of the tree of life through the contrasting picture might give the Christians of Ephesus encouragement and victory as the conquerors.

III.4.3.2. Tree of life in the Old Testament

The statement of the ‘tree of life’ originally stemmed from Ge. 2:9 and 3:22 (cf. Ps. 1:3; Pr. 3:18; 11:30; 13:12; 15:4; Jer. 17:8; Ezk. 28:13; 31:8-9). Among the so-called ‘wisdom literature’ – Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes, wisdom is also expressed as a ‘tree of life’ (e.g. Pr. 3:18). In a vivid turn of metaphor, wisdom can be linked with the tree of life and expressed with a personified woman and the life-death situation is described positively in the image of ‘the tree of life’ (Murphy, 1996:ix). Owing to this explanation, it is possible to determine the emphasis of creation and life in wisdom theology, which seeks to describe their faith in some coherent and meaningful way. One can thus state, “wisdom theology is creation theology”⁵⁶ (Murphy, 1996:118) that gives us life unlike the Artemis cult.

In the paradise of God, the original condition of man at creation prior to the fall will be restored because in the Bible, trees are seen as “symbolic of the life of God” (Wenham, 1987:62) and an “organic correlation in life” (Nielson, 1989:71). The tree was also regarded as a symbol of life-giving divine power to the Asian Greeks as well as to the Jews, though in a different way (Ramsay, 1994:179). The secret Torah of the tree of life is

dead wood or wood, a piece of wood, anything made of wood (Vine, 1966:4.153). Sometimes ξύρον can be interchangeable with σταυρός (see Vine, 1966:4.153, Schneider, 1967:5.39-41). The tree of life can be connected with the cross on which Jesus died. Schneider (1967:5.40-41) is quite correct to say that early Christian art explains a relationship between the tree of life and the cross. The cross of Christ, the wood of suffering and death, is for Christians a tree of life. It is thus for the first time depicted as the symbol of victory over death.

⁵⁶ In Proverbs, wisdom is regarded as one of the highest goals of the faithful people of God (Wenham, 1987:63), because wisdom could be identified with Jesus in terms of the New Testament. Sometimes wisdom could be connected with the “divine word or a theology of creation” (Murphy, 1996:118). Sawyer (1992:105) connects the old creation with the new creation as follows: creation theology, based on the story of Adam, is a key element to evaluate Paul’s theology and his understanding of the person and work of Jesus of Nazareth. To have wisdom could thus be explained as a complete fellowship with God. In order to understand the concept of the New Creation, New Adam, and New Age of Paul, he suggests: 1. Paul was a first-century Jew who believed he was living in the Messianic age, which had cosmological implications; 2. By exploring creation imagery in his theology, Paul was not simply discovering a proof-text for his new convictions; he was also expecting a common image, which would appeal as much to the Gentile as to the Jews; 3. Paul’s recourse to the image of creation depends on his personal experience (:105-106).

identified with the first two tablets of Moses⁵⁷ (Morris, 1992:136). It is not surprising that the ideas that the tree of life is sacred and provides life-giving fruits (O' Reilly, 1992:178), were important to the Asia Minor audiences who needed God's power, consolation and encouragement through this image. Citing the tree in Isaiah as a metaphor, Nielsen (1989:79) explains the concept of the tree as follows:

Concepts of the tree as holy are a universal feature of almost all 'primitive' religions. If we consider the climatic conditions in the Palestinian region, it can come as no surprise that here also the tree was considered a *symbol of life*. Where trees can grow there is water and where there is water, there is the possibility of life. Thus, here also are the fundamental day-to-day experiences, that underlie the idea of the tree.

Based on the argument thus far, one can certify that the image of the 'tree of life' symbolizes the life-giving presence of God, and the tree refers to the redemptive effects of the 'cross' (Schneider, 1967:5.40-41; O'Reilly, 1992:170). It brings about the restoration of God's presence to the people of God (cf. Beale, 1999:235).

Giblin (1991:54) associates the tree of life with the cross, expressed as giving his promise to the conquerors in a banquet-image, namely, eating from the tree of life. Ultimately, the tree of life signifies the cross as being the fruit of salvation that will be given to the conquerors. The problems of the church of Ephesus are that they have forsaken their first love, as well as that, they have faced the works of the Nicolaitans who encouraged a compromise with the pagan society and worship of the pagan gods, namely Artemis or Asklepios, including of an imperial cult. Because Ephesus was known as the 'temple warden' (νεωκόρος) of the pagan goddess Artemis, it is not surprising that the city's life was dominated by the temple's life. To those who conquer the situation of life, the promise

⁵⁷ When one considers the tree of life in the light of restored creation, the tree of life is considered a key characteristic of a perfect garden where God dwells (Wenham, 1987:62). The ancient Near Eastern image of the tree of life can be compared with a cosmological tree that is closely rooted in the underworld, offering healing and immortality as its fruit and in Jewish cosmology (O' Reilly, 1992:170). Under the influence of the tree of life, they feel that the safety and security of the state or individual was assured. During the early Christian centuries, this tree of life was readily linked with the cross. In connection with this concept, the cross, erected on Golgotha in the historical city of Jerusalem at a particular moment in time, can be here regarded as the eternal cosmic tree of life, revealing the perfect ideal world in the heavenly paradise of the New Jerusalem (O'Reilly, 1992:170-171).

statement is a good symbolic image for the reward of eternal life and conqueror (Mounce, 1977:90).

III.4.3.2.1. Paradise of God

One must now turn to the ‘paradise of God’ (ὁ παράδεισος τοῦ θεοῦ). Παράδεισος is a loan-word from an old Persian form denoting an enclosure, park, or garden, which existed for the parks of the Persian king and nobility (Jeremias, 1967:5.765; cf. Bauer, 1979:614; Liddell & Scott, 1996:1308). The origin of this word ‘ὁ παράδεισος τοῦ θεοῦ’ in Revelation 2:7 could be derived from the Septuagint reading of Genesis 13:10 (ὁ παράδεισος τοῦ θεοῦ) and Ezekiel 28:13 (ἐν τῇ τρυφῇ τοῦ παραδείσου τοῦ θεοῦ), 31:8 (ἐν τῷ παραδείσῳ τοῦ θεοῦ). The meaning of the paradise of God, which is differentiated from a secular ‘park’ or ‘garden’, has a change in meaning here; from the profane sphere to the religious sphere. The paradise of the first age, in which the condition of the bliss was lost due to sin, would be restored through an eschatological paradise, having the hope of a future time of bliss.

In terms of the New Testament, Jesus is presented as the Messiah, who will open the gate of paradise and allow the conquerors to eat of the tree of life⁵⁸ (Jeremias, 1967:5.772). According to Jewish thought, they expected that the paradise and the tree of life would reappear at the time of the Messiah (Ford, 1975:388)⁵⁹. If one compares the paradise of God where the tree of life was standing with the sacred precinct (τέμενος) where the statue of Artemis was, one can easily understand what kind of message this word indicates.

⁵⁸ With Revelation 2:7 in the New Testament, only two passages mention paradise: Lk. 23:43 and 2 Co. 12:4. In Lk. 23:43, Jesus promised the criminal that ‘today you will be with me in paradise (ἐν τῷ παραδείσῳ)’. Following the contemporary Jewish conception, paradise here refers to the intermediate abode of the righteous (cf. Wilson, 1996:201) or eschatological fellowship. Paradise as now concealed, points beyond itself to its eschatological return (Jeremias, 1967:5.769-771). The promise that “today you will be with me in paradise” must have been a great comfort to the Christian. To the oriental mind it expressed the perfect condition of blessedness (Vine, 1966:3.158). In 2 Co. 12:4, Paul spoke of a visionary experience in which he was caught up to paradise (εἰς τὸν παράδεισον). Therefore, in these texts, paradise is focused on a heavenly rather than an earthly perspective.

⁵⁹ According to the rabbinical teaching, there was a threefold paradise; the paradise of the Adam where the tree of life stood, the paradise of the souls in heaven, which was the abode of the redeemed between death and resurrection, as well as the eschatological paradise where the souls of the righteous would be (see Ford, 1975:388, Lk. 23:43).

As a matter of fact, the whole sacred precinct (τέμενος) was recognized as a refuge for criminals. The character of this τέμενος was a sacred enclosure, unchangeably centred upon the spot originally marked by the sacred tree. Above all, it was generally known as “a place of asylum” (Hemer, 1986:49). That is why τέμενος as a place of asylum offers a place of safety to the criminals who committed sins. The criminals who ran away to this place might have been thinking of this τέμενος as the place of salvation. That is, in the criminals’ mind, τέμενος must have been a παραδείσος (Kistemaker, 2001:110). However, τέμενος couldn’t offer eternal life to the supplicant. This created a certain illusion of lies, as it couldn’t provide any salvation to the people who were on its side, nor security in terms of a Christian perspective.

In contrast to this concept noted above, the Christians could, within their framework, have understood what it referred to, namely the tree of life in the paradise of God. Although there are many arguments, related to the tree of life among scholars, the salvation through the cross (the tree of life) was in marked contrast with what Artemis gave (Beale, 1999:235). To the conquerors that need to have the promise of encouragement and consolation, the promise of the tree of life does provide some present picture, as well as an eschatological picture in conjunction with the local reference (Aune, 1997:152). The tree of life can only symbolize the cross on which Jesus died to save us (cf. Beale, 1999:235). It can bring salvation to the people who try to experience a picture of refuge in the presence of Christ. Thus, the image of the tree of life can be connected with the promise statement given to the conquerors in the light of an eschatological perspective.

In this paradise of God, which is the dwelling of God, only those who endure, love and conquer would have eternal life. This would enable followers of Christ to live the life of everlasting communion with and in the presence of God, as symbolized through the paradise. This is the message sent to the conquerors at Ephesus.

The explanation of the tree of life and the paradise of God appears within the Inter-Testamental literature. In 1 Enoch 25:3-5, Michael says to Enoch that the tree of life will be given to the righteous and the pious, and the elect will also be presented with its fruit for life (cf. 1 Enoch 24:3-5). In 2 Enoch 8:1-4, Enoch was caught up to the third heaven and

there he saw paradise, which was inconceivably the place for pleasant living. In the midst of the trees, which are in the paradise, the tree of life is indescribable for its pleasantness and fine fragrance. And it is also more beautiful than any other (8:3), considering that there is no unfruitful tree in paradise, while every tree is well fruited, with every place being blessed (8:7). In 4 Ezra, 2:12, it is mentioned that the tree of life should provide them with some fragrant perfume (cf. 4 Ezra. 7:123). In 4 Ezra, 8:52, the angel who revealed the secrets of the end of time to Ezra reassures him in the following way: it is on your behalf that Paradise is opened, the tree of life is planted, the age to come is prepared, plenty is provided, a city is built, rest is appointed (cf. 2 Baruch. 4:3, 6; 2 Enoch. 65:10; Odes of Solomon. 20:7).

In the Testament of Levi 18:9-11, one determines a picture of paradise during the Messianic age as follows: he shall open the gates of paradise and shall remove the threatening sword against Adam. He shall give to the saints to eat from the tree of life and the spirit of holiness shall be on them. Through the survey of the Inter-Testamental literature in conjunction with the tree of life and paradise, one can determine some particular creation imagery, cosmological implications, as well as a messianic age to come in terms of an eschatological aspect. It must be returned to the restoration of paradise including the concept of an eschaton, as well as a messianic age.

III.4.4 The Conquerors in the church of Ephesus

Some brief and preliminary remarks by Kiddle (1940:61) might be helpful in understanding this section. The promise statement given to the seven churches must have had considerable meaning to the Christians of John's day. The use of the word conqueror ($\nuικάω$) as an appropriate concluding refrain might not be used as a timeless symbol, but as an embodiment of the social and political situations confronting them. It is true that when they heard about the promise statement regarding the conquerors, they might immediately have understood what the implications of this were, pertaining to their social and political circumstances.

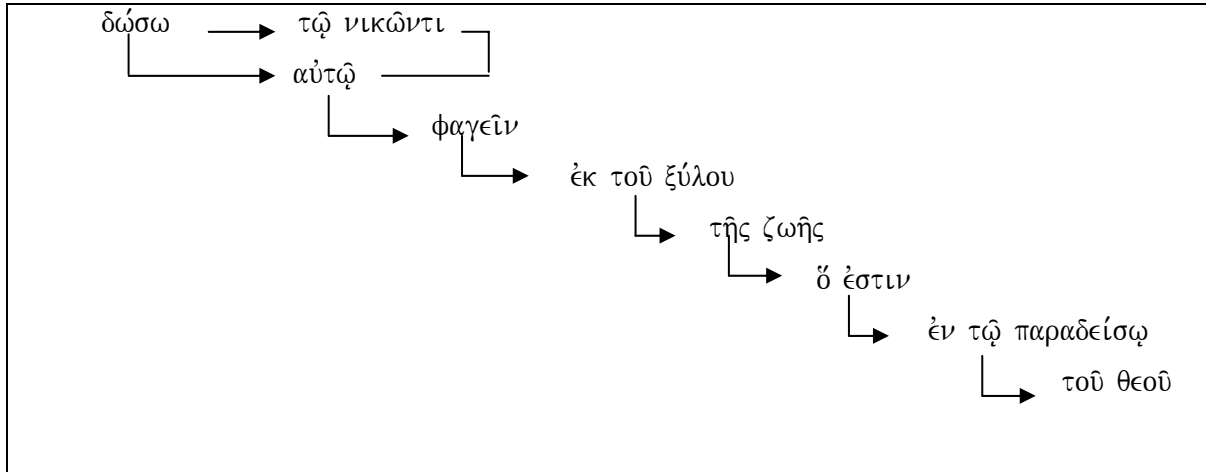
The promise statement given to the conquerors in the church of Ephesus is given together

with the bestowing of the tree of life in Rev. 2:7: Τῷ νικῶντι δώσω αὐτῷ φαγεῖν ἐκ τοῦ ξύλου τῆς ζωῆς, ὃ ἐστὶν ἐν τῷ παραδείσῳ τοῦ θεοῦ. The most important statement of this sentence is the use of νικᾶω. In Revelation νικᾶω is a key word (Bauckham, 1993b:88) and the term νικᾶω was used in two different ways: of “physical, military victory and of moral, religious victory” (Leivestad, 1954:212; cf. Swete, 1977:29; Bauckham, 1993b:66-73; Aune, 1997:151-152). In spite of his insight concerning the physical, military victory and of the moral, religious victory, Sweet (1979:80-83) explains these categories as related to the theme of spiritual victory over Satan (cf. Jn 16:33), victory won by faithful witness and the word of God unto the death (12:11; cf. Jn 18:37). These categories contrast with Satan who looks like the conqueror (11:7; 13:7).

Charles (1975:1.53) prescribes the use of the word ‘νικᾶν’ as “characteristic of our author, and is used of the faithful Christian warrior.” He does limit the word ‘νικᾶν’ only to the martyrs but not to all the Christians.⁶⁰ In contrast with Charles (1975:1.54) and Kiddle (1940:62-63), as Leivestad (1954:214) noted, ὁ νικῶν is not limited exclusively to the literal martyr, but it reflects a rather extraordinary impression of the bloody martyrdom in the letters to the seven churches. Thus, one doesn’t have any reason to limit the conqueror-concept only to the martyr. As Bauckham (1993b:88) insists, the call to conquer is open to all the people of God participating in the divine war. To eat the tree of life in the paradise of God is only allowed to the conquerors who were faithful Christians within the church.

When one analyzes the text of 2:7, it can be structured as follows:

⁶⁰ Kiddle (1940:61-65) explains the word conqueror as having two-fold significance. First, the conqueror must overcome the temptations of this life and second, represent in action his bearing of the Christian virtues. Kiddle connects the conquering principle with certain martyrdom, but he doesn’t connect all seven promises to the conquerors, being martyrs. Five of these promises (2:7, 2:11, 2:17, 3:5, 3:12) are not limited only to the martyrs, but to all the people who were saved. In two (2:26, 3:21) of the promises - those towards Laodicea and Thyatira - the conqueror-principle could apply only to the martyrs. One has no legitimate reason to consider only these two promises as having pertained to the martyrs. Rosscup (1982:261-276) suggests the main views regarding the conquerors as follows: 1) a saved person who retains salvation, which forfeited some, 2) a saved person who continually conquers and is accordingly distinguished from a defeated Christian, 3) every saved person. Rosscup supports the view 3) that every saved person is a conqueror. In order to support this conviction of 3), one should give some careful attention to this view exegetically.



In 2:7, the use of the dative form of the present active participle τῷ νικῶντι implies “continuous victory” (Robertson, 1933:6.300) or at least “the victorious member of the Church” (Swete, 1977:29). As Charles (1975:1.54) noted, the participle τῷ νικῶντι might be influenced by the use of the Hebrew participle, which can have a perfect or an imperfect sense as the context may require. If possible, it might denote the “*continuance of completed action*” (Blass & Debrunner, 1961:175). It does accordingly imply that even the struggle for victory is yet continuing. One should thus emphasize the continual nature of those obtaining the victory, because the present participle in Revelation 2-3 grants the dynamic sense of a continual victory over and against the forces opposing God and his church (Homcy, 1995:195). Based on this analysis, one would recognize that the meaning of each letter intended to encourage its audience to a course of action (Kirby, 1988:200), even though they were confronted with a harsh reality.

Beckwith (1967:451) does not accept this promise as a specific reference to the circumstances of the Ephesians, but this promise as a final victory over all spiritual foes without specification of a particular object of conflict. But, it must be rejected because the author had an informed knowledge regarding the character and fortunes the church of Ephesus faced. He knew what the Ephesians did and experienced. It might, therefore, be written in a language that the audiences could understand.

The seven letters of Revelation 2-3 were written for troubled Christians suffering under persecution, social and political discrimination and inner conflict of the churches in Asia Minor. The conflict, the persecution and the inner problem of this present life in the world

were not for them a final destination. To conclude, the main purpose was to confirm and verify that God, Jesus and the conquerors will ultimately gain the victory in this conflict. Paradoxically, this decisive victory over Satan and death was achieved by the death of Christ on the cross. He conquered through “an act of total self-sacrifice” (Mounce, 1977:144; cf. Kiddle, 1940:62; Barnes, 1976:68⁶¹; Sweet, 1979:82-83; Rosscup, 1982:263-276, Beasley-Murray, 1992:77-79; Homcy, 1995:193). The message that John delivered to his community focused on the conditions within their particular situations. The statement of Caird (1966:33-34) regarding this topic is quite correct:

He is not an armchair theologian working out a philosophy of history, nor a fantastic visionary losing all touch with reality in dreams of the future; he is a pastor deeply absorbed in the task of preparing his friends for an imminent ordeal and helping them to see, by the light of the Cross, that this ordeal is in fact the victory which is both theirs and God's.

Consequently, the promise statement given to the conquerors must be related to the previous context, which the church of Ephesus had to face. They must overcome their first love that they had forsaken, and respond to Jesus' call to repentance. The false apostles and Nicolaitans should also be overcome. Only those who overcame the situation of the church of Ephesus, in that the Christian experienced a harsh reality, could be called conquerors before Jesus and God. Beale (1999:235) limits this problem, apart from persecution and tribulation only, to the church's own sin of not testifying about Christ to the world outside of the church itself. I think that this is quite correct, but it is too narrow to explain the problem of the church of Ephesus. The conquerors who overcame the problem will receive the blessing of God's salvific presence (cf. Garratt, 1897:34-36; Mounce, 1977:90; Aune, 1997:151-154; Beale, 1999:235; Morris, 1999:62; Hendrikson, 2000:63; Johnson, 2001:73) like receiving the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God. The reason that the Christian as a believer can live as a conqueror in this world is because Christ conquered sin and

⁶¹ He regards victory as having a moral character as follows: 1) pertaining to his own easily-besetting sins, 2) pertaining to the world and its temptation; 3) pertaining to prevalent error, 4) pertaining to the ills and trials of life (1976:68). In this dissertation, ethical motif is a very important theme. The emphasis of the moral motif of Barnes is quite a good insight, but he misses the christological aspect regarding the slain lamb. Thus, one should keep in mind that the foundation of the victory of Jesus depends on the total self-sacrifice as well as the motif of moral characteristic. See Wall (1991:101-102).

death and the forces of evil on the cross, forever. The victory of Christ is thus in another way paradigmatic towards his followers who wanted to follow the way of Christ (Reddish, 1982:134).

The future verb δώσω of verb δίδωμι in this verse (Rev. 2:7) is closely connected with the promise statement given to the conquerors. The future verb δώσω can be interpreted as to “give permission to” (Charles, 1975:1.280) the conquerors. That is, the conquerors will be given permission to eat the tree of life from the Lord. When one considers that the future verb δώσω is linked with the conquerors and the tree of life, the future verb δώσω implies the victory of the conquerors. According to Swete (1977:30), that can be expressed as a personal victory against the evil ones. Thus, the mentioning of the conquerors, the tree of life, and the garden of God indicate and guarantee the victory of the people of God as the conquerors. This is the message of the promise-statement given to the conquerors in the church of Ephesus.

III.4.5. Summary

In the midst of the city of change and religious centre, the church of Ephesus experienced various problems in a pagan environment. The Artemis cult of Ephesus was a very prominent phenomenon and the Artemis was regarded as “Savior, Lord, Queen of the Cosmos” (Arnord, 1989:21). Christianity was treated as a *superstitio* in the dominant polytheistic or imperialistic religious, social and culture. For this, Christianity would have faced social, cultural, and religious conflicts. Artemis is not a real Saviour and a real Lord. Christ, who holds the seven stars and the seven golden lampstands, is a real Saviour and Lord. Regarding the relevance of the local situation of the church of Ephesus, it might have made sense to the Ephesus Christian that the Artemis built up with a tree-shrine is contrasted with the ‘tree of life’ which is the guarantee of God’s salvation given to the conquerors.

The conquerors in the church of Ephesus can be expressed as those who bear ἔργα καὶ κόπον καὶ ὑπομονήν and restore their first love which they had forsaken (2:2-5). These were the characteristics over the conquerors of the church in Ephesus. That is, the

conquerors were those who did the work commanded by Christ and who overcame the hardship by maintaining the endurance in their situations they faced (Beasley-Murray, 1992:78). Christ's figure thus expressed as holding church and its members is properly matched with the promise statement that would be given to the conquerors to encourage and to confirm a victory.

III.5. The promise statement given to the Conquerors of the church of Smyrna

The church of Smyrna is called a faithful church with the Philadelphia church, but the members of the church suffered with θλίψις, πτωχεία, καὶ βλασφημία. The terms θλίψις, πτωχεία, καὶ βλασφημία reflect the external persecution or harassment, actual poverty, and the slander that the church's members faced. In the midst of crisis and conflict with Roman authority and Jews (see Gill, 1997:389-403), the church's members need to receive encouragement and victory from a heavenly perspective. John sent his letter to the church of Smyrna to console and encourage so that their suffering will be limited for ten days (2:10) and they would become conquerors who will receive the crown of life and from a heavenly perspective, will not be hurt by the second death.

III.5.1. The city of Smyrna

It is correct to state that the historical horizon is the same horizon as with human life and behaviour and no interpretation can transcend it (Long, 1994:397). In order to understand the context of life of the church of Smyrna, one must go to the context of life, which the church of Smyrna had to face.

The Aeolians, who were the first Greeks in that area, occupied the first settlement of Smyrna in the 10th century. Ionian Greeks, who developed a powerful state, replaced them. They gradually gave way, however, and were besieged and destroyed in 627 B.C. by Alyattes, king of Lydia (Grant, 1963:926). Its importance was due not only to its port facilities (cf. Filson, 1962a:4.393; Grant, 1963:927), but also because it was a suitable starting-point for the land trade route to the east. Through its maritime connection, Smyrna came into contact with the Romans and made an alliance with them against the Seleucid

power. Therefore, Smyrna was the first city in Asia Minor to erect a temple to the goddess Roma (Potter, 1992b:6.74; cf. Filson, 1962a:4.393; Ramsay, 1994:184; Hartog, 2002:45). Smyrna was given permission to build a temple to the Emperor Tiberius, because of its long loyalty and many services to Rome⁶² (Tacitus, *Annals*. IV. 55-56).

Smyrna had many things to be proud of in itself. It was the birthplace of Homer (Filson, 1962a:4.393; Grant, 1963:927; Hemer, 1986:57; Potter, 1992b:6.74; Ramsay, 1994:190; Hartog, 2002:44) and the most beautiful city of all. The Romans consequently regarded Smyrna as one of the most important cities in the province (along with Ephesus, Sardis, and Pergamus). The religious life of Smyrna included a variety of cults. The city took pride in the imperial cult and Cybele-worship as the centre of religion (cf. Filson, 1962a:4.393; Barclay, 1957:31-37; Hemer, 1986:71). The tutelary deity of Smyrna was their mother-goddess, Cybele (cf. Ramsay, 1994:188). For the Greeks, Cybele was called the ‘Mother of the Gods’ and for the Latins, she was called the ‘Great Mother’ (cf. Ferguson, 1993:264).

As with any other mystery cults, the myth of Cybele implies the annual dying in the autumn and its coming to life again in the spring. This cult was also very meaningful for the local Smyrna Christians, because at the church of Smyrna, Jesus was introduced as the One who ‘is the First and the Last, who died and came to life (Rev. 2:8)’. It could accordingly not be ignored that in the church of Smyrna, the imperial and provincial cults had influenced every aspect of the Christian life when the book of Revelation was written. One should keep in mind that the religious influence permeated every aspect of city and village life and the complete Christian community (cf. Beale, 1999:240-241). Owing to this kind of religious influence in the city of Smyrna, Smyrna was also designated as the ‘*νεωκόρος*’, or custodian, of the temples of the entire province (Hartog, 2002:46). A special devotion to Rome and the imperial or provincial cult of the Smyrna-city was enough to have favour from Rome. One can inevitably suppose that the pagan culture of the Greek-Roman world may have influenced the Jews and the Christians who lived within the pagan environment (cf. Stambaugh & Balch, 1986:46-52).

⁶² As one of the major cities of the province, Smyrna possessed three temples: one under Tiberius (A.D. 14-37), one under Hadrian (A.D. 117-138), and the third under Caracalla (A.D. 211-217). When one considers possessing three temples in Smyrna city, one can suppose that Smyrna was a centre for the imperial and provincial cults.

According to Josephus (Antiquities, XII.3.1), it is written that the Jews obtained honours from the kings of Asia, and Seleucus Nicator made them citizens in those cities, which he built in Asia (cf. Antiquities, XII.3.2). One can accordingly suppose that the Jews in the Diaspora provided some accommodation and prepared certain arrangements, in order to have some privileges through their accommodation. In contrast to this favour from their neighbours, in the Sibylline Oracles (V.122-123), the conflict between the Jews and their pagan world was explained through the statement: “Smyrna will one day weep, having rolled down the cliffs. She who was once revered and famous, will perish and Smyrna will also come, bewailing its musician, to the gates of Ephesus, while she herself will truly perish” (Sibylline Oracles, V.306-307). Through these statements, one can imagine what the situation of life within the church of Smyrna was amidst the conflict between the Christians and the hostile world.

III.5.2. The social situation of the church of Smyrna

In the church of Smyrna, Christians were confronted by suffering and a problem of another kind. Smyrna was a great trade city, as well as one of the great centres of emperor worship (Beale, 1999:239-245; Kistemaker, 2001:122-126). Here the Christians were in conflict with the Jews. The conflicts between Christians and Jews were severe, especially during the first century. When one looks at Acts 6:8-7:60, it seems quite clear that Stephen was one of the earliest martyrs. The problem that the church of Smyrna faced was one of conflict with the Jews, poverty (spiritual poverty over and against real spiritual richness) and slander (Rev. 2:9; cf. Frankfurter, 2001:403-425)).

The text states the following: ‘οἶδά σου τὴν θλίψιν καὶ τὴν πτωχείαν, ἀλλὰ πλούσιος εἶ, καὶ τὴν βλασφημίαν ἐκ τῶν λεγόντων Ἰουδαίους εἶναι ἑαυτοὺς καὶ οὐκ εἰσὶν ἀλλὰ συναγωγὴ τοῦ Σατανᾶ: I know your afflictions and your poverty - yet you are rich! I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan’ (Rev. 2:9). In fact, the Jews who say they are Jews are not Jews, but a synagogue of Satan. Therefore, it reflects the conflict and discrimination with the Jews (DeSilva, 1992a:287-289). From an earthly point of view, in contrast with a heavenly point of view, to be a Christian meant real self-sacrifice (Hendriksen, 2000:65), but from a heavenly point of

view, Christians are ‘real conquerors’.

III.5.3. The second death

The church of Smyrna seemed to have faced some internal vitality with the Philadelphia-church, since only the churches of Smyrna and Philadelphia hadn’t received any formal blame from the Lord. The church of Smyrna seemed to have experienced tribulation amidst circumstance of severe poverty. The situation of the church is explained in 2:9: ‘οἰδά σου τὴν θλίψιν καὶ τὴν πτωχείαν, ἀλλὰ πλούσιος εἶ, καὶ τὴν βλασφημίαν ἐκ τῶν λεγόντων Ἰουδαίους εἶναι ἑαυτοὺς καὶ οὐκ εἰσὶν ἀλλὰ συναγωγὴ τοῦ σατανα’. The church of Smyrna was not outwardly wealthy and suffered from tribulation (οἰδά σου τὴν θλίψιν καὶ τὴν πτωχείαν) for ten days, indicating a limited period of intense persecution, imprisonment and the slanders of the Jews (Aune, 1997:166). Filson (1962a:4.393) connects this passage with aspects of the life of the city of Smyrna. The description of Christ who was the First and the Last, who died and came to life⁶³ again (Rev. 2:8; cf. 1:17, 22:13) was not at haphazard, but can be connected with the past history of the city of Smyrna because John was very familiar with its history.

The promise statement given to the conquerors of the church of Smyrna is that “he will not be hurt at all by the second death” (Rev. 2:11). Rosscup (1982:278) suggests that the promise statement given to the conquerors is a privilege of all the saved, whether or not they become martyrs. When one looks into the text of the Smyrna church, as argued by Rosscup one can’t exactly distinguish between the saved person who is an overcomer and a saved person who is not. The emphasis seems not to be derived from the text itself because the text itself doesn’t divide believers into two parts: one the saved person, the other not a saved person. There was only one congregation that was in trouble in the church of Smyrna. The letter of Smyrna was sent to the people who were under persecution. Through the statement “οἰδά σου τὴν θλίψιν καὶ τὴν πτωχείαν” (Rev. 2:9), one can verify that John

⁶³ One defined the church of Ephesus as a city of change in terms of its historical and geographical background. Thus, as in the Ephesus letter, the church of Smyrna could be also connected with the city of life in terms of its historical and geographical background. Ramsay (1994:195-204) connects this statement in the following way: all Smyranean readers would at once recognize the striking similarity to the early history of their own city. The suggestion of Ramsay is quite persuasive, but theologically weak. For this argument, see Kiddle (1940:26); Barclay (1957:38-40); Caird (1966:34-35); Beale (1999: 213-215, 239); Johnson (2001:73).

spoke to the Christians who lived under the suffering of persecution and poverty (Kiddle, 1940:26; Bredin, 1998-99:162).

In an antagonistic and pagan environment, it would be difficult to make a living as a Christian, with the result that many would be economically destitute (Mounce, 1977:92). Believers at Smyrna were to have ten days of tribulation.⁶⁴ They must confront ‘τὴν θλίψιν’, which indicates some internal and external oppression from the Jews (cf. Ford, 1975:392) and could be connected with economic poverty. This is a tribulation, which all the conquerors must face and endure, for the sake of their faith. They should also face ‘τὴν πτωχείαν’⁶⁵, which indicates material poverty, but is also used in a spiritual poverty (Ford, 1975:392; cf. Mounce, 1977:92; Morris, 1999:63-64).

Just as the seven cities were prosperous communities through the participation in the business and social life of these cities, Christians must also participate in idolatrous religion, trade guilds, as well as the Roman state religion in order to survive and in order to be materially successful in a pagan environment (Bauckham, 1993a:377). The synagogue of Satan in Revelation 2:9 particularly echoed an internal conflict between two groups: the synagogue and church. The blasphemy by those who say they are true Jews, but are not, but are a synagogue of Satan revealed what the essential problem in the church of Smyrna was. This blasphemy (βλασφημία) was not directed as blasphemy against God, but a

⁶⁴ The argument whether it should be accepted as a symbolic number indicating a limited time or not is a continuing issue. But most commentators agree that the ten days indicate a limited time. It may be derived from Daniel 1:12,14, where Daniel and his three friends were put to the test for exactly that length of time. In Revelation, the testing of tribulation for ten days would distinguish whether they were really conquerors or not. It is possible that this might have been literally ten days in Revelation, but it is much more in accordance with the general character of this book to suppose that the number ten here is used to denote “a few” (Barnes, 1976:72), or “an indefinite, but short time” (Beasley-Murray, 1992:82; cf. Lenski, 1943:100; Charles, 1975:1.58; Swete, 1977:32; Sweet, 1979:86; Aune, 1997:166). For the objection to this opinion, see Hemer (1986:67, 69).

⁶⁵ According to Hemer (1986:68), such poverty could have been present for several reasons: 1) It may have been at least partly due to the despoliation of their property by mobs (cf. Caird, 1966:35; Charles, 1975:1.56), 2) The converts to the Christianity were most often found among the poorer classes (cf. Henry, 1979:190; 1 Co. 1:26; James. 2:5), 3) The devoted Christians on occasion reduced themselves to penury by the liberality of their own giving (2 Co. 2:8), 4) It was difficult for an uncompromising Christian to make a living in a pagan city (cf. Mounce, 1977:92). The first and third suggestions are improbable. The second suggestion is problematic, since it is now recognized that early Christianity could not be restricted to the lower classes (Aune, 1997:161). The prevailing viewpoint has been that the constituency of early Christianity consisted of the poor and dispossessed of the Roman provinces (Meeks, 1983:52), but one must understand that it encompassed the social spectrum as a whole (Aune, 1997:161; cf. Meeks, 1983:51-73; Stambaugh & Balch, 1986:110-116). The fourth suggestion has, according to many commentators, been the appointed reason as a basis for the Smyrnaean poverty (Aune, 1997:161).

blasphemy directed to the people of God who were in the church of Smyrna (Plumptre, 1884:93-94). To the Christians who faced various tribulations, poverty, and conflict between Jews and Christians, the word that the conquerors will not be hurt at all by the second death, may have given a hope and certainty to the victory.⁶⁶ That is, John provided a heavenly perspective that endurance, suffering, and martyrdom is not defeat, but conquering (Reddish, 1995:222).

According to Mounce (1977:94; cf. Robertson, 1933:6.303; Charles, 1975:1.59-60; Sweet, 1979:86; Wilson, 1996:209-210; Aune, 1997:168) the second death is a rabbinic terminology for the death of the unbelievers in the next world (Tg. Jer. on Dt. 33:6). Philo (Praem, 70) describes two kinds of death: “the one that of being dead, which is either good or else a matter of indifference; the other that of dying, which is in every respect an evil.” The second death must be reserved as punishment for unrepentant sinners. It was called in Revelation 20:14 (cf. 20:6) and 21:8 as the lake of fire, which mentions the punishment of eternal suffering or exclusion from the eternal life or everlasting communion with God in paradise (Rudolph, 2005:403-405).

In conjunction with the situation of the church of Smyrna, which suffered various troubles, the promise that the conqueror will not be hurt at all by the second death might be meaningful to the community of the Smyrna church. They were in danger of the first death, but after the first death, in the negative form (Ὁ νικῶν οὐ μὴ ἀδικηθῆ ἔκ τοῦ θανάτου τοῦ δευτέρου), the second death can have no power to harm them. In the positive form (δώσω σοι τὸν στέφανον τῆς ζωῆς), the eternal life will be given to the conquerors. In connection with this topic, Ramsay (1994:200) is quite correct to say:

It is this triumph over death that constitutes the guiding thought of the whole letter, just as change was the guiding thought of the Ephesian letter. He that persists to the end, he that is steadfast and overcomes, shall triumph over death. ... Here

⁶⁶ In the church of Smyrna, one can find out the contrast between death and life (cf. Benedict, 1966:12) that Smyrna was dead and yet lived. The contrast between apparent destruction and real vitality was expressed in several forms through this letter. The church seemed poor, but was rich. It showed apparent tribulation and suffering but was really triumphant and crowned with the crown of life (Ramsay, 1994:197). According to Seiss (1974:70), the church of Smyrna was ironically the church of Myrrh or bitterness, but agreeable and precious unto the Lord, holy in the midst of its conflicts, sufferings, and of blessed expectations for the world to which the resurrection is to lead the people of God.

again the final promise is seen to be peculiarly appropriate to the character and needs of the persons addressed.

Consequently, one can recognize that the second death (τοῦ θανάτου τοῦ δευτέρου) is related to eternal death in conjunction with the first death in terms of physical death (Beasley-Murray; 1992:83; Hendriksen, 2000:66; cf. Plumptre, 1884:98-102; Garratt, 1897:37; Lensky, 1943:103; Beckwith, 1967:455; Ford, 1975:396; Ladd, 1979:45; Wall, 1991:74). The second death can be linked with the crown of life as the positive and negative statement given to the conquerors pointing out victory. Therefore, the statement that the second death will not be hurt can be interpreted with another expression of victory given to the conquerors. To endure suffering as conqueror indicates participation in the first death from an earthly perspective, but to participate in the first death is to escape the second death and to have the promised rule of God's grace and peace from a heavenly perspective (Wall, 1991:74).

III.5.4. The crown of life

The promise over the crown of life given to the conquerors could be approached from various points of view. In terms of topographical reference, Ramsay (1994:186) links the reference to the crown of life with the appearance of the hill, Pagus. Hemer (1986:60) connects the familiar symbol of the life of crown with the topographical appearance of the city rising symmetrically to its crown of battlements. But it is not right to simplify the message of Revelation only in topographical terms. The construction of the social world, and subsequently the maintenance of that world, involve culture, language, ritual, institutions, custom, doctrines, indeed everything that one considers as forces of human life (Henry, 1979:182). Gager (1975:10) insists that the social aspect of world-construction derives from a basic conviction, which is always based on the concrete *Sitz im Leben* of a believer.

The 'στέφανος', in fact, played its part in many ancient customs and diverse implications such as victory, honour, kingship or royal visitation (Stevenson, 1995:257-268).⁶⁷ This is

⁶⁷ The crown of life has been much discussed by many commentators. Among them, I think that the

accordingly a very familiar image in Asia Minor to which Revelation was sent. The crown is provided as a common prize given to the victor at the athletic and musical competition (Stevenson, 1995:258-259; cf. Beckwith, 1967:455; Meyers, 1992:6.998; Aune, 1997:166-167; 173-176; Morris, 1999:64-65; Johnson, 2001:75). Charles (1975:1.58) insists that the crown is awarded to the victor in the games. A victor's crown in the games was considered to have been some supreme earthly honour (Grundmann, 1971:7.620). Because Smyrna was famous for its games, it is possible to suppose that the image of the crown of life in the church of Smyrna may have borrowed from this image of the victor that achieved a victory in the game at that time (cf. Ladd, 1979:44-45).

Sometimes in terms of ritual, the crown could be connected with the deity who gave his favour to the recipient. In the Greco-Roman world, it was a common practice that the crown was dedicated to the deity to honour and to express gratitude for what was given by the deity (Grundmann, 1971:7.620).⁶⁸ The crown also became a symbol of military victory. The wreath was given as a symbol of honour within the context of military awards and benefactor relationships (Stevenson, 1995:265). After a war victory, victorious generals were honoured with some triumphal crown (Josephus, J.W. 7.105, 124). The main meaning of the crown given to the benefactors was the expression of honour to benefactors such as kings, emperors, individuals and cities (Josephus, Ant. 14.35, 304; 16.296).⁶⁹ In Philo's works (Leg. 1.80; Agr. 171), one also finds some particular use of a crown (Στεφανῶν). Millar (1977:140-141) is therefore quite correct to say that

The most regular and extensive gifts of this type which an emperor received were

suggestion of Hemer (1986:72-73) is most suitable for us to have the information over the crown of life. He suggests seven possibilities: 1) allusion to the athlete's crown of victory, 2) allusion to the crown given to the presiding priest at the Mysteries of Dionysus, 3) allusion to the crown given as a symbol of an earthly honour, 4) allusion to the crowns given by pagan priests, 5) allusion to the eponymous priestly magistrates of the city known as *stephanephoroi*, 6) the festal crown reflecting the Christian's joy, 7) allusion to the topographical appearance of Smyrna. He emphasizes 1, 3, 7 as plausible suggestions. These suggestions are not in contrast with one another. Rather they should complement each other for a clearer interpretation in terms of its geographical, cultural, and social contexts.

⁶⁸ The social function of the victory wreath or crown echoes various social aspects. The fact that the victor's crown and the deity's crown can be connected with each other explains that athletic games go together with Greek religious festivals.

⁶⁹ For example, Aristobulus sent a crown valued at four thousand pieces of gold as a present to Pompey after he came to Damascus, and marched over Celesyria (Josephus, Ant. 14.35). When Antony came to Ephesus, Hyrcanus, the high priest, together with some Jews, sent a deputation to him, which carried a crown of gold with them (Josephus, Ant. 14.304).

the gold crowns which were offered on a variety of occasions, notably on his accession and after victories. This custom was inherited from the Hellenistic kings, and had established itself in Rome as soon as major victories were won by Roman generals in the Greek east; for the Greek cities naturally made for these victors the same offerings which they were accustomed to make to their victorious kings.

The true significance of these crowns at that time would be categorized as follows: thankfulness/gratitude (εὐχαριστάι), honour (τιμῆ), and worthiness (ἄξιος) (Stevenson, 1995:267). Through the survey regarding the meaning of the crown, one can suppose that the primary meaning of the crown in a given context can closely be linked with victory, honour and divine glory. However, when one thinks about these meanings of a crown, they don't operate exclusively of each other, but are inclusive of one other.

In the N.T, 'στέφανος' occurs 18 times. Many references to crown are explained according to the terminology of the prize for an athletic victory and the eternal reward of the faithful from an eschatological point of view. Paul metaphorically recommends strict training to the Corinthians to gain a crown (e.g. 1 Co. 9:25). In 1 Ti. 4:8 with an athletic image, Paul describes a victor in an athletic's game getting a crown, having reached his final destination. In this verse, Paul uses an eschatological aspect to explain a crown, which will be given by the Lord.⁷⁰

In the Inter-Testamental literature, the image of a crown could also be found. The crown as a metaphor for the eschatological reward of the righteous was used in the Testament of Job 43:3. In 4 Maccabees 17:15, as the reward of the martyr, a crown will also be given. The Lord is portrayed with a crown on the head (Odes of Solomon 1:1; cf. 5:12, 9:8-11, 17:1).

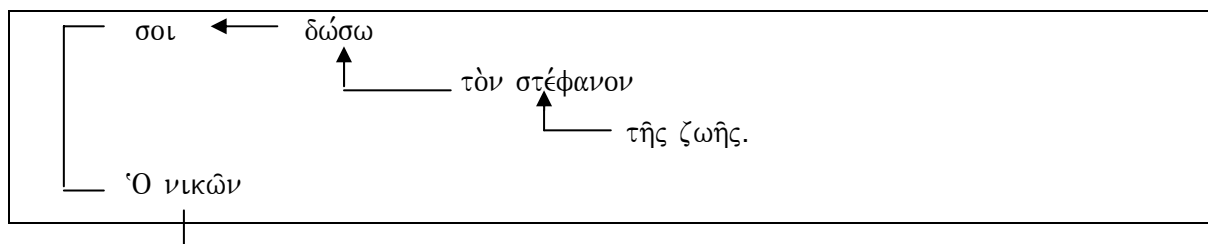
⁷⁰ Vos (1965:192-193) compares three texts (Jas. 1:12; 2 Ti. 4:8; Rev. 2:10) and finds the following analogous features among these three texts: in James 1:12; 'λήμψεται τὸν στέφανον τῆς ζωῆς ὃν ἐπηγγείλατο τοῖς ἀγαπῶσιν αὐτόν'; 2 Ti. 4:8; 'ἀπόκειται μοι ὁ τῆς δικαιοσύνης στέφανος, .. καὶ πᾶσι τοῖς ἠγαπηκόσι τὴν ἐπιφάνειαν αὐτοῦ'; Rev. 2:10; 'γίνου πιστὸς ἄχρι θανάτου, καὶ δώσω σοι τὸν στέφανον τῆς ζωῆς'. This makes the promise an analogous feature, which he found through the comparison of these three texts: 1) A promise is given to those who endure temptations, sufferings, poverty, harassment, and persecution, 2) A crown of life/righteousness is given, 3) The Lord is also the One who apparently bestows the crown. He supposes that these three texts were derived from the common statement of Jesus. This seems to be quite correct, even though he doesn't regard the context of the three texts in which these three principles were laid up.

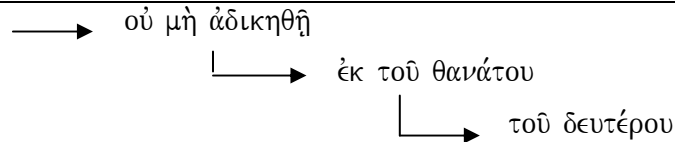
According to Wall (1991:73), the crown as an eschatological symbol will be given as the reward of eternal life to those who keep faithful witness of Christ even unto death. The genitive ‘τῆς ζωῆς’ has been interpreted in various ways. The phrase τῆς ζωῆς (of life) could be interpreted as “an appositive or epexegetical genitive” (Aune, 1997:167; cf. Plumptre, 1884:97-98; Robertson, 1933:6.303; Lenski, 1943:101; Swete, 1977:33; Beale, 1999:244). Through the contrast between life and death in this letter, the image of the crown of life may easily be understood as having a symbolic meaning of attaining the eternal life, if they are conquerors in this earth (cf. Plumptre, 1884:97-98; Benedict, 1966:13; Beckwith, 1967:454-455; Grundmann, 1971:7.630-631; Ladd, 1979:45; Reddish, 1982:139).

According to Benedict (1966:13), the crown of life is more than the eternal life. It should be to enjoy and to experience ever more deeply the divine life. Martin (1988:33) argues that after στέφανος, the genitive τῆς ζωῆς should be regarded as genitive of content, indicating a life of victory achieved by those who endure and win their conflict with temptation, suffering, and death to appear as conqueror. Therefore, the image of the crown of life might give encouragement and hope to the conquerors as a guarantee of their eternal life.

III.5.5. The Conquerors in the church of Smyrna

The promise statement given to the conquerors of the church of Smyrna can be divided into two parts (2:10,11), consisting of a positive (δώσω σοι τὸν στέφανον τῆς ζωῆς) and a negative form (Ὁ νικῶν οὐ μὴ ἀδικηθῆ ἕκ τοῦ θανάτου τοῦ δευτέρου). As argued by Hemer (1986:59), the themes of suffering, death, as well as resurrection are closely linked with the victory motif. It can be analyzed as follows:





In a positive form (δώσω σοι τὸν στέφανον τῆς ζωῆς), the crown of life as the symbol of victory that will be given to the conqueror in the future indicates eternal life, just as in a race, the victors receive their victory wreath on winning. The conquerors of the church of Smyrna have laid down their physical lives or endured suffering even up to the point of death. That is why the promise statement that they will be exalted to the point of the triumph of eternal or spiritual life (Rosscup, 1982:278), might give them consolation and encouragement. If they do not have a promise statement given to them, they couldn't endure the sufferings or problems confronting them. As noted by Du Rand (1990:354), “the language of the Apocalypse of John represents a poetic-rhetorical construction of an alternative symbolic universe as a response to a specific historical-rhetorical situation.” Upon the basis of a response to a specific historical-rhetorical situation, the conquerors of the church of Smyrna who listened to these alternative symbolic messages might have had some great power of their own, through which they could have endured the suffering.

In the negative form (Ὁ νικῶν οὐ μὴ ἀδικηθῆ ἐκ τοῦ θανάτου τοῦ δευτέρου), they have received the promise that the conquerors will not be hurt through the second death. The meaning of ἀδικέω can be translated as to hurt or to do wrong (Vine, 1966:2.260-261).⁷¹ According to Smyth (1974:429), “οὐ μὴ with any person of the future indicative occasionally denotes an emphatic future denial.”⁷² If they were not conquerors in terms of their heavenly aspect, they will be hurt by the second death in the future. But, if they are

⁷¹ On the basis of the semantic domain, Louw & Nida (1993:1.231, 745, 757) interpret the word ἀδικέω according to three meanings: 1) To hurt or to harm, with the implication of doing something which is wrong and undeserved (cf. Lk 10:19), 2) To do that which is unjust or unrighteous- ‘to act unjustly, to do what is wrong’, 3) To mistreat by acting unjustly toward someone- ‘to act unjustly toward, to mistreat’. When John used ἀδικέω it means that it always refers to inflicting direct, positive injury on some object (Rosscup, 1982:279).

⁷² The future with οὐ is used in an imperative sense to explain urgency, warning, or irony, while μὴ with the future is used to express a prohibitive sense (Smyth, 1974:429). According to Blass, Debrunner, and Funk (1961:184), οὐ μὴ with the aorist subjunctive or future indicative is the expression of negation regarding the future.

conquerors, they will not be hurt by the second death.⁷³ Thus, the conquerors that were in the church of Smyrna must have overcome such circumstances, in the midst of which they faced problems, consisting of θλίψιν, πτωχείαν, βλασφημίαν, πάσχω (Michael, 1997:74-75). If they had overcome these various problems, they were called conquerors in terms of the heavenly aspect. As a result, they would receive the crown of life as eternal life in the positive form and would not be hurt by the second death, as eternal death, in the negative form. That is why John promised the Christians at Smyrna, not the crown in which the city took pride, but the ‘crown of life’, which only God could give to the conquerors (Scobie, 1993:609). The christological title that died and came to life again is thus closely connected with the promise statement given to the conquerors. It gave them confidence of victory and life in terms of a positive aspect expressed as the crown of life and a negative aspect expressed as the second death.

III.5.6. Summary

In the Smyrna church, Christians confronted the problem of suffering and death against Rome and the Jews. As the centre of religion, such as the imperial cult and Cybele-worship and the place of conflict with the Jews, they faced persecution and death as Christians. Christ is thus introduced as the one who died and came to life again (2:8) in order to give encouragement and confidence that they were already conquerors in terms of a heavenly aspect. The guarantee of victory is expressed as that the conquerors would receive the crown of life, implying victory, honour, and divine glory from Christ who became a real conqueror through suffering and death (Poythress, 2000:86-87). In those days, the meaning of the crown was one of the expressions given for memorizing the victory or honour to benefactors such as kings, emperors, famous individuals, and cities. Thus, the crown of life is given to the conquerors who were worthy to receive the victory and honour from Christ because of their works and what they have done in the midst of tribulation and suffering.

If the crown of life is the positive expression given to the conquerors, the promise that the

⁷³ On the basis of the interpretation over ἀδικέω (to hurt or to injure) in its weaker or narrower sense, Benedict (1966:14-15) insists that the Christians and the conquerors can be divided from one another. In the case of the former, they would forfeit the crown of life and be in that sense, injured, hurt, or affected by the second death, even though they are Christians (contra Rosscup, 1982:278-279).

conquerors will not be hurt at all by the second death (2:11) is the negative expression. One can recognize that the crown of life and the second death are the same promise statements given to the conquerors to give encouragement and victory. The church of Smyrna faced suffering from the trade guild community, from the idolatrous religion, and from the conflicts with Jews. The conquerors must confront physical death for faithfully keeping the word of God (Beckwith, 1967:455; Hendricksen, 2000:66). Thus, the rhetorical situation was to conquer the situations that they faced, such as afflictions, poverty, and even death. It means that the promise statement given to the conquerors was closely connected with the church in the particular social and historical situations (cf. Scobie, 1993:606-624). That is why Christ was introduced as the one who died and came to life again (2:8), reflecting the *Sitz im Leben* of life and death in the church of Smyrna.

III.6. The promise statement given to the Conquerors of the church of Pergamum

In the church of Pergamum, the christological designation as the one who has the sharp, double-edged sword was properly matched with the $\omega\iota\delta\acute{\alpha}$ formula (2:13-15), explaining the death of the faithful witness Antipas and the false teaching of Balaam and Nicolaitans. The reference to Christ's spiritual sword represented his fight for his people to give encouragement and hope of victory in spite of the death of Antipas (2:13). The figure of Christ who fought for the Pergamum Christians suggested with the eschatological victory's guarantee to those who were called as conquerors and with the eschatological warning to those who would not repent.

III.6.1. The city of Pergamum

Pergamum appeared in history at the end of the fifth century B.C. At that stage, the city of Pergamum hadn't yet emerged as a very important place, but after Alexander the Great's conquest of Asia (334-323 B.C.), Pergamum appeared as a major military centre and major political centre (Potter, 1992a:5.229).⁷⁴ Phileterus, the first Pergamene king, tried to start building his own kingdom (283-263 B.C.). The great period of Pergamum did begin

⁷⁴ As part of the Hellenistic history of Pergamum, three great events could be provided: the struggle against the Galatians, dangerous invaders of Asia Minor since 278 B.C, the friendship with Rome, and above all, the cultural interests of the kings who made their city into a renowned centre of art and learning (Mellink, 1962:4.733; cf. Potter, 1992a:5.229).

with Attalus I (241-197 B.C.), who had achieved considerable success amidst both military and political crises during the time of the ruler, Seleucid (Hemer, 1986:80; North, 1986:3.768). Eumenes II (214-153 B.C.), who made the greatest contribution to the splendour of the city, remained Rome's most important ally in the east Mediterranean. This situation did come to an end in 133 B.C. when Attalus III (138-133 B.C.), who bequeathed his kingdom to Rome, died (Mellink, 1962:4.734; Blaiklock, 1975:4.701; Pippin, 1987:65; Potter, 1992a:5.229). As mentioned by Mellink (1962:4.734), the result of this bequeathment was far from profitable for Pergamum.

In the period of the Roman Empire, Pergamum regained its prominence as a prosperous city with a glorious past.⁷⁵ In Pergamum, the imperial cult, the pagan religion and civil life were very important elements in which all of these could not have been separated from each other. It means that citizens would have faced their involvement in the life of their city - purchasing goods and food sacrificed to some idols (cf. Acts. 15:20, 29; 1 Co. 8:1-13), as well as in the imperial cult, worshipping gods, attending certain races. The Christians' daily life in a pagan environment could not have been easy. Attendance of pagan rituals was the test of political loyalty to Rome (Hemer, 1986:84). Therefore, the relationship between pagan cults and a certain political phenomenon couldn't have been separated from each other, in an effort to verify their status within the Roman state.

Pergamum was also the centre of religious worship (see Friesen, 2005:351-373). The four patron deities of Pergamum were Zeus, Athena, Dionysus, and Asklepios (Mounce, 1977:95).⁷⁶ These were regarded as true protectors of their people in their daily life. In fact, the Greek and Romans solicited the gods in order to obtain positive gifts in return, such as the increase of crops and flocks, victory over enemies, recovery from illness, wise advice

⁷⁵ According to Pippin (1987:68), the city of Pergamum was regarded as a centre of the Hellenistic culture; of worship (Athena, Zeus); of healing (Asclepion); of education (the library and gymnasia); of the arts (the 10,000 seat theatre); of government (the seat of the Attalid kingdom). Owing to these principles, there can be no further doubt that Pergamum was not only one of the great artistic and intellectual centres, but also one of the religious centres of that time.

⁷⁶ These four deities had their own personal characteristics for the Pergamum people. Zeus, the saviour or the king of the gods, and Athena, the virgin goddess under the influence of the Greek spirit, were represented as having given glorious victories over the enemies. It is highly probable that John who mentioned Satan's throne in Revelation 2:13 might have identified Satan's throne with an altar of Zeus, which was famous in Pergamum. In the influence of the Anatolian spirit, Dionysus, a god of wine, was a god of the royal family (cf. Ramsay, 1994:208) and Asclepius, the god of healing or the serpent, offered a species of personal salvation (Hemer, 1986:85). For more information about the cult of Pergamum, see Hansen (1971: 434-470).

regarding difficult problems of life.

According to Hansen (1971:440), Zeus had more dedications at Pergamum than any other gods. While the great altar of Zeus ‘*Soter*’ dominated the city from the centre of the acropolis, another crucial issue in Pergamum was the worship of Asclepius who was considered as a god of healing. This god was also designated ‘*Soter*’ and was closely identified with the serpent (Aune, 1997:183). Through this survey of the Pergamum city, the proper meaning of the text addressed to the church of Pergamum will be understood because the majority of references indicated a framework of contemporary life in the city (cf. Scobie, 1993:606-610).

III.6.2. The social situation of the church of Pergamum

First of all, Pergamum was famous for being the official cult centre of emperor-worship (Mounce, 1977:96). Antipas, a faithful witness, was killed ‘*ποῦ κατοικεῖς ὅπου ὁ θρόνος τοῦ Σατανᾶ*: where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to my name’ (Rev. 2:13). When John talked about ‘*ὁ θρόνος τοῦ Σατανᾶ*’,⁷⁷ he meant a seat of special power and authority and the place where Satan executed a special authority (Beale, 1999:245-248). It must have been a place in which the practices of emperor-worship, or the imperial cult had been enforced (Aune, 1997:194). One could, therefore, suppose that to be a faithful witness would have meant to have accepted a certain measure of suffering for Christ.

Another problem was eating food that had been offered to idols, according to the teachings of Balaam⁷⁸ and the Nicolaitans.⁷⁹ Collins (1984:88) mentions that eating meat sacrificed

⁷⁷ There are various opinions on what the throne of Satan indicates. Hemer (1986:84-85) suggests: 1) allusion to Pergamum as a centre of pagan religion generally, 2) the fact that the acropolis itself looks like a great throne, 3) allusion to the throne-like altar of Zeus Soter, 4) allusion to the Asklepius cult called Soter and also identified with the serpent, 5) allusion to the centre of emperor worship. Although he divides the meaning of the throne of Satan into five possibilities, one can’t exactly choose one possibility from them, because it is not mutually exclusive in the light of the historical and contextual situation.

⁷⁸ In order to understand the teaching of Balaam, one should go to the Old Testament Numbers 25:1-3, 31:16. Here Israel was described as having “begun to indulge in sexual immorality with Moabite women” (Nu. 25:1) and “they were the ones who followed Balaam’s advice” (Nu. 31:16). One can characterize Balaam as a false teacher or false prophet, leading to corruption. In the Bible, Balaam became a prototype of all the false teachers who led believers to corruption or who taught them to compromise through unfaithfulness. For more information about Balaam, see Hemer (1986:87-94).

⁷⁹ Irenaeus (book I, 26.3) supposes that the Nicolaitans have been derived from Nicolas of Antioch (Acts.

to idols indicates compromise with the surrounding Greco-Roman environment, an openness that Revelation's author regarded as syncretistic and idolatrous. Through this argument, one can suppose that the issue with the social and political situations of the church of Pergamum was the problem of compromise with pagan society and religion (Rev. 2:14-15), together with persecution (Mounce, 1977:97-100; Rev. 2:13).

III.6.3. The hidden manna

In the Old Testament, manna was miraculous food, which was given to Israel as their daily food during the journey through the wilderness (Ex. 16:31, 33, 35; Nu. 11:6-9; Dt. 8:3, 16; Jos. 5:12; Ne. 9:20; Ps. 78:24). This was sometimes also named 'bread from heaven' (Ex. 16:4), and 'heavenly food' (Ps. 105:40). According to Numbers 11:7, it was like coriander seed and looked like resin and tasted like something made with olive oil (Nu. 11:8) or honey (Ex. 16:31). There is no doubt that God sent this miraculous food to his people for their physical life in the Old Testament. In Revelation the meaning of manna should be altered to fit a new spiritual point of view (Kistemaker, 2001:133). As Swete (1977:39) correctly suggests, manna should within this context be understood as the life-sustaining power of the sacred humanity now hidden with Christ in God.

According to the Hebrew tradition, it was believed that after the temple and Jerusalem was destroyed in 586 B.C., Jeremiah hid the ark and the pot of manna in a cave on Mount Nebo. They should be preserved (Ex. 16:32-34; Heb. 9:4) up to the time of the Messiah, or until Israel was restored (Beasley-Murray, 1992:87-88). In 2 Baruch 6:8, an angel took the sacred temple objects and guarded them until the last times. Also in 2 Baruch 29:8, the treasure of manna will come down from on high and be fed by the elect at the messianic time (cf. Sib. Or. 7:148-149). Whereas manna was offered as food to Israel in the desert

6:5), who was one of the seven deacons. In Revelation, if one supposes that John possibly blamed the Nicolaitans, it might have been owing to their attitude towards a pagan society and religion (Caird, 1966:38). It may be possible to connect the Nicolaitans with Balaam's group (Beale, 1999:248-251). Charles (1975:1.52-53) identifies the Nicolaitans with Balaamites on the basis of the text, as well as etymological equivalents. Lenski (1943:90) and Beasley-Murray (1992:85-87) regard the Nicolaitans as agnostics that the spiritual things or spiritual freedom are more predominant than material things. It is, however, not easy to reveal whether they were Gnostics. Lenski (1943:90) regards the 'Nicolaitans' as another term for Balaam. For Fiorenza (1985:115-117), the Nicolaitans could be regarded as a Christian libertine group within these churches of Asia Minor. Thus, one can confirm that sects such as Balaam and Nicolaitan had the predisposition of the libertarian or antinomian movement of the Gnostics.

(Ex. 16:4), in the age of eschatological salvation, men will enjoy the same miraculous food and drink that were given to the people of God (Mounce, 1977:99; Ladd, 1979:49; Roloff, 1993:52). That is, manna is yet given as a symbol of the eschatological fulfillment that the conquerors will take.

In the New Testament, manna appears first in John 6:31-51. In this text, Jesus said to his audience that “it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven” (Jn. 16:32). Jesus was the bread of life (Jn. 16:35, 48) and he who comes to me will never go hungry and he who believes in me will never thirst (Jn. 16:35). Jesus didn’t refer to a physical marvel, but a divine-human nature in terms of a spiritual level (Marsh, 1968:298-309). Through this discourse of the true life’s bread, Jesus wanted to tell the people who he himself was. He is the ‘everlasting bread’ involved in the realm of God. As argued by Meyer (1967:4.465), in contrast to the manna⁸⁰ of the past, the food of the age of salvation coming from Jesus confers immortality to the conquerors of this world.

As Revelation was a book written out of its time and for its time, the author interpreted the meaning of the history in terms of a “traditional imagery” (Scobie, 1993:612).⁸¹ Thus, the remark of the manna could be connected with the ‘Sitz im Leben’ of the Pergamum city. Through the Nicolaitans and Balaam, the Christians must have endeavoured to some extent to accommodate the surrounding pagan culture. As Balaam in the Old Testament misled the Israelites into idol worship (e.g. Nu. 25:1-2; 31:16; cf. Acts. 15:20, 29), there were some people who followed the teaching of the Balaam the Nicolaitans in the community. They ultimately suggested that eating food sacrificed to idols as being part of the emperor worship and the pagan deities can be accepted without any problem. Their evil behaviour focused on the issue of eating food sacrificed to the idols (cf. 1 Co. 8:1-13; 10:14; 20-21, 25-28) and of immorality (*ἀγείν εἰδωλόθυτα καὶ πορνεῦσαι*). These evil behaviours can’t provide eternal life. But if the conquerors avoid these evil behaviors, they can receive “the eternal life” (Beasley-Murray, 1992:88) as the symbol of manna.

⁸⁰ Cf. 1. Co. 10:3; Heb. 9:4.

⁸¹ Scobie (1993:608) classifies these local references into three parts: 1) in terms of the past historical events of the cities, 2) in terms of the topographical features of the sites, 3) in terms of aspects of contemporary life in the cities. Pippin (1987:133) rejects these on the ground that: “Historical material gives clues to the ancient world but does not disclose authorial intent or reconstruct the function of the narrative as a whole.”

According to Coutsoumpos (1997:25), John's argument with the Balaam and Nicolaitans focused on their lax attitude toward pagan religion and society. If the food sacrificed to the idols was a symbol of worshipping their emperor or pagan deities who provided them with daily food for their life (Aune, 1997:192-194), the hidden manna, being the heavenly food, will provide them eternal life. Thus, the hidden manna as a heavenly food or eternal life given to the conquerors may give encouragement and hope to the Christian community in the church of Pergamum.

III.6.4. The white stone (ψῆφος λευκός)

The meaning of the white stone is difficult to define because a lot of suggestions have been offered as to the meaning of these words. According to Louw & Nida (1993:1.24), the context suggests that "this is something to be prized and a type of reward for those who have won the victory." Ψῆφος usually means 'a little stone' or 'pebble' and was used in counting or in voting for acquittal or condemnation (cf. Acts. 26:10, 4 Macc. 15:26; Vine, 1966:4.76).⁸² Hemer (1986:96) suggests seven possible meanings for the white stone: 1. a jewel in the Old Testament or Jewish tradition, 2. the judicial *calculus Mineruae*, the casting vote of acquittal, 3. a symbol of admission, membership or recognition, 4. an amulet with a divine name, 5. a symbol of gladiatorial discharge, 6. an allusion to a process of initiation into the service of Asclepius, 7. simply as a writing material whose form or colour was significant. He regards the sixth possible perspective for our passage. When one considers the whole context, addressed within the church of Pergamum, this is not enough to solve the problem as a whole. In order to interpret its meaning in this context, one has to connect the white stone with the social, cultural and historical contexts.

Concerning the white stone, two facts should be noticed. In the first place, the white stone is long-lasting and imperishable, in contrast to temporary and perishable materials. In the second place, the white colour of the stone indicates certain fortunateness, functioning as an important factor in the context (Ramsay, 1994:221-223). One may suggest that a

⁸² In Acts 26:10, in front of King Agrippa, Paul stated that "on the authority of the chief priests I put many of the saints in prison, when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them" (τε αὐτῶν κατήνεγκα ψῆφον). In 4 Macc. 15:26, the mother holds in her hand two stones for her children; the one brings death and the other deliverance.

contrast between the white stone as a lasting and imperishable material and a parchment as a temporary and perishable material should be considered. It is not easy to come to a conclusion concerning the background of this symbol, owing to various opinions regarding this issue among different scholars.

It is, however, very probable that the white stone was used by jurors to signify an acquittal (Reddish, 1982:141-142).⁸³ If the hidden manna represented some heavenly food, providing the eternal life to the conquerors, the white stone will be used as a ticket of admission to public festivals or a token for admission to the banquet or to the royal assemblies (Mounce, 1977:99-100; Warren, 1983:97; Wilcock, 1989:48-49). Phillips (1974:66; cf. Poythress, 2000:88) argues that the white stone is “a symbol of changeless purity.” It is true that the colour white⁸⁴ was used as a symbol of purity in Revelation. But one should keep in mind that the context is more important than the connotation of its colour, even though the colour white is a very important element.

In the church of Pergamum, the teaching of Balaam and that of Nicolaitans endangered the Christians. These groups such as Balaam and Nicolaitans encouraged participating in the eating of food sacrificed to idols. When one regards these circumstances, it is clear that the white stone indicates the conqueror’s token of admission to the messianic banquet. As Caird (1966:42) argued, the white stone is probably the conqueror’s ticket of admission to the heavenly feast, indicating a very permanent admission ticket to an eternal feast. This symbolism comports with the image of manna and the image of eating food sacrificed to the idols. In contrast to the food sacrificed to the idols, which were perishable and temporary from an earthly point of view, the manna as a heavenly food and the white stone as a ticket of admission to the heavenly banquet would be given to the conquerors who confronted the accommodation and assimilation in their situations (Rudolph, 2005:311). Thus, they can be called the conquerors because of their victory over the *Sitz im Leben* they faced.

⁸³ Charles (1975:1.66-67) suggests that the real source of this idea can be connected with the sphere of popular superstition as a magical amulet (cf. Beckwith, 1967:461-463; Roloff, 1993:52; Aune, 1997:190). One can’t accept this when one regards the context of the text.

⁸⁴ Cf. 1:14; 3:4, 5, 18; 4:4; 6:2, 11; 7:9,13; 14:14; 19:11,14; 20:11. For more information about the table of colour, which was used in Revelation, see Prévost (1991:28).

III.6.5. The new name

The name (ὄνομα) for an object, man, or higher being is closely associated with the those who bear it (Bietenhard, 1967:5.243). In the Old Testament, the Israelites were aware of the significance attached to a personal and proper name. In Eve's case (Ge. 3:20; cf. 17:16), she was named as 'the mother of all the living'. A change of name represents the change of one's identification or status (Ge. 17:15). When God made the covenant with the patriarchs, their names were changed to new names (e.g. Ge. 17:5; 32:28). In Isaiah, God promised that Jerusalem would in the future be called by a new name (Isa. 62:2; 65:15). Swete (1977:40) regards this new name (ὄνομα καινόν) as "the symbol of the new life" in connection with the moral victory, which is transported to the conquerors (cf. Isa. 62:2). In the New Testament, the name (ὄνομα) is connected with the name, person and work of Jesus Christ (cf. Mt. 23:39; Mk. 9:38; Lk. 1:49; 24:47; Jn. 2:23; 3:16; 17:12, 26).⁸⁵

The two most common words for 'new' are νέος and καινός. The νέος signifies what was not there before, while the (καινός) signifies "what is new and distinctive", as compared with other issues (Behm, 1965:3.447; cf. Vine, 1966:3.109-110). According to this definition, νέος may refer to that which is new and has never before existed, while καινός refers to what is new in nature or quality. Hence 'new' is a prominent theological term in the apocalyptic promise (Behm, 1965:3.449). In contrast to this opinion that νέος and καινός must be distinguished according to their distinction or nature, Louw & Nida (1993:1.594n9)⁸⁶ reject this argument. Then, whose name is written on the white stone? Whether the new name written on the white stone was the name of Christ himself, the name of God, the name of victorious person or magical amulet, or not, it is not easy to decide.

On the basis of a magical amulet that was common in the ancient world, Beckwith (1967:463; cf. Charles, 1975:1.66-67; Sweet, 1979:90-91; Metzger, 1993:36; Aune, 1997:190-191) insists that this prevalence of magical practices reveals the origin of the

⁸⁵ For more detailed information regarding the name, person and work of Jesus Christ, see Bietenhard (1967:5.270-280).

⁸⁶ According to them, some people see the use of καινός in contrast with νέος. But it is not possible to find in all occurrences of καινός and νέος this type of distinction (Louw & Nida, 1993:1.594n9).

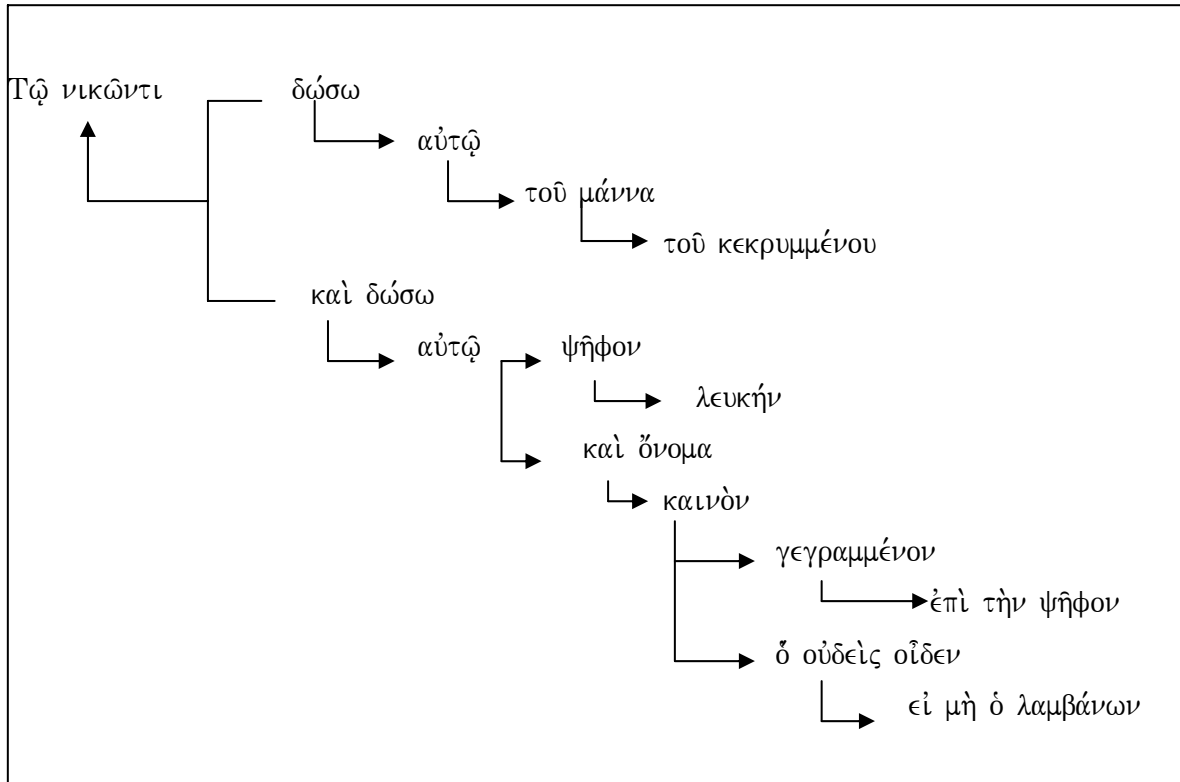
symbol used here. The person dealing with the Apocalypse takes it from a use with which all his readers were familiar. When one considers the context of the promise statement given to the conquerors, and the relationship between the hidden manna and the white stone, one can't accept this suggestion as a proper explanation for communication between the author and certain audiences.

In relationship with the church of Philadelphia (Rev. 3:12), Kiddle (1940:35; cf. Caird, 1966:42; Beasley-Murray, 1992:88-89; Beale, 1999:253-258) suggests this new name as a new name for Christ. Since Christ's new name was as yet unrevealed to men, the possession of a new name by the conquerors must necessarily have been a privilege in which other men were not involved. It is difficult to decide whether to accept or reject such a suggestion. Opposing this suggestion, Hemer (1986:102) argues that the analogy of Rev. 3:12 is not necessarily a factor, for John used similar symbols differently in different situations. Furthermore, if a new name means a change of a new status, a new name written on the white stone couldn't have been given to Christ's new name, because he doesn't need a change for a new status or a new quality of character.

In Revelation, Christ is already the exalted One (Rev. 1:13-16) and he is on the throne with God (Rev. 5:6). Thus, the new name written on the white stone must have been a name for conquering Christians. According to Plumptre (1884:128-129; cf. Phillips, 1974:66; Mounce, 1977:100; Swete, 1977:40-41; Hemer, 1986:102-103; Wall, 1991:66-67; Ramsay, 1994:224; Johnson, 2001:78), the new name had been, to Isaiah and Jeremiah, the image for expressing the new life of blessedness, provided to the people of God. Therefore, the imagery would seem to be the conqueror's name. One can say that the new name written on the white stone is the Christian's name as the conquerors (Morris, 1999:68-69). It is more suitable to the congregation's situation and the relationship between the hidden manna and the white stone. The conquerors' new name in this text proves their transformed identity in Christ and their new or higher status of existence as those who have overcome the circumstances of their harsh realities (Slater, 1999:130). Thus, the name must have been the name of the victorious conquerors, sharing heavenly food for eternal life and the tickets of admission for the heavenly messianic banquet. These images accord well with the context of the Pergamum letter as a whole.

III.6.6. The Conquerors in the church of Pergamum

The promise statement given to the conquerors appears to have a double promise in 2:17. It can be structured as follows:



The first part of this promise statement given to the conquerors is expressed in the following way: Jesus will give the conqueror the hidden manna. Τοῦ μάννα can be understood as a partitive genitive. The partitive genitive is used only in this New Testament example with ‘δίδωμι’ (Robertson, 1933:6.307; cf. Charles, 1975:1.65). According to Blass *et al* (1961:90), the partitive genitive is being driven out by the use of the preposition ἐκ. The focus of this sentence ‘δώσω αὐτῷ τοῦ μάννα τοῦ κεκρυμμένου’ might be found in the concept of ‘some’ of the manna, hidden (Benedict, 1966:16). It implies only a sharing of the hidden manna as an eschatological, eternal food or life of the conquerors.

The second part of this promise statement given to the conquerors is expressed in the following way: Jesus will give the conqueror a white stone with a new name written on it.

The accusative ψῆφον λευκήν is expressed to indicate the whole. That is, if the entire object is affected, the verb in question takes the accusative (Smyth, 1974:320). In a similar way, Christ's words in Revelation 2:17 suggest that the conquerors will be given a share in that manna, which has the distinctive identity of being hidden (Benedict, 1966:16). In the Pergamum city, the Christians who lived in the midst of such pagan circumstances experienced several problems. Their distinctive identity as a minor group was confronted through the demand of their larger social environment. As Desilva (1992b:377) argued, this research regarding the interrelationship of Revelation with its social, cultural, and political situations will show its function as “an identity-forming and boundary-maintaining device.”

The Christians faced the imperial cult as an expression of the religious, social and political loyalty. Pergamum was the centre for the worship of Asclepius, as a healing god, as well as of Zeus, *Soter* (Morris, 1999:65). The Christians also faced the teaching of Balaam and the Nicolaitans, who generally offered accommodation. Regarding these problems, only the conquerors can receive the hidden manna and the white stone as an eschatological blessing and eternal life. The promise statements about the hidden manna and the white stone might give the Christians encouragement and confidence of victory as the conquerors in a hostile world.

III.6.7. Summary

The Christians who lived in the midst of the imperial cult, pagan religion, and civic life faced various problems such as false teaching, conflict, and persecution. Pergamum was also the centre of religious worship of such deities as Zeus, Dionysus, and Asklepios. Zeus was called ‘Saviour’. Thus, the imperial cult, pagan religion, and civil life were important forces that confronted the Christians (Warren, 1983:93-94).

In these situations between life and death (Rudolph, 2005:309), the confidence and encouragement of victory was introduced by the christological designation as the one who has the sharp, double-edged sword. The christological designation as warring warrior Christ for the conquerors would give the image of eschatological victory to the conquerors

even though in this world they suffered and died. This image is derived from Isaiah 11:4 and 49:2 in that with the rod of his mouth and the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked and the earth. But the judgment afflicted on the wicked in the Old Testament is reinterpreted with the sharp double-edged sword coming from Christ's mouth (e.g. 1:16; 2:12, 16; 19:15, 21), indicating the powerful word of Christ and Christ's lordship (Howard-Brook & Gwyther, 1999:140).

The promise statement about hidden manna as a heavenly food is linked with the daily food given during the journey in the Old Testament (e.g. Ex. 16:31; Nu. 11:6-9; Dt. 8:3). Whereas God has given this miraculous food to his people for their physical life, in Revelation the meaning of manna should be reinterpreted with a new spiritual perspective. According to Swete (1977:39), the meaning of manna should be understood as the life-sustaining power that is hidden in Christ. Whereas the false teaching of Balaam and Nicolaitans can give the physical food to the people of the earth, the hidden manna that was a heavenly food for the conquerors can give the eternal food to the people of God, namely the conquerors (Slater, 1999:128).

The white stone has the following two meanings: long-lasting and imperishable and a certain fortunateness as used by jurors to signify an acquittal (Ramsay, 1994:221-223). In conjunction with the context of hidden manna, the white stone can be closely associated with a ticket of admission to public festivals and a token for admission to the banquet or to the royal assemblies (Warren, 1983:97). In contrast with the false teaching of Balaam and Nicolaitans, the white stone as a ticket of admission to the heavenly banquet might give an eschatological heavenly victory's confidence to the conquerors who confronted suffering and death. As Reddish (1982:141) argued, the conquerors are those who reject false teachings, and who would be rewarded with the heavenly manna.

III.7. The promise statement given to the Conquerors of the church of Thyatira

The church of Thyatira was threatened with internal false teaching by a false prophetess named Jezebel who encouraged them to eat food sacrificed to idols and to be sexually immoral (2:20). In the introductory statement, Christ appears as the Son of God whose

eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze (2:19). The interesting thing is that Christ as the Son of God (ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ) is contrasted with Jezebel's children (τὰ τέκνα αὐτῆς). It means that Christ's statement as the Son of God has real authority and power (Beasley-Murray, 1992:90). The promise statement given to the conquerors thus fits with the structure of this letter, on the basis of the church's situation in order to give victory and encouragement.

III.7.1. The city of Thyatira

Not much is known about the history of the Thyatira city, and it is the smallest and least important of the seven cities appearing in the book of Revelation (Beasley-Murray, 1992:89). The city of Thyatira is situated at the long valley between the Hermus and Caicus rivers. This city was found by Seleucus I (301-281 B.C.), Alexander's general, who inherited the greatest segment of the empire (Blaiklock, 1965:107; Hemer, 1986:106-107).

In contrast to some of the other cities, the city of Thyatira was not a centre of the religious cult, even though the city of Thyatira had its local patron-god, Apollo Tyrimnaeus. Under the Roman Empire, the worship of Apollo Tyrimnaeus was closely connected with the emperor-worship cult (Filson, 1962b:4.638; contra Barclay, 1957:65).⁸⁷ The outstanding characteristic, which the Thyatira city possessed, was that more trade-guilds were present locally than in any other cities in Asia Minor (Mounce, 1977:101). As Blaiklock (1984:130) argued, Thyatira's geographical importance derived from a broad and ancient trade, and in the days of the Roman Peace, this city, like Laodicea, was well known as a commercial centre. Thyatira was a trade-guild centre for potters, tailors, dyers, wool-workers, leather-workers, shoemakers, linen-weavers, bakers, smiths, as well as slave-merchants (Blaiklock, 1984:130; Stambaugh & Balch, 1986:153). Trade-guilds took a religious form (Sweet, 1979:92),⁸⁸ because the trade-guilds had their own patron gods. The

⁸⁷ Another major religious cult that was in Thyatira city as patron-god was that of the oriental Sibyl called Sambathe. Some scholars insist that Jezebel, who had a respected position in the Thyatira church, may be identified with the local Sibyl Sambathe prophet. This can, however, hardly be true, because Jezebel was called a prophetess by the Christians of the Thyatira church and was tolerated as a member of the church. For this argument, see Charles (1975:1.70), Beckwith (1975:466), Swete (1977:42-43).

⁸⁸ In the Greco-Roman period, if the family was a natural group bound through blood, some private groups were eager to organize some clubs in order to achieve social purposes as a common interest - a sacrifice to a god, a common meal, festivals. The characteristic of such a social group was mainly religious, existing for

Christians who lived in these situations had been forced to participate in these trade-guild ceremonies. These environments must have created some problems for the Christians, having been members of the trade-guilds, and must have raised the question as to which way they could participate in such a religious ceremony.

For Christians, these events had been in sharp contrast to the worship of the true God. One should keep in mind that the problems that threatened the Christians of Thyatira came not from outside, but from inside the church. Thus, the conquerors in the church of Thyatira were those who overcame the internal problems.

III.7.2. The social situation of the church of Thyatira

In the church of Thyatira, there was no religious or political persecution. Their works were praised by the Son of Man: ‘Οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα καὶ τὴν ἀγάπην καὶ τὴν πίστιν καὶ τὴν διακονίαν καὶ τὴν ὑπομονήν σου, καὶ τὰ ἔργα σου τὰ ἔσχατα πλείονα τῶν πρώτων: I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance and that you are now doing more than you did at first’ (Rev. 2:19).

When one considers chapter 2:20, the situation seemed to have rapidly changed. They did well, but they accepted the woman Jezebel who called herself a prophetess (Rev. 2:20).⁸⁹ It is certain that she misled the church into sexual immorality, compromise and eating food sacrificed to idols in the pagan society. She had to be a prominent woman within the church. The problem that the Thyatira confronted was a situation of life and death (Rudolph, 2005:314). They had two choices: faithfulness or compromise. The threat for the

the worship of a specific god or hero. Through this religious ceremony, the club or guild may have been unified under the name of religion. They also had a social and economic purpose. As Ferguson (1993:132) correctly indicated, “The purposes of these associations with their characteristic terms were economic (*stationes*), religious (*cultores*) or social (*tenuiorum*).” The religious form was above all an important element, which unified the membership of the club or guild.

⁸⁹ To reveal the identification of the woman Jezebel is not easy. One can suppose that Jezebel had a prominent position within the church (Mounce, 1977:103). Regarding the identification of Jezebel, Barclay (1957:64-72) suggests three possibilities: 1) according to this form, ‘τὴν γυναῖκα Ἰεζάβελ’, she was regarded as the wife of the bishop of the church, 2) Jezebel is identified by a famous local oracle called *Sambathe*, 3) the suggestion that this woman Jezebel was Lydia (Acts. 16:14-15). One can’t find who exactly Jezebel was. For this woman Jezebel, one can refer to the Old Testament texts (1 Ki. 16:31, 21:25-26). Here, Jezebel incited King Ahab and Israel to compromise and fornicate by worshipping Baal. As with Balaam, one can suppose that Jezebel was a prototype of the false teacher, who led the church to sexual immorality and compromising of the pagan society.

church of Thyatira did not come from outside. It was not persecution at the hands of Rome. It was not emperor worship. But it came from inside the church (DeSilva, 1992a:292). It was compromise within the church. That is, the problems that threatened the church of Thyatira were internal problems rather than external problems (Charles, 1975:1.69). As Rainbow (1996:212) insists, the struggle of the conquerors is against the idolatry and immorality within the church.

III.7.3. Authority over the nations

The promise-statement given to the conquerors of the Thyatira church derived from its social and historical background. The images of Thyatira were similar to those of Thyatira Christians. The rod of iron applied to the local situation and considered in the sense of wielding of the shepherd's staff or club to ward off the attacks of marauding beasts (Mounce, 1977:106). The prophet of Revelation intended to emphasize the meaning of the text through the military image. Thus, these verses, 'I will give authority over the nations. He will rule them with iron scepter' (δώσω αὐτοῖς ἐξουσίαν ἐπὶ τῶν ἐθνῶν καὶ ποιμανεῖ αὐτοὺς ἐν ῥάβδῳ σιδηρᾷ: Rev. 2:26-27, cf. 12:5; 19:15) might have made sense to the audiences familiar with this term.⁹⁰

To rule with an iron sceptre is the symbol of power to destroy those who are captured in the pagan's blasphemous claims of helpless humiliation (Beasley-Murray, 1992:93). The church of Thyatira faced the power of Rome through various situations and was ruled with a rod of iron and was smashed like pottery. As some disenfranchised minor group, she needed some hope and encouragement through the word of Christ. Therefore, this promise-statement given to the conquerors was the guarantee of the eschatological life (cf. Beale, 1999:268-269), even though the present life of the Thyatira-Christian had a lot of problems related to the issues discussed.

⁹⁰ There has been heated debate concerning the use of ποιμανεῖ in Rev. 2:27, which is a quotation of Ps. 2:9 (LXX: ποιμανεῖς). The meaning of this word could be divided into two, indicating 'to rule or shepherd' and 'to break or to destroy'. Charles (1975:1.76) suggests its meaning as to break or to destroy (contra Hemer, 1986:124-125). Louw & Nida (1993:1.479) insist that the meaning of ποιμαίνω should be regarded as meaning "to rule, to govern." When one considers the context of this verse, one cannot completely exclude the possible meaning of 'to break or to destroy.'

According to the Jewish tradition, the messianic kingdom will come by judging their gentile oppressors. But, in contrast with the Jewish tradition, John reinterpreted this tradition whose framework was thoroughly embedded into the Old Testament influence. This Psalm 2 was called a Messianic Psalm,⁹¹ having anticipated the eschatological Lord's day on which the Lord will return to destroy his enemies and to establish his righteous kingdom on earth (Hendriksen, 2000:72). This implies that the new age of the messianic kingdom can only be inaugurated with the destruction of the wicked. As Swete (1977:47) correctly indicated, the new order replaces the old order and the intention of the potter reconstructs and reorganizes the old order.

This prophetic message through a prophet might have changed their world-view, which was not deeply rooted in the true message of God. Jesus, the ultimate conqueror, had an authority over the nations through his death and resurrection (Barr, 1986:242). Thus, the message seemed apparent that the conquerors would have an authority over the nations if they continued the will of Jesus to the end, without any accommodation with religious laxity in their pagan environment.

III.7.4. The morning star

Concerning the interpretation of 'morning star', one couldn't find a satisfactory explanation to solve the problem.⁹² On the basis of the text, this problem will be dealt with and from its social or historical background.

⁹¹ As a messianic Psalm, one should keep in mind that Psalm 2 has an important function and various quotations or allusions in the New Testament. Psalm 2:1-2 is cited in Acts 4:25-26 and mentioned the kings of the earth and rulers of the earth against the Lord and his Anointed One. Psalm 2:7 is also quoted in Acts. 13:33 and Heb. 1:5: 5:5. This Psalm citation focuses on the coronation of the king (Witherington III, 1998:412), and emphasizes the relationship between God as Father and Jesus as Son. Through this statement, one can recognize that Jesus as Son of God is superior to human beings and does have authority over the nations and a judgment over the nations (Jer. 19:11). In Odes of Solomon 29:8, it is mentioned that "he gave me the scepter of his power, that I might subdue the thoughts of the gentiles, and humble the strength of the mighty." In a Psalm of Solomon 17:22-24, the Messianic King, who is the son of David, is to destroy the unrighteous rulers, to purge Jerusalem of gentiles, to smash the arrogance of sinners like a potter's jar, to shatter all their substance with an iron rod, to destroy the unlawful nations with the word of his mouth. These statements indicate the sovereignty of Christ over the nations.

⁹² According to Hemer (1986:125-126), the morning star could be divided into four items: (1) A reference to Christ himself, (2) As emblems of Messianic authority in the prophecy of Balaam in Nu. 24:17, (3) The planet Venus as an emblem of authority since Babylon, (4) As an emblem of the immortality of the righteous. For a more detailed classification, see Mounce (1977:107).

From Babylonian times, the planet Venus was the symbol of authority or rule. In Roman times, it was the symbol of victory and sovereignty (Beasley-Murray, 1992:93). According to Aune (1997:212-213; cf. Barnes, 1976:86; Sweet, 1979:96), in ancient times the morning star, having been identified as the planet Venus, was recognized as the herald of a new day. But in conjunction with Revelation 22:16, indicating Jesus himself as the bright Morning Star, the relationship between the morning star and the planet Venus should be rejected, and one doesn't know exactly whether John engaged in such a discussion from an astrological framework or not. Malina and Pilch (2000:59) insist that the morning star as in 22:16 does not indicate Jesus, but it rather describes the mighty star servant, ready to serve the conquerors. According to them, "to give the victor the morning star is to give that person one of the strongest astral sky servants as his own personal servant, hence to reach and surpass the power of the mightiest of magicians."⁹³ They go too far to the world of fantasy or conjecture and their insistence is not biblically based. One can, therefore, not accept this theory as a proper explanation concerning the morning star.

The morning star is accepted to be an allusion to Numbers 24:17 (cf. Mt. 2:2), as a symbol of messianic authority or rule in the prophecy of Balaam. Just as Numbers 24:17 (cf. Ge. 49:10; Ps. 2:9; Isa. 11:1-4) was also interpreted to have been of messianic origin in the Jewish writings, the morning star is a symbol associated with the messianic rule (Wall, 1991:79; Bauckham, 1993a: 323-326; Beale, 1999:268-269; contra Hemer, 1986:125). This theory is probable, but their theory that the star symbolizes sovereignty or rule, is somewhat of a weak argument on the basis of Revelation 22:16. On the basis of Daniel 12:3 (cf. Mt. 13:43; 2 Pe. 1:19; Job. 38:7), Beckwith (1967:471; cf. Ladd, 1979:54) suggests that the righteous shall shine like the stars in the messianic kingdom.⁹⁴ That is, it reflects the glory, which shall be given to the conquerors. When one considers the context

⁹³ As social-scientific and anthropological scholars, they try too hard to interpret the Bible in the field of astrology. Following Dupuis who was concerned with the ultimate sources or origins of religion and believed all religions were rooted in the worship of the sun (see Malina, 1995:12-13), they tried to interpret the Bible with this unusual insight. Malina (1997:84, 96) insists that one find such an astral prophecy in Ezekiel, Zechariah, Daniel, Enoch and Revelation. The chief celestial characteristic about Jesus' astral reference is the Son of Man. Information about a celestial Son of Man would be derived from the sky in the same way the author of Revelation obtained his information. John the Seer noted a number of constellations. But such an interpretation is too fantastic to accept.

⁹⁴ In 4 Ezra 7:19, when the righteous shall be separated from their mortal body, they shall have rest in seven orders. In the sixth order, their faces are to shine like the sun and they are to be made like the light of the stars. 1 Enoch 104:2 explains that the righteous shall shine like the lights of heaven.

of the letter in conjunction with Revelation 22:16, it might also not be accepted as a proper explanation concerning the morning star.

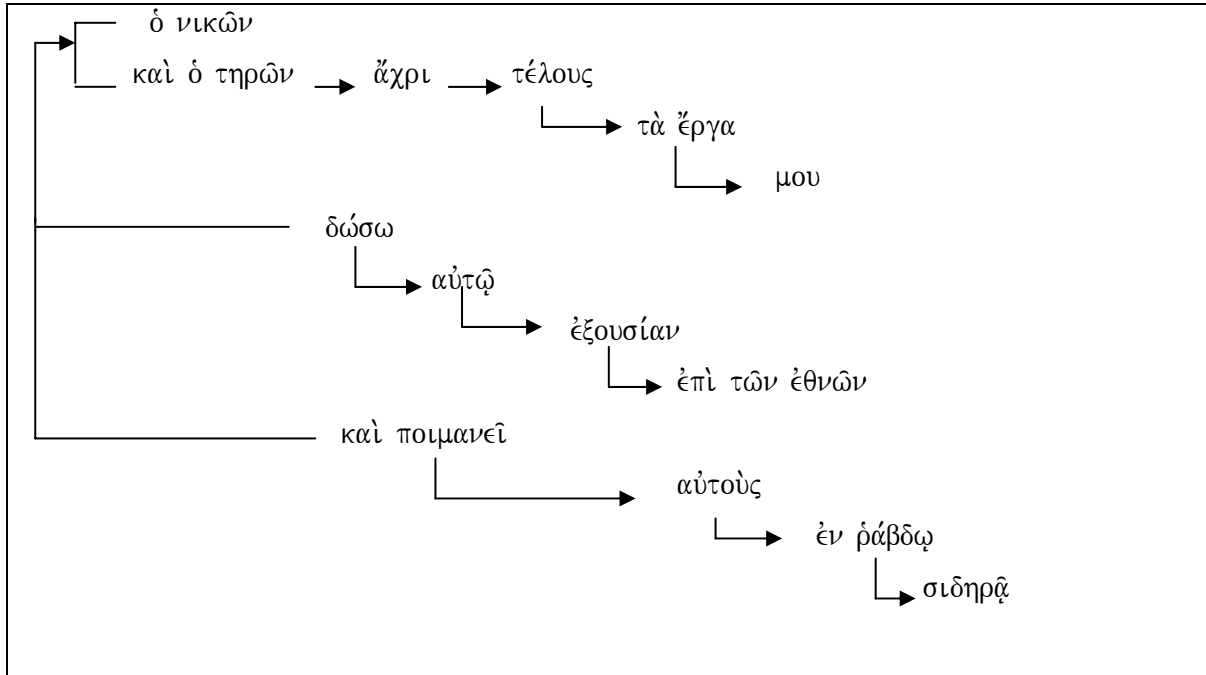
In Revelation 2:28, Christ promised the morning star (τὸν ἄστέρα τὸν πρωϊνόν) to the conquerors. It is not at all easy to discover what the meaning of this implication is, but there is a good solution in Revelation 22:16. In this reference, Jesus himself is the Morning Star (Sweet, 1979:97; ὁ ἀστὴρ ὁ λαμπρὸς ὁ πρωϊνός). He would give himself to the conquerors that endure to the end. When Jesus referred to ‘giving’, like that of the morning star, one must realize that this one has a comprehensive or implicit meaning. This meaning implies the work or authority and personality of Jesus as the morning star.

Many scholars have tried to divide this prophetic message into their own framework, emphasizing only one side. Thus, the morning star which the conquerors will receive will probably represent more than Christ himself⁹⁵ in connection with authority over the nations (Rev. 2:26) and with Revelation 22:16. Lensky (1943:124-125) indicates correctly that Jesus himself is regarded as the royal star, and he will give to every conqueror the royal star, the morning one. He (Christ) and all these other conquerors will shine together, all being like morning stars in brilliance, being derived from him. It does seem clear that the morning star given to the conquerors is more comprehensive in content, including the authority, works, and personality of Christ himself. Thus, receiving the morning star as Christ himself (Roloff, 1993:56) might provide encouragement and hope to the conquerors in the victory of the kingdom of God (Beasley-Murray, 1992:94).

III.7.5. The Conquerors in the church of Thyatira

The promise-statement given to the conquerors is found in 2:26-28: “To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations. He will rule them with an iron sceptre; he will dash them to pieces like pottery, just as I have received authority from my Father. I will also give him the morning.” It can be analyzed as follows:

⁹⁵ Most commentators insist that the morning star is Christ himself in conjunction with Rev. 22:16. The advocates of this insistence are the following: Kiddle, 1940:43; Caird, 1966:46; Phillips, 1974:73; Charles, 1975:1.77; Swete, 1977:47; Reddish, 1982:145; Rosscup, 1982:282; Wilcock, 1989:51; Metzger, 1993:37; Morris, 1999:74; Poythress, 2000:90; Johnson, 2001:82.



Two present participles, ὁ νικῶν καὶ ὁ τηρῶν, are important words indicating who the conquerors are. The two phrases are connected with καὶ, which is a coordinative conjunction, binding two words into one concept. It is perpetually being translated into its most literal equivalent (Moulton, 1906:12). That is, the two phrases are regarded as the same one through repetition of the article (καὶ ὁ, καὶ ὁ) (Charles, 1975:1.74). It could consequently be interpreted like this: they are conquerors who overcome and do my will to the end or keep Christ's works. First of all, the words νικάω and τηρέω can be used to deliver the meaning of victory and conquering in Revelation. Those who conquer their life situations, such as the false teaching of Jezebel and compromising with pagan gods and keeping the word of God, can be called conquerors.

What is the message of this passage: ὁ τηρῶν ἄχρι τέλους τὰ ἔργα μου? It refers to doing the same works that Christ did, while he lived in the earth (Leivestad, 1954:214). Through these events, just as Jesus conquered the world, the Thyatira Christians as the followers of Jesus must conquer this material world.

To the conquerors who overcame the world through maintaining the works of Christ, Jesus promised authority over the nations just as Jesus received his authority over the nations from God his Father (Bauckham, 1993b:70). One can observe here the particular contrast

between τὰ ἔργα μου (2:26) and τῶν ἔργων αὐτῆς (2:22). Some of the Thyatira Christians followed the false teaching of Jezebel, which led them astray to commit fornication and to eat food sacrificed to idols (2:20). This is a severe warning to the Christians who followed the false teaching of Jezebel, instead of the teaching of Jesus.

The promise-statement given to the conquerors was also a suitable promise having been made towards the community, who listened to the message of the prophet (cf. Georgi, 1986:121-126). They were such a weak and marginalized minor group. They were conquerors under the threat of a trade-guild. As Christians, they could not participate in the common meals and pagan ceremonies enforced through this meeting, together with the false teachings of Jezebel. But they are promised the authoritative rule and victory of Christ (Aune, 1997:214) as the conquerors, if they don't live according to such a prescribed pagan lifestyle. To the conquerors who experienced various threats of injustice, the promise-statement might give them encouragement and victory (Morris, 1999:74).

III.7.6. Summary

One could not discover any persecution or harassment by external conflict in the church of Thyatira, but did discover serious internal conflict. In this letter, the christological designation could be linked with the promise statement, which the authority over the nations with an iron sceptre would be given. The image of Christ's figure and the promise statement provided the symbol of power to destroy those who participated in the pagan's blasphemy (Bauckham, 1993b:8-9; cf. Witherington III, 2003:77-84). That is, it depicted Christ's authority as redeemer to the conquerors and judge to the wicked. Here, the quotation of Psalm 2:9, which is a messianic Psalm, emphasized the relationship between God as father and Christ as son (cf. Rev. 2:18) and depicted the powerful authority over the nation as judge.

The image of authority over nations given to the conquerors can be derived from its social and historical circumstances. In a military and trade centre, authority over nations is applied as the symbol of power to destroy those who followed the pagan's blasphemous claims of false teaching (Charles, 1975:1.76). To the disenfranchised Christian group,

authority over nations with a rod of iron might give them hope and encouragement and guarantee them eternal life for ‘rhetorical effect’ (see Kirby, 1988:197-204). That is, John suggested ‘alternative universe’, demanding the replacement from old things to new things (Swete, 1977:47).

The morning star as an allusion to Numbers 24:17 was understood as the symbol of victory or sovereignty (Beasley-Murray, 1992:93-94). Even though some scholars understand the morning star as the planet Venus (Aune, 1997:212-213) or as the strongest astral sky servants (Malina & Pilch, 2000:59) or messianic reign (Bauckham, 1993a:323-326), it should be related to the personality and work of Christ in connection with Revelation 22:16. Here, Jesus himself is the Morning Star and he will give himself to the conquerors who persisted in their work to the end.

The use of ὁ νικῶν καὶ ὁ τηρῶν in verse 2:26 indicated that the conquerors are those who keep the will of Christ to the end. In this context, what is the meaning of the will of Christ? It can be linked with the social and historical situations that the church of Thyatira faced. It is divided into two parts, indicating both positive and negative aspects. In terms of the positive aspect, they kept τὰ ἔργα καὶ τὴν ἀγάπην καὶ τὴν πίστιν καὶ τὴν διακονίαν καὶ τὴν ὑπομονήν in the name of Christ (2:19). They confronted the negative false teaching of Jezebel, such as sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols (2:20). The conquerors must overcome these temptations through their circumstances. If as Christians, they keep their faith and do not compromise themselves with false teachings, they can be called conquerors. As Mounce (1977:144) insists, the decisive victory of the conquerors can be achieved “by an act of total self-sacrifice.”

III.8. The promise statement given to the Conquerors of the church of Sardis

The problem of the church of Sardis was not regarded as harassment or persecution by outside forces but as an internal problem within the Christian community. Christ’s figure, which held the seven spirits of God and the seven stars, provided the fullness of Christ to the world (Gilbertson, 2003:85-92). It means that the role of the seven spirits especially emphasizes the perfection of God’s relationship with his people (Painter, 1997:564). Thus,

Christ began his statement with οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα just as the Laodicea church had been heard (οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα; 3:15) and warned that their deeds must be completed in the sight of God.

III.8.1. The city of Sardis

Sardis, which was the capital of Lydia, was situated on some tiny plateau summit, 1500 feet above the plain and surrounded by precipices, except at one point where it was joined to the mass of Tmolus by a narrow saddle, even this approach was steep and difficult (Hemer, 1986:129). Owing to this topographical position as “an ideal stronghold” (Ramsay, 1994:261), the city of Sardis was, during ancient times, thought to have been an impregnable place. However, throughout the history of the city of Sardis, it was captured twice, i.e. by Cyrus in 549 B.C and by Antiochus the Great in 214 B.C, because of its residents’ carelessness or idleness. In the time of Croesus (560-546 B.C.), who became the most famous Lydian king through his vast wealth and his fabulous gold, Sardis was an example of luxury and prosperity and reached its climax (Blaiklock, 1965:112-113; cf. Pedley, 1968:24). To have been a citizen of Sardis at that time was to be a citizen of the most sophisticated country in the world (Pedley, 1968:4).

Sardis was furthermore very much a centre of political, military and industrial importance (Pedley, 1968:9). Under Roman rule, Sardis continued to be a centre of the textile industry, as well as an important political and economic centre. The art of dyeing wool was supposed to have been invented at Sardis. Sardian dye was famous in all antiquity.

Regarding the wool industry, it seems clear that Revelation 3:4a (“yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes”) had some local reference. The patron deities of Sardis were Cybele and Artemis, and the great temple in Sardis was the one dedicated to Artemis (Yamauchi, 1980:68-69; Hemer, 1986:138-139; Ramsay, 1994:266-268). These deities might have deeply influenced the lives of those people who worshipped them as their patron deities. In contrast to the past prosperity or fame of Sardis city, it was now blamed: you are dead (νεκρὸς εἶ). Accordingly, Ramsay (1994:275) explains that only Sardis city in the whole province of Asia had a more splendid history in the past ages. The

city of Sardis showed such a prominent contrast between the past glory and present misery. Its history was the exact opposite of the history of Smyrna. Smyrna was dead and yet lived, but Sardis lived and was yet dead.

III.8.2. The social situation of the church of Sardis

Sardis was the capital of the ancient Lydian kingdom, and had a more splendid history than any other city in Asia Minor (Ramsay, 1994:275). Sardis was famous as a commercial centre and was wealthy too. In terms of the geographical position, it was regarded as a nearly impregnable fortress and an ideal stronghold. In contrast with its previous splendid history, the problem was that Christ, as the one who holds the seven spirits, accused them of being spiritually dead (Michael, 1997:81). According to Aune (1997:219), the contrasting message of this church is “life and death.”

In Revelation 3:1, they were blamed like this: ‘Οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα ὅτι ὄνομα ἔχεις ὅτι ζῆς, καὶ νεκρὸς εἶ: I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead’. When one reads this letter, one couldn’t find any persecution, emperor worship, conflict with Jews or internal false teaching, but the problem of the church of Sardis was their spiritual stupor (Hendriksen, 2000:73). Because of their spiritual tepidity and sloth, they were called “a peaceful church for the dead or dead church” (Barclay, 1957:85): ‘γίνου γρηγορῶν καὶ στήρισον τὰ λοιπὰ ἃ ἔμελλον ἀποθανεῖν, οὐ γὰρ εὔρηκά σου τὰ ἔργα πεπληρωμένα ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ μου: Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God” (Rev. 3:2).

III.8.3. White garments

The colour white was mentioned in the promise-statement given to the conquerors in the church of Pergamum. One has said that even though the colour white usually indicates the symbol of purity in Revelation (Ford, 1975:409), the context is more important than the connotation of the colour. The white garments should also be regarded in the context of the

Sardis letter. In Revelation, four Greek words are used with reference to a garment: ἱματίον (e.g. 3:4, 5, 18; 4:4; 16:15; 19:13, 16), στολή (e.g. 6:11, 7:9, 13, 14; 22:14), βύσσινος (e.g. 19:8, 19:14; cf. 18:12, 16), λίνον (e.g. 15:6). In a comparison of two words, namely, ἱματίον and στολή, ἱματίον usually indicates an outer cloak or mantle, while στολή refers to a long robe (Vine, 1966:1.63, 198-199). The cultural significance of a ‘long robe’ at that time indicates a high social status and signifies some special occupation or activity that used this cloth (Louw & Nida, 1993:1.74).

The statement pertaining to the white garments (ἱματίοις λευκοῖς) reflects the context of the Christian community, which has lost its initial enthusiasm, morality, as well as its spiritual life. As with the church of Ephesus, Jesus stated to the church of Sardis that he knew their deeds (οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα), which were dead. As a city having a memory of a certain splendid past history, they lived with a reputation of being alive, while they were, in fact, dead (ὄνομα ἔχεις ὅτι ζῆς, καὶ νεκρὸς εἶ), owing to their deeds. As a centre of the wool industry or of the dye industry, in conjunction with their social and historical contexts, the meaning over those who have not soiled their garments, in contrast with those who have soiled their garments, might be understood without any problem. The contrasting metaphor between soiled garment and unsoiled garment showed who the conquerors were (Ulfgard, 1989:81; cf. Barr, 1998:59)

According to Ramsay (1994:282-283; cf. Blaiklock, 1965:117), the white garments given to the conquerors can be connected with the idea of a triumph, similar to that of a victorious Roman general. Ramsay’s view is certainly attractive, but through this text, one couldn’t see any crucial key to support his view. In the case of Michaelis (1975:4.249), it signifies the gift of eternal life in fellowship with the exalted Lord. It was sometimes used to indicate the gift of eternal life (cf. Krodell, 1989:133). If one accepts this view, it is to generalize the meaning of the text, without any consideration of the applicable context. Although some proper interpretation regarding the white garment might indeed be possible, when one considers the meaning of the context, it couldn’t be accepted as the primary meaning of the text. As Ulfgard (1989:81) argued, the clothing reveals the identity of the people who wear it, because only the people who wear white garments will walk with the Lord and never blot out his name from the book of life.

In this letter, one couldn't find any elements of persecution from the Roman authority or Jewish community or the false teaching of the false prophets or prophetesses. But, here an attitude of spiritual idolatry or spiritual debauchery was indeed apparent (Warren, 1983:109-110). Most Christians at the church of Sardis did not truly engage in morally correct behaviour in the sight of God (e.g. 3:1). This behaviour caused them to be spiritually asleep without any expectation of the return of Christ (e.g. 3:2-3). When one thinks about these statements in connection with the white garment, the mentioning of the white garments might be connected with the life, which the conquerors as Christians must have faced in a pagan environment. The white garments must therefore have been an indication of a pure spiritual life and victory the conqueror would receive, more than the purity of those who have not soiled their garments (Warren, 1983:111).

In supporting this view, Beale (1999:278) is quite correct that white in Revelation describes not mere purity, but a faithful, non-compromising spirit in contrast to those who have stained their garments, that is, those who have assimilated to some extent (cf. Swete, 1977:179).⁹⁶ This explanation is a suitable interpretation in connection with its surrounding environment. If they fail to repent of this moral laxity or spiritual laziness, when Jesus comes like a thief in the night, they will face the judgment of Jesus in contrast with the spiritual life and victory the conquerors would receive.

In the New Testament, white is regarded often in an eschatological and apocalyptic way or as the heavenly colour (Michaelis, 1967:4.246-247) except for two passages (Jn. 4:35; Mt. 5:36). Even though the context of each passage differed, when the colour white was used in its own context, one can see white in terms of an eschatological or heavenly perspective. At the transfiguration (e.g. Mk. 9:2-8; Mt. 17:1-8; Lk. 9:28-36), Jesus' garments became dazzling white in terms of an eschatological or heavenly perspective.⁹⁷ After the

⁹⁶ Many debates about the white garments have been discussed. According to scholars who try to explain these white garments from their own perspective, one can see that the meaning of white garments varies. Some scholars see a white garment as a victory (Metzger, 1993:40; Ramsay, 1994:283; Talbert, 1994:21), purity (Beckwith, 1967:475; Ford, 1975:409; Michaels, 1997:82; Hendriksen, 2000:74; Johnson, 2001:84;), a victory and purity (Caird, 1966:49; Ladd, 1979:57; Bratcher & Hatton, 1993:69), a justification (Mounce, 1977:113; Sweet, 1979:100).

⁹⁷ When one compares these three passages, it becomes clear that each passage emphasizes a particular character in terms of an eschatological or heavenly perspective: τὰ ἱμάτια αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο στίλβοντα λευκὰ λίαν (Mk. 9:3), τὰ δὲ ἱμάτια αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο λευκὰ ὡς τὸ φῶς (Mt. 17:2), and εἶδον τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ (Lk. 9:32). The use of δόξα φῶς especially reveals the eschatological or heavenly characteristics of these

resurrection of Jesus as conqueror against death, the appearance of an angel who wore a white garment clarified the heavenly character of an angel (Mt. 28:3). It is not surprising that the meaning of a white garment used as a symbol of an eschatological or heavenly perspective like Jesus' or the angel's garment was applied to the conquerors of the church of Sardis as an eschatological expectation.

The characteristics between soiled white garments of the defeated and unsoiled white garments of the faithful conquerors must be regarded as having portrayed a contrasting image. Those who wear unsoiled white garments can be called conquerors because they kept their spiritual life free from the spiritual idolatry and spiritual debauchery in the pagan world (Kistemaker, 2001:152-153).

In 1 Enoch 14:20, Enoch has seen that the Great Glory was sitting upon the throne and his gown was shining more brightly than the sun, it was whiter than any snow. In 1 Enoch 62:15-16, it is said that the righteous and elect shall wear the garments of glory, which shall become the garments of life from the Lord of Spirits. In Josephus (Ant. 11:331), Alexander saw the multitude wearing white garments at a distance, while the priests stood clothed with fine linen and also in Ant. 20:216, many of the Levites and the priests wore linen garments (cf. Ex. 28:2-4; Lev. 16:4). On the grounds of these statements, the use of the white garments could be connected to 'glory, holiness, victory, ritual, moral purity, and righteousness', indicating multivalent meanings of the white garment as depending on their own situations. Therefore, the lists imply that the people of God, namely the conquerors, will receive the eschatological blessing by God (Ulfgard, 1989:84-85).

III.8.4. The book of life

The meaning of the book of life (3:5; cf. 20:15) could be derived from Exodus. 32:32-33, where Moses prayed that if God will not forgive the sin of his people, his name will be erased from the book God had written (Ex. 32:32). In terms of God's perspective, to erase the names of his people from the book of life was to remove from such people eternal life or salvation, which God will give to the conquerors (Hughes, 1990:57). In terms of people

passages.

who were against God, to erase their names out of the book of life was to lose their eternal life or salvation. As Kiddle (1940:47) argued, when a criminal's name was erased from the civic register of an Asiatic town, he was no longer a citizen of his city. Thus, it was the destiny of the faithless to lose the citizenship of heavenly society.

In Psalm 69:28, the Psalmist asks that the wicked may be blotted out of the book of life, not to be listed with the righteous (cf. Ps. 56:8; 139:16). In Daniel 12:1, it is also proclaimed that every one whose name is found written in the book, will be delivered (cf. Da. 7:10; 10:21). One can recognize that to those whose names have been written in the book of life, as opposed to those whose names have not, their respective crucial destinations are their salvation and eternal life. If one accepts that the Greek cities maintained a list of their citizens in a public register (Hemer, 1986:148; Beasley-Murray, 1992:98; Ramsay, 1994:281-282; Wilson, 1996:235), it is not surprising that this citizenship register idea can be applied to the conquerors of the church of Sardis. It indicates the destiny between life as the conquerors and death as the defeated, which was familiar within their framework of reference.

The respective contents of the book of life would guarantee salvation or eternal life (Wall, 1991:82), to those whose names have been contained therein. But a removal from it would be associated with eternal death or punishment. It is to reveal that if their name was written in the book of life, they belong to the kingdom of heaven as the conquerors. If their names were not written in the book of life, they would not belong to the kingdom of heaven (Charles, 1975:84; Ladd, 1979:58; Krodell, 1989:134). This is a symbol of a citizenship register within the kingdom of God in contrast to the Greek-Roman citizenship register in this world. If they want to be citizens of the heavenly kingdom, they should become conquerors, by repenting and keeping the word of God.

There are several passages mentioning the book of life in the New Testament.⁹⁸ In Luke 10:20, the return of the seventy who were sent to the village to preach the Gospel of Jesus

⁹⁸ In Revelation, two Greek expressions concerning the book of life were used. The first one is the use of ἡ βίβλος τῆς ζωῆς (e.g. Rev. 3:5; 20:15) and the second one is the use of τὸ βιβλίον τῆς ζωῆς (e.g. Rev. 13:8; 17:8; 20:12; 21:27). It is impossible to establish any material distinction between these two terms. The author of Revelation did, however, prefer βιβλίον to βίβλος (Schrenk, 1968:1.615, 618).

was rejoiced because Satan had been expelled from heaven. Jesus, however, informed them rather to rejoice because their names were written down in heaven: χαίρετε δὲ ὅτι τὰ ὀνόματα ὑμῶν ἐγγέγραπται ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς. The point that the author wanted to make was not their temporary authority in this world against Satan, but their eternal status, which is in heaven. It is accordingly implied that their citizenship in heaven has been guaranteed, according to which their names are written in the book of life.

According to Schrenk (1968:1.770), the statement, which was explained in Luke 10:20 can be linked with the idea of the book of life. In Philippians 4:3, Paul tells the people at Philippi to assist his fellow workers, whose names were written in the book of life (ὧν τὰ ὀνόματα ἐν βίβλῳ ζωῆς). If one agrees that the book of life reminds us of the citizen registers common to the Jewish and Hellenistic worlds, it is sure that Paul, who was familiar with the culture and custom of that time, used this concept in terms of a heavenly citizenship register in contrast to the registers on earth.

In the Ode of Solomon 9:11-12, it is stated that the names of all of those who have conquered will be inscribed in his book. Jubilees 30:21-22 states that the people who break the covenant or transgress the ordinance, will be recorded in the heavenly tablets as enemies and be blotted out of the book of life (cf. Jub. 5:13). In Joseph & Aseneth 15:4, it is mentioned that your name was written in the book of those living in heaven; in the beginning of the book, your name was written down with my finger, for it never again to be erased. It should accordingly be ascertained that the concept of a book of life, as a heavenly citizen register, is frequently found in ancient Israelite and Jewish literature (Aune, 1997:224). According to whether names of the people have been written in the book of life or not, they can be called the conquerors or the defeated.

III.8.5. The Conquerors in the church of Sardis

The Lord promises to the conquerors in the church of Sardis: “He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels: Ο 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.”

The comparative noun οὕτως could be translated ‘likewise’ or ‘thus’ (Aune, 1997:223). For this context, the translation ‘likewise (ὁμοιωῶ)’ will be the simplest solution, even though it is an application not regularly paralleled. One can consider οὕτως to indicate a repetition of the participle νικῶν, i.e. as being a conqueror (Beckwith, 1967:476). It can, therefore, be connected to the previous verse, indicating the conquerors as those who have not soiled their garments, those willing to walk with Christ, dressed in white, for they are worthy (Rev. 3:4). In connection with the local relevance, the promise statement given to the conquerors was not given to all Christians, but only to those who have not yet soiled their Christian lives in the surrounding environment of their pagan society (Benedict, 1966:30; contra Rosscup, 1982:284-286). The promise statement given to the conquerors can be divided into three parts:

- | |
|---|
| <p>1 Ὁ νικῶν οὕτως περιβαλεῖται ἐν ἱματίοις λευκοῖς
(He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white)</p> <p>2. καὶ οὐ μὴ ἐξαλείψω τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ἐκ τῆς βίβλου τῆς ζωῆς
(I will never blot out his name from the book of life)</p> <p>3. καὶ ὁμολογήσω τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ἐνώπιον τοῦ πατρὸς μου καὶ ἐνώπιον τῶν ἀγγέλων αὐτοῦ.
(But will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels).</p> |
|---|

In no 1, the conquerors will be dressed in white by what is revealed in 3:4: ὅτι ἄξιοί εἰσιν. Thus, they would be called conquerors by Christ because of their deeds or acts that are worthy (Beale, 1999:278). In no 2 and 3, through the negative and positive statements in that Jesus is the subject in contrast to no 1, Jesus accepts the name of conquerors according to the people’s status within the heavenly kingdom (Aune, 1997:227). In Revelation 3:4, the past tense (οὐκ ἐμόλυναν τὰ ἱμάτια αὐτῶν) points to the completed act, which can be connected to the historical reference to the church of Sardis, but in Revelation 3:5, these three future tenses (περιβαλεῖται, οὐ μὴ ἐξαλείψῃ, ὁμολογήσω) can be connected with the

eschatological promise statement given to the conquerors in the church of Sardis.

In order to obtain the title of the conqueror, they must have overcome the present circumstances in which it was not easy to ignore the pagan environment. The prominent differences between the conquerors and the defeated depend on whether they truly keep the word of God or not. In front of Christ who held God's churches, the statement of the death and life (Rudolph, 2005:319) through the mentioning of the white garment and the book of life might give the Sardis Christians encouragement and victory or warning.

III.8.6. Summary

As Gilbertson (2003:81-92) rightly pointed out, to reveal the spatial dimension of the text is a useful instrument for what John uses it to make theological points. In the case of the church of Sardis, it would be a very useful tool to see the horizon of the spatial dimension of text as well as the historical, cultural, and social contexts in order to understand the promise statement. That is, in the case of white clothing it could not be interpreted in the literal sense but rather as a spiritual life that is contrasted with moral laxity or spiritual idleness (Charles, 1975:1.82). On the basis of the image in which a victorious Roman general was celebrated, Ramsay (1994:282-283) argues that the white garment is the symbol of triumph. One should, however, consider the situation in which the text was written. In contrast with the false teaching and worshipping the pagan deities enforced by the trade-guild and the spiritual idolatry or spiritual debauchery, the white garment can be explained with the implication of pure spiritual life and victory (cf. Warren, 1983:111). This is the demand given to those conquerors who lived in a pagan world.

The book of life in contrast with the book of the Greek-Rome's citizen-register must also be regarded as providing the spiritual meaning. The names of the conquerors written in the book of life assure the guarantee of salvation and eternal life of the conquerors (Witherington III, 2003:106). Whereas the defeated would not be written in the book of life as citizens of the heavenly kingdom, the conquerors who repent and keep the word of God would be written in the book of life as a citizen of the heavenly kingdom. John, thus, suggested the 'heavenly perspective' through use of the spatial dimension (Gilbertson,

2003:89-92) to the Christians who were in danger of moral laxity, spiritual indulgence, and spiritual death in order to encourage and guarantee a victory. Thus, the conquerors in the church of Sardis are those who have not soiled their garments and those whose names have been written in the book of life.

III.9. The promise statement given to the Conquerors of the church of Philadelphia

The church of Philadelphia is the other church that received praise from Christ just as he had praised the church of Smyrna. Christ himself describes a door that is connected with an image built up on the basis of the social situation of Philadelphia's Christians who were harassed by Jews (see Edersheim, 1994:228-255). The image of an open door can be understood as entry to the kingdom of God (Wilcock, 1989:55; Stevenson, 2001:242). That is why structurally, the introductory statement about an open door in 3:8 is linked with the image of a pillar, which appeared in the fulfillment statement of 21:2-27.

III.9.1. The city of Philadelphia

Attalus Philadelphus built the city of Philadelphia whose truth and loyalty towards his brother Eumenes won him the epithet, Philadelphus (Blaklock, 1965:120). It was not a new city, but was historically prominent. When one compares it with the other seven cities that appear in the book of Revelation, Philadelphia became a centre of Greek-Asiatic culture and an important location for the imperial post road (Ford, 1975:416; Ramsay, 1994:286-287). According to Mounce (1977:115), this city was called "gateway to the East." Through this geographical importance, Ramsay (1994:287)⁹⁹ called Philadelphia "missionary city." An important event that took place at the city of Philadelphia was a severe earthquake in A.D.17 (Beasley-Murray, 1992:99). The influence which this earthquake had on the city of Philadelphia in A.D. 17, made the city of Philadelphia of

⁹⁹ According to Ramsay (1994:292; cf. Barclay, 1957:95), Philadelphia could be distinguished from the other cities by several characteristics: First, it was called the missionary city; secondly, its people lived always in dread of an earthquake disaster; thirdly, because of that, many people went out of the city to dwell outside; fourthly, it took a new name from the imperial god. His analysis of the characteristics of the city and past history of the church is quite correct, but his insistence that the open door (Rev. 3:8) implies a good opportunity for missionary work couldn't be supported when one considers the context of the text. In order to support this argument, even though he adduces the case of Paul (1 Co. 16:9; 2 Co. 2:12), he didn't properly consider the given context of the text.

particular geographical importance.

Tacitus (Annals. 2.47) wrote that twelve famous cities of Asia fell by an earthquake in the night and the calamity fell most fatally on the inhabitants of Sardis. The memory of this disaster that Philadelphia confronted impacted their reality and remained long after as they had to live in the midst of a threatening danger from a new earthquake disaster. Thus, because of the earthquake disaster, escape to the neighbouring countryside was a common experience and people preferred to live for long periods in tents on the safer ground (Blaiklock, 1965:120).

Philadelphia can be distinguished from the rest of the seven cities in that it gave up its old name and accepted a new name. After the earthquake of A.D. 17, the emperor Tiberius gave many advantages to Philadelphia. Therefore, Philadelphia took the name of Neocaesarea in gratitude to Tiberius for his generous support and assistance (Suetonius, Vespasian: 17). After that, during the reign of Vespasian, Philadelphia was called Flavia after the ruler's family (Blaiklock, 1965:121). Thus, the promise statement given to the conquerors of the church of Philadelphia in Revelation 3:12 might be connected with these local references which have been mentioned above. Theologically, as well as through history and geography, the author of Revelation delivered his message to his audiences, informing them of the issues he intended to share with them.

III.9.2. The social situation of the church of Philadelphia

In the church of Philadelphia, Christians also faced problems. But they didn't deny the name of Christ or betray the witness of Christ against the Jews. They were the people who lived among those 'ἰδοὺ διδῶ ἐκ τῆς συναγωγῆς τοῦ Σατανᾶ τῶν λεγόντων ἑαυτοὺς Ἰουδαίους εἶναι, καὶ οὐκ εἰσὶν ἀλλὰ ψεύδονται: "I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars" (Rev. 3:9). The opponents that the church of Philadelphia faced were the Jews. They were not true Jews, but liars (Kiddle, 1940:50), namely 'ἐκ τῆς συναγωγῆς τοῦ Σατανᾶ'. This means that the Jews persecuted the Christians. They looked like the defeated from a worldly point of view. But they were really 'conquerors' overcoming their situation against the Jews in the

sight of God or from the heavenly point of view (Rudolph, 2005:321) because ‘ὅτι ἐτήρησας τὸν λόγον τῆς ὑπομονῆς μου’ (Rev. 3:10). Here, one can’t trace any emperor-worship or imperial cult enforced by Rome, self-indulgence, or sloth as in the church of Sardis. But, one can trace persecution or discrimination and conflicts with Jews. In the midst of these situations, the promise statement that the conquerors will become a pillar in the temple of God might provide an important message to encourage and give a hope.

III.9.3. A pillar in the temple of my God

According to Kiddle (1940:53-54; cf. Charles, 1975:1.91-92), this pillar is linked with the practice of the priest of the imperial cult, who at the end of his period of service erected his statue in the temple and inscribed his name upon it. This local reference was, however, rejected by Hemer (1986:166), because there is insufficient evidence to support this theory. There are several suggestions as to what the pillars may imply. That is, Farrer (1964:81) insists that the reference regarding the pillar implies Jachin and Boaz (e.g. 1 Ki. 7:21; 2 Ch. 3:17), which Solomon set in front of his temple. Swete (1977:57; cf. Wilson, 1996:243; Aune, 1997:241) rejects this idea as supporting the metaphorical use of that word in Scripture and in Jewish and early Christian literature.

On the way to the desert, the people of Israel were guided by a pillar of cloud by day and by a pillar of fire by night (Ex. 13:21-22; στύλω: LXX; cf. Ex. 14:19, 24; 24:4; Nu. 12:5; 14:14; Dt. 31:15; Ps. 99:7). Through this guidance, the Israeli people recognized the presence of God directly. Through the presence of God, or at least the memory of the presence of God on the way to the desert, the people of Israel could have conquered the land of Canaan, which God promised to give to the Israeli people.

One must remember that the Philadelphia city was a famous centre of heathen worship.¹⁰⁰ There were lots of pagan temples, which were also easily accessible to the people. Even

¹⁰⁰ As noted above, the city of Philadelphia was struck by an earthquake in A.D.17. Due to serious damage, the inhabitants were afraid to live there. Thus, most of the people lived outside of the city, because of the terror caused by the earthquake. Through this influence of the earthquake, the volcanic soil was very suitable for vine-production. Volcanic soil, even though it is good for vine production, was not in any case necessarily suitable for corn (Hemer, 1986:159). Based on this emphatic influence of wine-production in Philadelphia, they worshipped Dionysius, the god of wine (cf. Barclay, 1957:98).

though the archaeological evidence is limited (Yamauchi, 1980:78), the Philadelphia Christians might have been very familiar with the pillar image (Rev. 3:12). The religious life in the seven cities couldn't have been separated from their daily life, because at that stage in time, religion was life and to live was to be religious. In connection with the life of the ordinary people, the pillar in the temple might have offered security under the guidance of some patronage god, on whom people depended for their security and prosperity (Stevenson, 2001:247-251). It could be transferred to the Philadelphia Christian who had little power (Rev. 3:8) in pagan society.

In this city there was no sign to be found of any persecution or of forced emperor and pagan-god worship. Through 3:9, one can suppose that the main issue in the church of Philadelphia was that of serious conflict between the church and the Jews (Mounce, 1977:118).¹⁰¹ No matter what the problem was on both sides, the obvious thing was that there was a conflict between these two spheres, and in both of them, the Christian community was a disfranchised minor group. In this situation, when one considers the principle of an 'open door' (Rev. 3:8), it is not necessarily easy to accept this allusion as an opportunity for effective missionary work (Metzger, 1993:41; Ramsay, 1994:296; contra Wilcock, 1989:55; Beale, 1999:285; Stevenson, 2001:242). The explanation regarding a messianic kingdom within the context of the previous verse (Rev. 3:7) might be connected with the eternal kingdom, which may imply an 'open door', to be the appropriate interpretation (Ladd, 1979:59; Michaels, 1997:84).

In the midst of such a conflict situation between Christians who apparently had no power and the Jews who had some power, the pillar image must have given those Christians some stability and security. The conquerors would not be shaken by any disaster, nor would they ever have to take refuge in open country. As disfranchised minor Christians, their conflict situation with the Jews would be rewarded with God's firmness and steadfastness in the temple of God in eschatological terms (Slater, 1999:146). The image of the pillar might, therefore, have been understood as the assured security in the final kingdom of God in

¹⁰¹ From a cultural-anthropological perspective, Pilch (1992:126-134) explains lying and deceit in the context of Mediterranean culture. He suggests that lying and deceit must be viewed in their specific cultural perspective in order to give a proper theological interpretation. He insists that lying and deceit that appeared in the seven churches of Revelation must be seen from the point of view of anthropological literature. See Pilch (1992:130-133).

contrast to the earthly temple, which is perishable and temporary (contra Stevenson, 2001:215-221; 241-251).¹⁰²

III.9.4. The Conquerors in the church of Philadelphia

The promise statement given to the conqueror of the church of Philadelphia was (Rev. 3:12): “Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name” (Ο νικῶν ποιήσω αὐτὸν στῦλον ἐν τῷ ναῶ 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 Ἱερουσαλήμ ἡ καταβαίνουσα ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ μου, καὶ τὸ ὄνομά μου τὸ καινόν).

This promise statement can be divided into three parts. The first part is that the conqueror is promised that he will be made a pillar in the temple of God. The phrase τοῦ θεοῦ μου is used as a “subjective genitive” (Wilson, 1996:239) rather than an objective genitive. Thus, it can be interpreted that God himself is the temple. The phrase ἐν τῷ ναῶ indicates στῦλον. That is, in (ἐν) the place at which God himself is the temple, the Lord will provide the victory through a pillar (Charles, 1975:1.91). It provides the security or firmness of the conquerors who were in conflict with the Jews. Metaphorically, John stated that the conquerors that have kept God’s word and have not denied God’s name would become pillars in the prominent place where God exists.

The second part is that the conquerors will not go out. The use of οὐ μὴ with the aorist subjunctive that is “the most definite form of negation regarding the future” (Blass & Debrunner, 1961:184) can be connected with the previous phrase ἐν τῷ ναῶ. It means that the conqueror will not go out in the temple that is the place of God or God himself. That is,

¹⁰² In the Inter-Testamental literature, 1 Enoch 90:28-29 explains that all the old pillars and all the old columns were pulled out and transformed into all new pillars and all new columns. In the New Testament, the allusion over pillar appeared in Gal. 2:9 and 1 Ti. 3:15. According to Gal. 2:9, James, Peter, and John who were the main leaders of the church of Jerusalem were called pillars. In the case of 1 Ti. 3:15, the house of God as the church of the living God is called the pillar. Here, the pillar image is mentioned not over church as a building but church as ground of truth in that God exists. The temple pillars of Solomon, that is, Jachin and Boaz are explained in Josephus (Ant. 8.76-78).

as the everlasting people of the kingdom of God, the conquerors who have become pillars will never remove from this place of preeminence in the eternal temple in terms of eschatological blessing or stability (cf. Beale, 1999:294-295). The Christians as genuine people of God, who have to face a certain conflict with the Jews in a pagan environment, should overcome their *Sitz im Leben*, in order to occupy an unshaken place in the temple of God.

The third part is that upon the conquerors, the Lord will write the name of God, the name of the city of God and his own new name. These three names as an accusative indicate γράψω. That is, these three names would be written upon the conquerors, indicating the “divine ownership” (Aune, 1997:242). It is likely that because an inscription or seal of God’s name was put on the forehead of servants of God (Rev. 7:2-5; 9:4; 14:1; 22:4), it might be connected with divine ownership, deciding whether the conquerors belong to God’s side or Satan’s side. With various languages, these three names that were written upon the conquerors expand “the full revelation of his character” (Mounce, 1977:121). To have the name of God means to have heavenly citizenship as those who have the name of God and the name of Jesus. This section can be structured as follows:

→	τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ θεοῦ μου
→	καὶ τὸ ὄνομα τῆς πόλεως τοῦ θεοῦ μου, τῆς καινῆς Ἱερουσαλὴμ ἡ καταβαίνουσα ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ μου
→	καὶ τὸ ὄνομά μου τὸ καινόν

The promise statement given to the conquerors in Philadelphia in the midst of conflict may thus give them hope and encouragement from a heavenly point of view in contrast to an earthly perspective. If the conquerors overcome the situations they faced in a pagan and a hostile world, the conquerors will be pillars in the temple of God.

III.9.5. Summary

In terms of the situation of the church of Philadelphia, the christological title as the one who holds the key of David and the promise statement that conqueror will be become a

pillar in the temple of God are structurally paralleled with each other. Through this structural parallelism, John draws his theological meaning to the Philadelphia Christians who were under serious conflict between the church and the Jews (3:9-10). That is, in the midst of the conflict situation, ‘open door and pillar’ can be connected with a future stability and security of God’s people in New Jerusalem (cf. Swete, 1977:57-58). Therefore, the mentioning of ‘open door’ as an opportunity for effective missionary (Charles, 1975:1.87; cf. Metzger, 1993:41) can’t be supported by the context. But, the explanation about ‘open door’ is suitable to regard as the absolute control of Christ within a messianic kingdom.

Stevenson (2001:248) regards the image of a pillar as a permanent and eternal service executed by a priest or priestess. But the context in which the image of a pillar is used supports the stability and security of the conquerors from a heavenly perspective. The inscribing of the three names on a pillar, that is, the name of Christ, the name of God and the name of New Jerusalem, implies a close relationship between the conquerors and Christ. That is, “the victor will belong to God and be part of the heavenly city” (Witherington III, 2003:107). In contrast to an earthly perspective, the promise statement might give encouragement and hope to those concerned. It is correct that Christians will fully participate in the accomplished worship of the New Jerusalem and will hold full citizenship as the perfect people of God (Kraybill, 1996:172).

III.10. The promise statement given to the Conquerors in the church of Laodicea

Christ who is the Amen, the faithful, true witness, and the ruler of God’s creation has accused the church of Laodicea of worshipping wealth, of self-satisfaction, and spiritual tepidity (cf. Poythress, 2000:92-93). Structurally, the warning statement in the body section and promise statement in the conclusion are constructed with the statement of salvation and judgment, which is given the conquerors and the defeated (e.g. 3:16-21).

III.10.1. The city of Laodicea

The city of Laodicea was built by Antiochus II (B.C. 261-246) and had been called

Laodicea after Antiochus' wife (cf. Hemer, 1986:180). Even though Laodicea didn't have a natural fortress like Thyatira, it did have an important geographical location, which owed its importance to its situation at the crossroads in a later age. Owing to its geographical importance, Laodicea inevitably became a great commercial centre (Morris, 1999:80), especially under Roman rule. The disadvantage that Laodicea had was its lack of a water supply. Water was supplied mainly by a vulnerable aqueduct from springs six miles away to the north in the direction of Hierapolis (Blaklock, 1965:124). Laodicea is closely connected with two cities, namely Hierapolis and Colossae, in the Lycus valley.¹⁰³

Because of its proximity, the people of Laodicea must have drawn Hierapolis' water (which as a hot spring ran through an aqueduct and had a healing effect) in order to supplement Laodicea's water supply. Laodicea was famous as a city and well known for the following: it had a famous school of medicine, it was a centre of the wool industry and it was a wealthy banking city (cf. Ford, 1975:419-422; Hemer, 1986:191-201; Metzger, 1993:43; Ramsay, 1994:307-312).¹⁰⁴ These facts were very familiar to audiences who listened to this prophetic message (contra Aune, 1997:260). Scobie (1993:619) thus suggests that on the basis of this extensive local background, it is true that when John uses the images in vv.17 and 18, the extensive local background could not be ignored.

III.10.2. The social situation of the church of Laodicea

After it was destroyed by a devastating earthquake in A.D. 60, the city of Laodicea was restored with its own finances without any help from Rome (Caird, 1966:56-58). Tacitus (Annals, xiv:27) mentions this fact: "one of the famous cities of Asia, Laodicea, was that same year overthrown by an earthquake, and, without any relief from us, recovered itself by its own resources."

Being in a wealthy, medical and industrial city, the church of Laodicea was proud of itself.

¹⁰³ In Colossae 4:13, the two cities, that is, Hierapolis and Laodicea, are mentioned. In Colossae 1:2, Colossae is mentioned and in Colossae 2:1; 4:13, 15, 16, Laodicea is mentioned. Through this statement, one can suppose that these three cities had an intimate relationship with each other.

¹⁰⁴ Laodicea as a centre of medicine, wool and banking was well known to people who were interested in its history. The earthquake that occurred in Laodicea city in A.D. 17 and A.D. 60 especially confirmed that Laodicea was a wealthy city because without any assistance from the government, the people of Laodicea rebuilt it after the earthquake.

That was why they were reproached in this manner: ὅτι λέγεις ὅτι Πλούσιός εἰμι καὶ πεπλούτηκα καὶ οὐδὲν χρεῖαν ἔχω, καὶ οὐκ οἶδας ὅτι σὺ εἶ ὁ ταλαίπωρος καὶ ἐλεινὸς καὶ πτωχὸς καὶ τυφλὸς καὶ γυμνός, 18 συμβουλεύω σοι ἀγοράσαι παρ' ἐμοῦ χρυσίον πεπωρωμένον ἐκ πυρὸς ἵνα πλουτήσης, καὶ ἱμάτια λευκὰ ἵνα περιβάλῃ καὶ μὴ φανερωθῇ ἡ αἰσχύνῃ τῆς γυμνότητός σου, καὶ κολλ[ο]ύριον ἐγγρῖσαι τοὺς ὀφθαλμούς σου ἵνα βλέπῃς' (Rev. 3:17-18). Through this text, one can see that the state of that city was closely connected with the spiritual condition of that church (Wilcock, 1989:57). In this church, one doesn't find any emperor-worship, persecution, and conflict with the Jews or Rome. But the problem of the church of Laodicea was self-satisfaction, self-conceit or self-deception without Christ.

III.10.3. The Throne

The image of a throne can be connected with the door image in Revelation 3:20, because the promise that has been given to the conquerors in 3:21 was given to those who open the door toward Jesus. Scholars have had many debates about whether it could be regarded as a call to the individual heart for present fellowship with the Lord¹⁰⁵ or an eschatological view¹⁰⁶ or a Eucharistic view (see Wiarda, 1995:203-212).¹⁰⁷

In contrast to a call to the individual for the present fellowship, when one compares v. 20 with v. 21 (cf. Swete, 1977:63-64), which brings the promise to the conquerors, it is appropriate to consider this issue from an eschatological point of view (Roloff, 1993:65). As Beckwith (1967:491) argued, the image of Christ knocking at the door of men's hearts was not what John delivered here. They were unfortunately mistaken by having disregarded vv. 19-21, while the author intended these verses to be regarded as one unit (cf. Slater, 1999:148). The author had written the one prophetic message to the Christians at Laodicea as a whole. He did not want to divide his prophetic message into pieces. Thus, it must be read as a whole.

¹⁰⁵ The advocates of this viewpoint are the following: Lenski, 1943:163-164; Charles, 1975:1.101; Mounce, 1977:129; Ladd, 1979:67; Hemer, 1986:206-207; Wall, 1991:87; Talbert, 1994:23; Beale, 1999:308-309; Hendriksen, 2000:78-79.

¹⁰⁶ The advocates of this viewpoint are the following: Kiddle, 1940:60; Farrer, 1964:83; Beckwith, 1967:491; Swete, 1977:63-64; Sweet, 1979:109; Metzger, 1993:46.

¹⁰⁷ The advocates of this viewpoint are the following: Caird, 1966:58; Krodell, 1989:145; Poythress, 2000:95.

The interpretation of these texts (vv. 19-21) needs not to be regarded as mutually exclusive. It is possible to read verse 20 as one prophetic message, including v. 19 and v. 21. In contrast to 3:19, implying a call to the individual heart in the present, 3:21 must be understood as having an eschatological perspective. Thus, the door image should be regarded as having an eschatological perspective, expecting a certain eschatological table-fellowship (Swete, 1977:63) with the Lord, as well as a present view, indicating knocking at the door of “individual believers” (Beasley-Murray, 1992:107).

In ancient times, the throne (θρόνος) usually indicated the power of kings and gods (Schmitz, 1965:3.160-161). As noted above, in Revelation 2:13, the throne of Satan (ὁ θρόνος τοῦ σατανᾶ) revealed the main characteristic of that city, which formed the centre of the religious cult, having served both the emperor cult, as well as the imperial cult (cf. Pilch, 1978:39-40). Coin and inscriptions explain the characteristic of many of the gods and goddesses that were worshipped at Laodicea (Yamauchi, 1980:143).

In general, one should remember that the church of Laodicea was also influenced by a certain pagan culture, politics and economics as well as religion (Beale, 1999:302). In order to bear a strong influence and yet survive in the society in which they lived, they had to participate in certain pagan religious ceremonies, social and political meetings, as well as economic matters. Thus, that “I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing (πλούσιός εἰμι καὶ πεπλούτηκα καὶ οὐδὲν χρεῖαν ἔχω)” (Rev. 3:17) indicates the participating degree of the church of Laodicea in pagan society (cf. Swete, 1977:66). The promise statement given to the conquerors in 3:21 seemed meaningful within the setting of their contemporary life. The admonition was that they needed proper fellowship with Christ as the antidote to the self-sufficiency of a Christ-less church. The result of this admonition was that they would enjoy an eschatological fellowship with Christ (v. 21) through the image of sitting on the throne together with Christ in the messianic kingdom (Witherington III, 2003:108).¹⁰⁸ The image of the throne was a symbol of the power and rule of an earthly king (Wilson, 1996:251; cf. Lensky, 1943:165). The throne and the king

¹⁰⁸ According to Davis (1992:37-39), the ‘throne’ means Yahweh’s dwelling among his people who are the people of the covenant. This term is also closely related to the ‘house’, ‘temple’, and ‘palace’. And these terms can be connected with the ‘temple theology’, which was the physical and theological centre of Israel (Ex. 25:9,40). When one considers ‘house’, ‘palace’ and ‘throne’, one can suppose that these terms indicate the dwelling of God among his people.

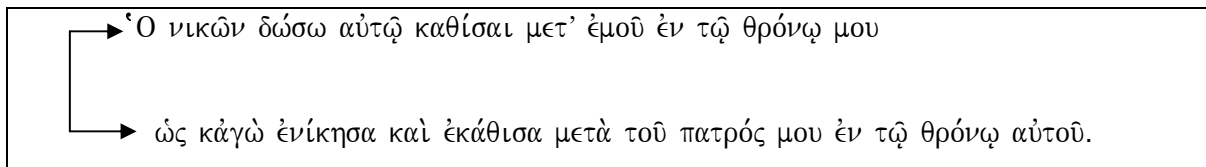
could accordingly be connected with each other. The king sitting on the throne executes his rule and his authority among his people. Even though the image of a throne was used to indicate a certain earthly sovereignty (e.g.. Ge. 41:40; 1 Ki. 2:19; 7:7; 10:18; 22:10), it could also be connected with God who is sitting on the throne in heaven (cf. Ps. 11:4; 103:19; Isa. 66:1; Acts. 7:49). As with an earthly king, the throne upon which God is sitting in heaven is a symbol of judicial power and authority over and against the wicked people who broke the covenant between God and his people (cf. Schmitz, 1965:3.163). The symbol of the throne is that the throne of God functions as an important symbol indicating the kingship or sovereignty of the eschatological kingdom (Aune, 1997:284) to those who participate in the spiritual communion with the Lord.

In conjunction with this allusion noted above, in Luke 22:30 Jesus promised his disciples that they may eat and drink at his table and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel (cf. Mt. 19:28). In this context, it seems clear that the throne upon which God is sitting in heaven is a place of fellowship with God, as well as of sovereignty. When the Son of Man comes with his angels to judge the nations, he will sit on the throne of glory and divide the wicked and the righteous (Mt. 25:31-33). The throne is also the place of judgment, from which the righteous would receive eternal life, while the wicked will be sent to eternal punishment. One can accordingly recognize that the throne of God is a symbolic expression of God's sovereignty and rule (Mounce, 1977:134; Poythress, 2000:100).

Revelation 3:21 represents the promise of Christ to those conquerors that they would be seated together with Christ on the throne. Their victory and sovereignty follow the pattern of the victory of Christ who is sitting together on the throne with God through the victory of the cross (Caird, 1966:58; Mounce, 1977:130). To the conquerors at Laodicea, the image of sitting on the throne with Christ was a familiar issue. In order to receive victory in the sight of God, they would have to throw away their self-sufficiency to share the victory or power of Christ who is on the throne with God. That might be the message of hope and encouragement to the conquerors because God and Christ control all circumstances (Beale, 1999:320).

III.10.4. The Conquerors in the church of Laodicea

The promise-statement given to the conquerors of the church of Laodicea is found in 3:21, “To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne” (Ὁ νικῶν δώσω αὐτῷ καθίσαι μετ’ ἐμοῦ ἐν τῷ θρόνῳ μου, ὡς κἀγὼ ἐνίκησα καὶ ἐκάθισα μετὰ τοῦ πατρὸς μου ἐν τῷ θρόνῳ αὐτοῦ). This promise-statement could be divided into two parts:



These two parts are connected through the particle ὡς and provide us with an analogy between Christ’s conquering and the victory of the Christians (cf. Benedict, 1966:39). The use of καθίσαι and ἐκάθισα connects two conquerors, namely Christ and the people of God into one symbolic image. ἐνίκησα and ἐκάθισα both indicate a historical aorist showing us the meaning of each of the words (Swete, 1977:64). In the case of ἐνίκησα as historical aorist, it means that the conquering of Jesus as one single historical event indicates the event of the cross through which Jesus suffered and died. One can recognize that the death on the cross is the reason for Christ’s conquering (Morris, 1999:84). And in the case of ἐκάθισα, also as a historical aorist, it indicates the enthronement of Christ through his death. These statements tell us that through the victory on the cross and enthronement, Christ conquered the world that hated Christ (cf. Swete, 1977:64-65).

That is the pattern of our life in this secular world as an ethical motif. The conquerors who were in the church of Laodicea, will not inherit the right to salvation automatically by way of their works. The conquerors will not be recompensed with a share in the rights of the salvation or the throne (Bennetch, 1939:363-364). The Christians who were full of self-satisfaction or self-sufficiency had to be warned through their loss of fellowship with Christ, whether it is a call of an individual or eschatological view or not. Only the conquerors that have a fellowship with Christ can have the privilege of sitting with Christ on the throne in heaven just as Christ has sat on the throne with God in heaven (Kistemaker, 2001:176).

In the church of Laodicea, one couldn't find any symptom of persecution by Rome, conflict with the Jews and racial or religious tensions. The problem they had was that of compromise with the church, together with its surrounding. It was a suitable statement for them that, without compromise with a pagan society, the fellowship with Christ attending to the eschatological table-fellowship and sitting on the throne with Christ was greatly necessary for their community. The christological designations (3:14) that provide the heavenly image of Christ structurally are well matched with the promise statement given to the conquerors that they would be given the right to sit with Christ on his throne (3:21). That is, to the conquerors the promise statement provided the heavenly perspective, in contrast with an earthly perspective (Howard-Brook & Gwyther, 1999:126-131). It should be kept in mind that the christological designation as introductory statement (3:14), blame statement as body part (15-20), and the promise statement as conclusion (3:21) continually provide the same idea to the conquerors in terms of heavenly and earthly aspects in order to give encouragement and warning as a whole.

III.10.5. Summary

In the letter to the church of Laodicea, the evidence of external harassment and persecution directed against the Laodicean Christians is not found. As the centre of a prosperous city, they are warned about self-sufficiency, self-deception, and spiritual tepidity. Therefore, Christ's warning word to spit Laodicean Christians out of his mouth (3:16), if they do not repent, is contrasted with the table fellowship with Christ (3:20) as eschatological view. This eschatological view expressed as table fellowship provided a heavenly perspective, which will have the right to sit with Christ on Christ's throne. The images of table fellowship as the symbol of God's presence (Osiek and Balch, 1997:193-214) and throne as the symbol of God's power and sovereignty (Sweet, 1979:117) can be contrasted with the worldly view that Laodicean Christians focused on (cf. Goldsworthy, 1984:74-86). Thus, the promise statement given to the conquerors consisted of participating in the rule of Christ, who himself had conquered through the ministry, death, and resurrection (Roberts, 1988:31).

III.11. Conclusion

Until now, I have mainly discussed the promise statement given to the conquerors of each of the churches in Revelation chapters 2-3. Through this chapter, I rejected the view of commentators (e.g. Robinson, 1976; Gentry, 1989) that Revelation was only written under the persecution of Rome and for the encouragement of a disfranchised minor group. The situation of the seven churches was very different, with plenty of variations (cf. Friesen, 2005:352-356). They faced their own problems, which they themselves had to conquer. The problems they had to face were not only persecution or conflict with their earthly enemies, but also the restoration of their first love (Rev. 2:4), as well as compromise with their pagan environment (Rev. 2:20; 3:15, 17). It means that the problems of the seven churches must be examined according to their own situations they faced (Scobie, 1993:606; cf. Shea, 1980:158). That is why it could not ignore the use of local references.

When one considers the seven churches in chapters 2-3, the most important thing to consider is the christological designations (see Cullmann, 1963; Dunn, 1980), which are already mentioned in 1:9-20 as an introductory statement. These christological designations in 1:9-20 such as a Son of Man, the First and the Last, the Living One, and dead and alive are closely linked with the christological designations in chapters 2-3 (cf. Hartman, 1997:137-140). As Aune (1990:190) argued, “The cumulative effect of these titles and characterizations is to unify the seven proclamations as pronouncements of the exalted Christ who appeared to John in 1. 9-20.” In these christological titles in 1:9-20, Christ is introduced as conqueror through death and resurrection (Reddish, 1995:220) and as “God’s divine agency” (Slater, 1999:149) who executed his lordship over the whole universe as well as the seven churches. After that, it is applied to the Christians that were in the seven churches as the conquerors like Christ.

Each letter begins with an introductory christological designation, which defines the letter or church’s characteristic. For example, in the case of the churches of Ephesus and Smyrna, Christ who holds the seven stars in his hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands (1:13; 2:1) implies the lordship and power over the seven churches (Kistemaker, 2001:111). It connotes that the conquerors will be safe in the hand of Christ, if they keep their faith within the church as well as in a hostile world. In the case of the church of Smyrna, life and death is a very important theme (cf. Rudolph, 2005:308). Christ appeared as ‘the first

and the last, who dies and came to life again' (1:17-18; 2:8). This letter reflects a local conflict and attempts to encourage the Christians as the conquerors to remain faithful (Beasley-Murray, 1992:81). As Slater (1999:119-120) insisted, this letter is a good example of the link between Christ and the conquerors who won the victory through suffering. These christological titles at the beginning of the seven letters have a theological intention, implying eternal life to the conquerors and warning the defeated (Boring, 1989:88).

The body section which begins with the οἶδα formula describes the praise and blame of the seven churches and the Spirit, and promise statements are introduced. One should keep in mind that the structural characteristics of the seven letters are uniformly structured, even though there are some differences in the seven letters (see Grové, 2000:193-208). The structural characteristics of chapters 2-3 should be regarded as the united prophetic message, which is on the basis of the real situations of the conquerors (cf. Thompson, 1986:147-153). As a prophetic message having a structural unity, the 'I know' formula reveals the real situation of the seven letters. Seven letters give the message of victory, hope, and encouragement to the conquerors that are really connected with their own situations and conquered their situations. That is, the conquerors can expect to suffer conflict, martyrdom, and even death within the church as well as the hostile world because of their faith in God and Christ. Therefore, the purpose of the οἶδα formula is to encourage and to comfort the conquerors in the midst of conflict and persecution.

The major images of the promise-statements, which have been given to the conquerors, were thoroughly rooted in certain local situations as well as in the Old Testament, New Testament, and Inter-Testamental literature. When the author used the image of the promise-statement in chapters 2-3, he didn't miss the relevance of the local situation. In having used the image of local relevance, the author has transferred earthly issues into heavenly sphere in terms of an eschatological perspective (cf. Resseguie, 1998:43). That is, John changed an earthly aspect into "alternative ideology" (DeSilva, 1992b:392). These prophetic messages challenged the conquerors to consider this worldly perspective in terms of a heavenly and an eschatological perspective (Bauckham, 1993b:7).

The major images such as the tree of life, crown of life, hidden manna, white stone, new name, morning star, white garment, book of life, a pillar, and throne would have been understood by the seven churches' members who were very familiar with these images. The most important thing regarding chapters 2-3 is that Jesus Christ is the conqueror that was dead but alive (Aune, 1987:244). Images such as suffering, death, and sacrifice in chapters 2-3 expand from the introductory statement of Christ to the conqueror's final victory (Thompson, 1986:151). As Boring (1986:267) argued, "the act of God in Jesus is extended into the lives of Christians in the church." Images that used to give encouragement and confidence of victory to the conquerors of the seven churches could be regarded as proper instruments to deliver the prophetic messages.

As Homcy (1995:193) mentioned, "the book of Revelation was not written simply to inform believers about the victory of the Lamb. Revelation is not only an apocalyptic portrait of the Lamb's triumph but also a prophetic exhortation for his followers to triumph in him." To the Christians, who within the various contexts faced various problems, Christ demanded of them also to have been conquerors within this secular world. The seven messages can be classified into two structures: salvation to the conquerors and judgment of the defeated (Muse, 1986:155). Becoming a conqueror in itself didn't imply that all the believers were automatically part of and within the church (cf. Rosscup, 1982:261-276). When one does actually realize what the promise-statement entailed, one could easily distinguish between two groups, being those who conquer and those who don't. Even though they were within one church, only those Christians, who remained faithful to the word of Christ and the testimony of Jesus to the end, could be called true conquerors. In other words, on the one hand, becoming a conqueror means to keep the word of Christ and to remain faithful to the testimony of Jesus in order to participate in the eschatological blessing of New Heaven and New Earth in chapters 21-22 (Boring, 1989:89). On the other hand, becoming a conqueror (Rainbow, 1996:212) means not to participate in idolatry (e.g. 2:14, 20), immorality (e.g. 2:21; 3:4), and the imperial cult (e.g. 13:4-8, 15-16; 1:9-11; 20:4). One can conclude that the promise-statements, which had been given to conquerors of the seven churches, were thoroughly rooted in their historical, cultural and social circumstances, which the conquerors had to overcome and endure.