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“THE GREAT HARLOT” (REV 17-18) AND “WIFE OF HARLOTRY” (HOS 2): A STUDY ON THE BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING OF A PEOPLE OF GOD IN CRISIS

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Abstract

One of the most evident themes shared between the books of Hosea and Revelation is the theme of judgment towards a whoring people. An explicit reading would indicate Hosean judgment as directed towards Israel and those of Revelation to the city of Babylon. In the latter case, the scholars agree upon the identity of Babylon to be the city of Rome. However, both the books personify the accused as a harlot, a wanton woman. A close scrutiny of the theme of judgment in Hosea 2 and Revelation 17-18 establishes that the books have an especially close relationship with many phrases, themes, and theological concepts in common. One of the strongest thematic parallels is the personification of the reproached people as a whore. The thread that connects Hosea and John is their thought pattern of picturing the pride of their concerned city in terms of a wanton woman who is abound with her pride and haughtiness. The article is an attempt to read Hosea 2 into the interlude of Revelation (Rev 17-18). The expected outcome is to

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bring out the theological message of the two texts for a people of God in crisis.

Keywords: Book of Revelation, *Diakonia*, Hosea, Israel, Jerusalem, 'Great Harlot,' Mother Church, 'Mother Yahweh,' People of God in Crisis, Pope Francis, Prophets, Rome

Introduction

The book of Revelation for a first glance seems to be the most cryptic piece of literature composed by the biblical authors. The history of interpretation of this book arouses in one's mind more curiosity than apathy. In my understanding, much of the book deals with the fall of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. as a judgment from God for covenant apostasy. The book presents a vision in which John of Patmos is transported to heaven in order to witness the cosmic struggle between good and evil at the end of time. Between the judgment scenes concluding in Revelation 16 and the victory of the lamb in Revelation 19, we find an interlude devoted to the "great harlot" and her ultimate destruction. Interpretations of this intermission designed by the author of the book of Revelation are many. Majority of scholars regard "the great harlot" as representing Rome.¹ However, a closer study of the interlude presented in chapters 17-18 reveals that the message of the book has a deep foundation of the OT, particularly the prophetic writings.² Studies have found a parallel between Isaiah 47 and Revelation 17-18.³ In this paper we try to read Hosea 2 into the interlude of the book of Revelation. By doing so we try to find a parallel between the "great harlot" and "the wife of harlotry." It seems significant to pursue the Hosean foundation of the passage in order to understand the purpose of the message of the book of Revelation intended by its author. The expected outcome of this effort is to bring out the theological message of the passage to people of God going through the crisis of humiliation, in biblical language a status of being stripped naked (Hos 2:10; Rev 17:16), than the destruction of Rome.

The methodology for this paper will first involve establishing a connection between Hosea 2 and Revelation 17-18 using the historical critical method. Once this connection has been established, an

¹For the detailed discussion cf., R. H. Charles, Charles, "A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Revelation of St. John," New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1966, 62.

²Jan Fekkes III, *Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions in the Book of Revelation*, Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994, 17.

³Fekkes, *Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions in the Book of Revelation*, 17.

evaluation of the “harlot” interlude will be done in light of Hosea 2 in terms of the theological understanding of these texts for people of God in crisis today.

1. Finding a Connection between Hosea and Revelation

One of the most evident themes shared between the books of Hosea and Revelation is the theme of judgment towards a whoring people. An explicit reading would indicate Hosean judgment as directed towards Israel and those of Revelation to the city of Babylon. In the latter case, the scholars agree upon the identity of Babylon to be the city of Rome.⁴ However, both the books personify the accused as a harlot, a wanton woman. A close scrutiny of the theme of judgment in Hosea 2 and Revelation 17-18 establishes that the books have an especially close relationship with many phrases, themes, and theological concepts in common. One of the strongest thematic parallels is the personification of the reproached people as a whore. In an attempt to find a connection between the two, the paper analyses the following phrases, themes and theological concepts.

1.1. Contrasting Figures: A Benevolent Mother and a Lurid Whore

The book of Hosea presents two contrasting mother figures: An irresponsible motherhood which is presented in Gomer, the mother of three abnormal children who decided to go after her lovers (Hos 2:4) and the mother of the priest who faces the verdict of destruction (Hos 4:5) against Yahweh who assumes the role of a benevolent mother who bent down to feed her children (Hos 11:4). A similar line of thought is evident in the book of Revelation in its presentation of the celestial mother (Rev 12:1-6) and the gaudy whore (Rev 17). An explicit reading would provide more of dissimilarity in the character traits of these mother figures. However, the attempt is to find an implicit line of thought that would bring a connection between the two books namely, Hosea and Revelation.

1.1.1. Whoring Mother vis-a- vis Mother Yahweh in Hosea

Hosean style of composition is rich in bringing the paradoxical thought using the same tenor of imagery.⁵ In a way, Hosea uses an

⁴Mitchel Reddish, *Revelation*, Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys, 2001, 323; Oablo Richard, *Apocalypse*, Maryknoll, New York:Orbis Books, 1998, 130.

⁵We find it in his use of the imagery of wilderness as a place of punishment (Hos 2:3) as well as a place of restoration (Hos 2:14). Similarly, the roaring lion which stood for Yahweh’s fierce judgment of Hos 5:14 becomes the sign of reconstruction in Hos 13:7-8.

“embracing technique”⁶ to counteract a crisis of his time. Hosea uses the imageries of “mother” to highlight the two distinctive potential significance of femininity. On the one hand femininity is described in terms of whoring mother and ravaged maternity and on the other, Yahweh, the God of Israel assumes the role of a benevolent mother. By presenting the opposite qualities using the same tenor, Hosea is trying to eliminate the negativity using positivity. One of the threats posed by his eighth century BCE Israel was the disintegration of family system of which mother becomes a crucial figure. To counteract the life-threatening situation of his people, Hosea presents Yahweh as a mother who gives her life to her son Israel.

When Hosea uses the language indicating the female fornication that describes the disintegration of one family, he offers a powerful and evocative metaphor of an intensifying socio-economic, political and religious crisis of eighth century Israel. Therefore, to discover the identity of the whoring mother in Hosea, it is imperative to analyze the socio-economic, political and religious contexts of eighth century Israel.

1.1.1.1. Eighth Century Israel an Immediate Context to Hosean Ravaged Maternity

In the history of Israel and Judah, the eighth century BCE, particularly during the reigns of Jeroboam II (ca. 781-747 B.C.E.) and Uzziah (ca. 781-745 B.C.E.) was a period of national restoration⁷ and were relatively free from external military threat.⁸ However, Hosea’s initial preaching (chs. 1-4) reflects his conviction that in spite of outward appearances all was not well in the kingdom. The nation’s wealth was primarily distributed among the ruling classes and the ordinary citizen suffered under Jeroboam II’s reconstruction policies.⁹

⁶It is Jawaharlal Nehru who used the expression “embrace” in his book, “History of India” while describing about the natural death of Buddhism in India, “Hinduism killed Buddhism with a loving embrace.” However, it is Lucien Legrand who used the term “embracing” as a strategy in relation to Hosea in his book, “The Bible on Culture: Belonging or Dissenting?” Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 2004, 34.

⁷Seong-Hyuk Hong, *The Metaphor of Illness and Healing in Hosea and its Significance in the Socio-Economic Context of Eighth Century Israel and Judah*, New York: Peter Lang, 2006, 109.

⁸Philip Francis Esler, *Ancient Israel: The Old Testament in its Social Context*, Fortress Press, 2006, 146.

⁹John Andrew Dearman, *Property Rights in the Eighth Century Prophets: The Conflict and its Background*, Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988, 132-133. 140; Rainer

After Jeroboam II's death, the ruling elite continued to benefit from the economic policy he established causing corruption and exploitation (Hos 6:8-10; 7:1-7). Free from external assaults and the necessity to pay tribute, the nation was able to enjoy the fruits of its agricultural endeavours and the success of its economy (cf. Hos 2:5, 8; 12:8; Amos 3:15; 5:11). More particularly, enjoyment of prosperity and plenty manifested itself in exuberant and lavish cultic worship, with its attendant feasting, drinking and sexual license (cf. Hos 2: 11, 13; 8:13; Amos 2:7ff; 4:4; 5:21ff). Ogilvie in his interpretation of Hosea testifies to Israel's persistent obsession with the Baal fertility cults.¹⁰ According to the OT, Baal is primarily a fertility god (cf 1 Kings 18 and Hos 2). Baal worshippers (Judg 6:25 ff; 8:33; 9:4; 1 Kings 19:18) consisted of priests (2 Kings 10:19; 11:18; Zeph 1:4), prophets (1 Kings 18:19ff; 2 Kings 10:19) and kings (2 Kings 10:25). In chapters 4-14, Hosea comes vehemently on them, the so called leaders of Israel – the king (5:1; 7:3, 5, 7; 8:4,10; 10:7, 15; 13:10-11), priest (4:4-10; 5:1; 6:7-10; 7:1-7), prophet (4:5; 6:5; 9:7), and princes (7:3,5,16; 8:4, 10; 9:15) with rebuke and condemnation. Their wrongdoings edge in the areas of cult, state and foreign affairs and prophet illustrates them metaphorically as sexual violations. An analysis of the following oracles will illustrate this notion further.

1.1.1.1.1. Oracles Against the Kings

Hosea 8:1-14 features the cultic predicaments of kings and princes and their effects on foreign affairs. The weakness of royal leadership is closely associated with the royal shaping of the idolatrous "calf of Samaria" from silver and gold (8:4-6). According to Kakkanattu, the calf image in the book of Hosea refers to the sanctuary at Bethel (10:5; 13:2). In contrast to the other generic references to idolatrous worship (cf. 14:13, 17), the calf image lays stress on the political aspect of cult. It deals with state sponsored cult. By placing the calf of Samaria and the monarchy side-by-side, Hosea portrays the monarchy, which promulgated and perpetuated idolatry in the northern Israel, as the root cause of all evils.¹¹ The ineffectiveness of this leadership fused into the theme of imprudent

Albertz, *History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period*, London: SCM Press, 1994, 165-167.

¹⁰Lloyd J. Ogilvie, *The Communicator's Commentary: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*, Word Books: Dallas, 1990, 82.

¹¹Joy Philip Kakkanattu, *God's Enduring Love in the Book of Hosea*, Forschungen zum Alten Testament 2. Reihe 14, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008, 115.

political alliances, termed in sexual language as “hiring lovers” (Hos 8:9-10).¹² Hosea compares Ephraim to a “wild ass” (Hos 8:9) which in Jeremiah 2:24 is characterized as unbridled sexuality: “a wild ass used to the wilderness, in her heat sniffing the wind! Who can restrain her lust?” The homage that Ephraim’s king and princess offer the nations is like the payment a man negotiates with a prostitute (Hos 8:10). The theme of irresponsible foreign treaties is juxtaposed with the denunciation of unlawful sacrifices in 8:11-14. Ephraim’s multiple altars to expiate sin have become the very sites for committing sin.¹³ Therefore, God will break down Israel’s altars and destroy its pillars, because it does not acknowledge Yahweh as king (10:1-4).¹⁴ In Kakkanattu’s view, the sin of Israel is that ‘they try to buy Yahweh by engaging in the Canaanite sacrificial customs.’¹⁵

1.1.1.1.2. *Oracles Against the Priest*

According to Yee, priests were male state bureaucrats who had major fiscal responsibilities, especially during the harvest.¹⁶ According to the OT narratives, sacrifice was the central means of collecting revenue for the state (cf. 2 Chr 31:4-6; Neh 10:36-39). Against the customary description of the complete annihilation of offerings, only a token portion of grain and animals was usually consumed in the sacrificial fires. The remainder went to the priests and their households (cf. Lev 2:2-3; 6:14-17; 7:31-34).¹⁷ This might be one of the reasons for the unrestricted increase of priests and altars as Hosea indicates in 4:7-15; 8:11-13; 10:2.¹⁸ According to Matthews and Benjamin, at sanctuaries throughout Israel, priests slaughtered and butchered livestock, decanted wine and olive oil, and parched grain.¹⁹ This picture of priests place them with significant responsibilities in handling the monarchy’s cash crops of “grain, wine and oil” (cf. Deut 12:17; 14:23; 18:4; 2 Chr 31:5; Neh 10:39; 13:5, 12). In Hosea’s indictment, the priests “feed on the sin of my people; they are greedy for their iniquity” (Hos 4:8). The priests

¹²Gale Yee, “‘She is not my Wife and I am not her Husband’: A Materialist Analysis of Hosea 1-3,” *Biblical Interpretation* 9 (2004) 345-383, at 358.

¹³Yee, “She is not my Wife,” 359.

¹⁴Yee, “She is not my Wife,” 359.

¹⁵Kakkanattu, *God’s Enduring Love*, 116.

¹⁶Yee, “She is not my Wife,” 359.

¹⁷Yee, “She is not my Wife,” 360.

¹⁸Kakkanattu, *God’s Enduring Love*, 116.

¹⁹V.H. Matthews and D.C. Benjamin, *Social World of Ancient Israel: 1250-587 BCE*, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993, 192.

availed their economic sustenance from practices of the cult. Besides, their combined role in sacrifices and food processing placed them in a position to be directly involved in gathering tribute from the peasant classes and deliver it to the super powers, Assyria and Egypt (Hos 5:13; 7:3-14; 8:9-10; 10:6; 12:1).²⁰ The joined interests of priestly and state affairs in agricultural products, such as “grain, wine, and oil,” for both foreign and national resolves is trademarked by Hosea as “sexual promiscuity” (Hos 2:8-9; 4:11-17; 7:14; 9:1-2; 12:1).²¹

1.1.1.1.3. Oracles against the Prophets

The prophet is convicted along with the priest for “stumbling” (v. 5), causing the people to be destroyed for lack of knowledge” (v. 6). According to Kakkanattu, the subject matter of Israel’s knowledge is Yahweh’s loving deeds in favour of Israel (Hos 11:3), embodied in the exodus.²² But according to Hosea, his addressees failed to have this knowledge, partly because those who were responsible for teaching it acted irresponsibly (Hos 4:6).²³ Having devoted themselves to “fornication,” priest and prophet permit a “spirit of promiscuity” to infect the people (Hos 4:10-12, 18-19). “A promiscuous spirit” defiles the nation and it “does not know Yahweh” (Hos 5:4). Murderous “priests banded together” (Hos 6:9) is responsible for the moral deterioration of the king and his royal court (Hos 7:3-7). This decline in state affairs, instigated by moral guardians of the society (priests and prophets) described as “adulterers” (Hos 7:4) directly affects foreign affairs where “Ephraim mixes himself with the peoples” (Hos 7:8). Ephraim’s unreliable foreign policy with Egypt and Assyria is compared to a silly, senseless dove (Hos 7:11-13). For grain and wine, the people gather themselves together and rebel against God (Hos 7:14).

The intermingling of priestly, prophetic and kingly crimes highlights the reality that Israelite religion, politics and foreign affairs were joined at the hip. Violations in any of these domains were symbolized by Hosea through sexual imagery.²⁴ In his attempt to project all these crimes Hosea uses a number of female imageries of ravaged maternity: The whoring mother (Hos 2); the endangered mother of priest and the prophet (Hos 4); miscarrying womb and dry breasts (Hos 9); mothers who are dashed in pieces with their children

²⁰Yee, “She is not my Wife,” 360.

²¹Yee, “She is not my Wife,” 360.

²²Kakkanattu, *God’s Enduring Love*, 124.

²³Kakkanattu, *God’s Enduring Love*, 124.

²⁴Yee, “She is not my Wife,” 359.

(Hos 10); mother who faces a life-threatening child birth (Hos 13); and pregnant women ripped open (Hos 13). According to Keefe, through these mothers who are destroyed, Hosea expresses the fate of Israel he witnessed in his time.²⁵ Moreover, when a system is corrupted by the evil practices of its inhabitants, its ill effect is born by the people who reside at the margin. In the case of male dominated Israel, women and children become the prey of its deviant behaviours.

Hosea witnessed the religion of Israel as androcentric that projected God as male and patriarchal, whereas the Canaanite culture embedded in his community provided an excess of goddesses and gods and a cultic practice to match. As Straumann rightly observes, Hosea seems to be a prophet who found himself in the midst of an agrarian community who valued the local deities representing the personified forces of nature who were more tangible than Yahweh.²⁶ The ravaged womanhood who became the prey to the cultic entanglements of androcentric system of Israel, longed for a deity who would assume their nature and re-establish their identity as women – mothers – the centre of family – who would teach Israel how to walk erect. A prophet is a person who is able to see people and articulate their mind. Hosea the prophet is responding to the ravaged motherhood of Israel by projecting Yahweh with the traits more suitable to a mother.

1.1.1.2. Mother Yahweh

Hosea never calls Yahweh as neither mother nor father although such notions are vivid in his descriptions of Yahweh. According to Straumann, in Hosea 11:1-4, “he employs imagery from the world of infants to show how God makes life possible, protects and shields it like a mother bringing up her child.”²⁷ A few of the activities enumerated by Hosea in 11:1-4 (teach them to walk, led them with cords of compassion and bands of love, bending down to feed them) are exclusively maternal. There are scholars who argue for and against Straumann’s interpretation of Yahweh assuming the role of a mother in the imagination of Hosea.²⁸ However, Yahweh cannot be

²⁵Alice A. Keefe, *Woman’s Body and the Social Body in Hosea*, New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001, 16-17.

²⁶Helen Shungel Straumann, “God as Mother in Hosea 11,” in *Feminist Companion to the Bible*, No. 8: *A Feminist Companion to the Latter Prophets*, ed. Athalya Brenner, Sheffield, 1995, 194.

²⁷Straumann, “God as Mother in Hosea 11,” 203.

²⁸Siegfried Kreuzer, “God as Mother in Hosea 11?,” *Theology Digest* 37, 3 (1990) 221-226; M.T. Wacker, “Traces of Goddess in the Book of Hosea,” in *Feminist*

subjected to any gender; what Yahweh does in Hosea is to teach people to be humane.

1.1.1.2.1. Yahweh Who Teaches the Infant Israel to Walk

In a normal parenting, mother's lap seems to be the most secure place for an infant. It is she who teaches the child its first step to walk. It is nature's way to make the young independent and grow stronger. When Hosea presents Yahweh as someone who teaches the infant Israel to walk, he starts the narration by recalling the exodus event (Hos 11:1). Therefore, in order to understand the identity of Yahweh, we need to go back to the exodus experience: through the blood that was put on the door post of the house (Ex 12:7), the passage over the sea, and through the water (Ex 14) – it is a birth experience. In that process, we come across a woman – Miriam, the sister of Moses who plays the role of a midwife who takes up the symbols and leads the women in dance. She was leading a people that just emerged from four hundred and thirty years of slavery (Ex 12:40), people living in fear and darkness. Four hundred and thirty years of slavery would make somebody walk bent over, unable to dance. She teaches the new born child to walk as a free person, walk through dance. So, Miriam is teaching Israel, how to be in the world. There is a very interesting connection here, in the Book of Leviticus (Lev 26:13), it is written, "God broke the yoke of slavery, led his people out of Egypt, so that they could walk erect." Hosea sees the new form of slavery that curbed the eighth century Israel from walking erect. So, he presents Yahweh as a mother who teaches her infant to walk erect.

1.1.1.2.2. Yahweh who Leads Israel in Her Pouch Made of Compassion

The image of a woman carrying her baby pouched at her breast is one that brings about a sense of a tender moment where a child is sure to feel secure and comforted. Hosea positions Yahweh and Israel to such tender moments when he imagines Yahweh to pronounce the following: "I led them with cords of compassion, with the bands of love..." (Hos 11:4). It is motherly instincts to carry the baby while teaching her/him to walk to protect the tender feet from hurting. The book of Deuteronomy compares Yahweh to an eagle that carries its young ones on its back while teaching them to fly (Deut 32:11). The image of Yahweh bearing Israel "on eagle's wings" during the desert wanderings (Ex 19:4) is another example. In the imagination of Isaiah too, Yahweh is presented as a tender

mother who carries her infant on her hip: “you shall be carried upon her hip” (Isa 66:12). When Hosea saw Israel, he was already a grown-up son who has distanced himself from his mother and led to his misery. In order to win back a wayward son Hosea needed to present a mother who is compassionate. Therefore, in Hosean imagination Yahweh assumes the role of a mother who is unable to punish his son. Yahweh says: “How can I give you up O Ephraim! How can I hand you over, O Israel! ...my heart recoils within me, my compassion grows warm and tender” (Hos 11:8). Isaiah portrays the similar position of Yahweh as: “Can a woman forget her suckling child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb...” (Isa 49:15). “As one whom his mother comforts so I will comfort you” (Isa 66:13). Hosea goes a step further when his mother Yahweh assumes the role of a wild animal who takes the extreme steps to protect its young: “... like a bear robbed of her cubs. I will tear open their breasts, ... I will devour them like a lion...” (Hos 13:8). Here we see that the maternal instinct of Yahweh to protect her children produces wrath as much as warmth.²⁹

1.1.1.2.3. Yahweh who Bends Down to Feed the Infant Israel

By positioning Yahweh feeding Israel Hosea seems to “inscribe female traits into the body of God.”³⁰ It is Straumann who interpreted Yahweh’s act of bending down to feed as an action exclusive to breast feeding mothers by translating the Hebrew word לַחֵיקָם (cheek) to “breast” and reading עַל (infant) rather than עַל (yoke) while most commentaries translate them into “cheek” and “yoke.”³¹ So, Straumann’s translation of Hosea 11:4b would read: “I was to them like one who lifts a child to the breasts...”³² According to Wacker, to have been fed by God indicates Israel as a recipient of most privileged care and significantly such images of divine action start from the material reality of the female body and rooted in

²⁹It is Hosean style to present the opposites using the same imagery. For example, when Hosea uses the imagery of lion for Yahweh. It indicates judgment (Hos 5:14; 13:7) as well as restoration (Hos 11:10). Further, the imagery of wilderness is employed in Hosea for retribution (Hos 2:3) as well as restoration (Hos 2:14).

³⁰Wacker, “Father- God, Mother-God,” 10.

³¹Kreuzer disagrees with Straumann’s adaptation of the lexicon from Ruth 4:16 as the word used here is לַחֵיקָם. which means “bosom,” where as in Hosea the word used is לַחֵיקָם. meaning “cheek.” However, Straumann’s interpretation seems to be logical as no one will lift an infant to their cheek to feed. Straumann, “God as Mother in Hosea 11,” 194-218.

³²For a detailed discussion see, Straumann, “God as Mother in Hosea 11,” 194-218.

feminine corporeality.³³ When a mother feeds her infant she transmits her life to it. As Straumann sees it when Hosea uses this imagery, he shows how God makes life possible and protects and preserves life as a mother sustains her baby's life by giving her own life to it.³⁴

Having analysed the contrasting mother figures in Hosea, we shall now attempt to explore the contradictory mother figures of the book of Revelation. As Hosea's literary style is characterized by his juxtaposition of contradictory features, the book of Revelation too has ample examples of the same literary style.

1.1.2. *Celestial Mother and the Gaudy Whore in Revelation*

The Book of Revelation presents two mother figures contradictory in nature. The first one is described as arrayed with the sun, having the moon under her feet and a crown of stars upon her brow (Rev 12). Here the woman is depicted as a goddess would be. Assyrian Juno wore a crown of precious stones, corresponding to the twelve signs of the zodiac. Other Greco-Roman goddesses were clothed or crowned with stars. Apollo's mother Leto wears a veil of stars.³⁵ The second mother is presented as a harlot (Rev 17) opposite of the first and arrayed in all the embellishments of earthly splendour. The mother in chapter 12 is clothed with heavenly lights, while the harlot is clothed with the excessive earthly clothing. Chapter 12 presents the mother of the Messiah and the giver of life, whereas chapters 17-18 portrays the mother of harlots who kills and drinks the blood of martyrs. These two mothers in the book of Revelation can be read as summing up of the two contradictory images of motherhood throughout the scripture – the divine motherhood which in one sense is the image of "*hokma*" (*sophia*) and the deceiving foolishness.

1.1.2.1. Celestial Mother

The celestial mother presented in Revelation 12 is clothed in the splendour of God's created luminaries. The author of the book of Revelation seems to weave her into his narrative plot along with a plethora of mythological figures as well as metaphorical elements which throws an insightful understanding of this woman. In her is entwined the four significant mother figures: Mother Eve, Israel the Mother, Mother of the Messiah and the Mother Church.

³³Wacker, "Father- God, Mother-God," 10.

³⁴Straumann, "God as Mother in Hosea 11," 203.

³⁵Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 315-316.

1.1.2.1.1. *Mother Eve*

The woman with birth pangs in the book of Revelation (Rev 12:2) finds a parallel with those of Eve in Genesis (Gen 3:16). She is faced by Satan,³⁶ the serpent (Gen 3:1), she brings forth her child in anguish (Gen 3:16) and her child will suffer attack by Satan (Gen 3:15). However, she is victorious and acquires the title, “mother of all living” (Gen 3:20). The portrait of this woman who finds a parallel figure in Eve who traversed from a senseless immature girl who falls prey to the treachery of the serpent to a victorious woman who acquired the title, “mother of all living” stands for the potential of womanhood who is capable of withstanding all the tribulations through patient endurance. The image of the woman crying out in her pangs of birth, is a symbol of feminine principle of embracing the creative life-giving patterns, her womb generates and protects life, breasts nurtures, arms embraces and comforts.

1.1.2.1.2. *Israel the Mother*

The woman encountering the serpent could be viewed as the personification of Israel, the nation which gave birth to Christ. The description of the woman clothed with the sun, the moon to protect her feet, and head crowned with twelve stars is reminiscent of the account of Joseph’s dream in Genesis 37:9 where he sees the sun, the moon and the eleven stars bowing down to him indicating the twelve tribes of Israel. Further, the woman carried into the desert with the two wings of the great eagle finds its historical background in Exodus 19:4 where Yahweh compares himself to an eagle who carries Israel. Like Israel the woman in Revelation 12 was carried on an eagle’s wings to the safety of the desert. Hosea takes up this imagery of wilderness as a place of restoration for the wronged Israel (Hos 2:14). According to NT scholarship, for the author of the book of Revelation, the imagery of the woman stands for the people of Israel who gives birth to the Messiah and the messianic age.³⁷

1.1.2.1.3. *Mother of the Messiah*

The popular interpretation of the woman of Revelation 12 seems to have pointed to Mother Mary, the mother of the messiah. This interpretation seems to be based on the title given to Mary as the “arc of the covenant.” The book of Revelation testifies the following:

³⁶In retelling of the Genesis story, the *naḥāś* has assumed the role of “devil” (Wis 2:24).

³⁷Wilfrid J. Harrington, *Revelation*, Sacra Pagina 16, Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2008, 130.

“Then God’s temple in heaven was opened, and the arc of his covenant was seen within his temple; and there were flashes of lightning, loud noises, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail” (Rev 11:19).

Since the celestial mother is positioned immediately after the description of the appearance of the “arc of the covenant,” tradition tends to describe the woman in Revelation 12 as Mary, the mother of the messiah.³⁸ The Apostolic Constitution *Munificentissimus Deus* states that the Mary is signified in various figures of the OT and also in the woman clothed with the sun (Rev 12:1).³⁹

The Arc of the covenant was built by God’s command to hold the ten commandments. When the people of Israel were in the wilderness, not knowing the route map for their journey, the arc functioned as a navigator leading them in the right path (Num 10:33). In the wilderness wanderings, the arc became the presence of God among his people and assumed the place of worship where lament occurs, where the people of God humble themselves, fall on their faces to the ground before their God. When the author of the book of Revelation places the celestial mother after the narration of the appearance of the arc of the covenant, probably he intends to present a goddess of high rank, the mother of the messiah.

1.1.2.1.4. Mother Church

The woman in Revelation 12, after the birth of the child undergoes persecution by the dragon, and the dragon made war on her other children. The description of the “other children” (Rev 12) reveals the identity of the woman as the church in continuity with Israel. The book of Revelation emphasizes the continuity between Judaism and Christianity and regards Christians as the real Jews (Rev 2:9; 3:9). The crown of stars gives us information about the woman who wears it. The word “crown” used elsewhere (Rev 2:10; 4:4) in the book describes the reward given to those who are faithful unto death. The audience of the book of Revelation were under the threat of martyrdom at the hands of the emperor. The churches in Smyrna

³⁸It is Albert the Great who connected the arc of the covenant with Mary in Reve 11:18. Cf., Albertus Magnus, *Opera Omnia* ... (38 vols.; Paris: Ludovicum Vives, 1890-1899), 37: 186. As cited by Buby Bertrand. “The Fascinating Woman of Revelation 12,” *Marian Studies*: Vol. 50, Article 9. https://ecommons.udayton.edu/marian_studies/vol50/iss1/9 accessed on 10/12/2018, 11.

³⁹Pope Pius XII, *Munificentissimus Deus*, 1950, 27. http://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/apost_constitutions/documents/hf_p-xii_apc_19501101_munificentissimus-deus.html

(2:10) and Philadelphia (3:10) were undergoing some form of persecutions. The woman's crown contains twelve stars. In the book of Revelation, number twelve represents both Israel and the Church. In the description of the new Jerusalem (Rev 21:12-14), the bride of Christ is decked with twelve gates representing twelve tribes and twelve foundations for the twelve apostles. Thus, in John's imagination, mother Church has the crown of twelve apostles to adorn her.

If the Celestial mother of the book of Revelation portrays four iconic motherhood of the biblical tradition, gaudy whore the mother of harlots in Revelation 17-18 pictures a contrasting figure of motherhood.

1.1.2.2. Gaudy Whore, the Mother of Harlots

The common interpretation of the harlot depicted in Revelation 17-18 is the city of Rome. This interpretation seems to be based on the observation that the so-called harlot is seen as sitting upon a beast with seven heads often taken to symbolize the seven hills upon which Rome was founded. However, a closer view of the Mother harlot in Revelation 17-18 reveals that she has a strong root in Hebrew Scripture. We try to explore the parallels found between Hosea and the harlot interlude in Revelation. Prophet Hosea singled out three figures responsible for Ephraim/Israel playing the whore – king (Hos 5:1; 7:3,5,7; 8:4,10; 10:7,15; 13:10-11), priest (Hos 4:4-10; 5:1; 6:7-10; 7:1-7) and prophet (Hos 4:5; 6:5; 9:7). In the book of Revelation, John singles out three groups of people who have shared in Rome's political and economic success – the kings of the earth (Rev 18:9), merchants (Rev 18: 15), and sea farers (Rev 18: 17).

1.1.2.2.1. Harlot with whom the Kings have Committed Fornication (Rev 17:2)

The great harlot is presented as one with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication.⁴⁰ The harlot is called Babylon, the great city. John uses the name Babylon to refer to the fallen city (Rev 14:8; 16:19). The Hebrew bible has a tradition of personifying the cities as female. According to Laffey, about fourteen cities are

⁴⁰Many scholars interpret the harlot as Babylon. Their assumption is based on the description that she is seated on many waters. The metaphor "many waters" rests upon Jeremiah's description of ancient Babylon's position, "O you who dwell by many waters" (Jer 51:13). Cf. Homer Hailey, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, Grand Rapids: Michigan, 343; Harrington, *Revelation*, 171.

clearly personified as women in prophetic texts.⁴¹ Scholarship applies this tradition explicitly to the metaphor of the wife in Hosea 2.⁴² According to Kelle, the prophetic critiques on the metaphor focuses on the seats of power – Jerusalem, Samaria, Nineveh, and Babylon – the cities likely represent the male ruling elite who sat on their thrones. Hosea uses the sexual imagery to describe unfaithfulness to God when he personifies the city as a wanton woman. We can see this Hosean style in Revelation, when it uses the sexual imagery to describe religious infidelity and accuses the woman Jezebel in the Church at Thyatira of practicing fornication and her followers of committing adultery with her (Rev 2:20-22). Based on this assumption, one is prompted to interpret the harlot in Revelation 17:2 as representing the city of Rome. In John's view, Rome deserves to be called a whore because of her arrogant claims of universal sovereignty, power and authority.⁴³ Revelation 18 describes the luxury and greed of the city as the major part of her fornication. According to Richard, in Revelation, Rome's relationship to the kings of the earth and the inhabitants of the earth is a "prostituted relationship."⁴⁴ Rome's wealth, power and influence are too alluring for many kings and nations to resist. They have entered into political and commercial alliances with Rome. They drink from her cup and become intoxicated and thus share in her guilt.⁴⁵ However, in chapter 19, there is a reversal of attitude. The people who have shared in Rome's political and economic success – the kings of the earth, the merchants, and the seafarers – bemoan the fall and loss of the city. Their lamentations are derived

⁴¹Gaza (Amos 1:7), Rabbah (Amos 1:14) and her daughters (Jer 49:3), Samaria (Amos 3:9) and her daughters (Ezek 16:53,55), Zion (Isa 1:27) and her daughters (Isa 1:8), Jerusalem (Isa 51:17) and her daughters (Mic 4:8), the daughter of Gallim (Isa 10:30), the daughter of Tarshish (Isa 23:10), Sidon (Isa 23:4) and her daughter (Isa 23:12), Tyre (Isa 23:15) and her daughters (Ezek 26:6,8), Bethlehem Ephrathah (Mic 5:2), and Sodom (Ezek 16:46, 48-49) and her daughters (Ezek 16:53, 55). For an extensive discussion, see, A.L. Laffey, *A Feminist Introduction to the Old Testament: A Feminist Perspective*, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988, 162.

⁴²John J. Schmitt, "The Wife of God in Hosea 2," *Biblical Research* 34 (1989) 7-11; Christina Bucher, "The Origin and Meaning of *znh* Terminology in the Book of Hosea," PhD diss., The Claremont Graduate School, 1988, 136; Julie Galambush, *Jerusalem in the Book of Ezekiel: The City as Yahweh's Wife*, Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992, 49.

⁴³Mitchell Reddish, *Revelation*, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary (SHBC), Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys, 2001, 323.

⁴⁴Pablo Richard, *Apocalypse: A People's Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, Translated by Philip Beeryman, Wipf and Stock: Eugene: Oregon, 1995, 130.

⁴⁵Reddish, *Revelation*, 324.

from their own loss than from grief over Rome's demise. With the city's downfall, all the benefits which they enjoyed from their alliance with Rome were lost. They "stand far off, in fear of her torment" (Rev 18:10, 15, 17). They do not come to her assistance; they are paralyzed by fear.⁴⁶

Hosea 10:1-10 comprises similar interconnections among king (10:3-4, 7, 15), cult (10:1-2, 5-6, 8), and foreign politics (10:6, 10). Israel is compared to a "luxuriant vine" which multiplies the altar in proportion to its yield, improves its pillars in proportion to nation's improvement. Luxuriant wine and pillar stands for *Asherah* and *Baal*, in which case, it is an allusion to the fertility cult, 'the result of which is alienation from Yahweh'.⁴⁷ In Hosea, the indictment is directed towards the kings of Israel indicating the failed leadership, whereas John focuses on the kings of the earth who were the beneficiaries of sovereign power of Rome. In either case, the woman who is pictured as a whore stands for the city which is in crisis.

1.1.2.2.2. *Harlot from Whom the Merchants Gained Wealth*

The description of merchants with whom the harlot entangled herself indicates the wealth and extravagance of Rome. Their commercial success is based on the sale of luxury items than the necessary goods. Their commercial enterprises focused on gold, silver, jewels, ivory, scented wood, fine linen, spices and horses and chariots. In John's view, the merchants made their wealth by taking advantage of the greed and opulence of Rome. The last item in the list of trade indicates the depth of Rome's decadence: נֹתְאָמוֹס נֹפְרִיקְנֵשָׁא טְאָצִי אֶבֶב. "slaves" – that is the human beings (Rev 18:13).⁴⁸ Human beings turned slaves are another commodity to be bought and sold, lumped together with "cattle and sheep, horses and chariots." Slaves were imported from all over the world and sold in the market to cater to the needs of the Roman society, whose economy was considered a "slave economy."⁴⁹ In John's view,

⁴⁶Reddish, *Revelation*, 344.

⁴⁷Kakkanattu, *God's Enduring Love*, 116.

⁴⁸NRSV translates σωμάτων, καὶ ψυχὰς ἀνθρώπων as "slaves – and human lives." The Greek word καὶ can be read exegetically, indicating that the following words further define what precedes. Therefore, a better translation for καὶ here would be "namely" or "that is" than "and." The words "slaves – that is human lives" indicate one item on the list not two. Cf., Isbon T. Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John*, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979, 717.

⁴⁹Scott Bartchy, "Slavery (Greco-Roman)," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman, 6 vols., New York: Doubleday & Co., 1992, 6:66.

Roman society does not uphold the noble ideals of justice, compassion, and human wellbeing, rather its interest is mainly on flashy and expensive luxuries, even if the acquiring of those items comes at the cost of human lives.⁵⁰ When Hosea condemned priests for exploiting the peasants (Hos 4:8-9),⁵¹ John points out the slave trade (Rev 18:13) and both come under the category of subhuman way of acquiring wealth.

1.1.2.2.3. Harlot from Whose Wealth the Sea Farers Grew Rich

The third group with whom the harlot engaged herself is composed of “ship masters and sea farers, sailors and all whose trade is on the sea” (Rev 18:17). They represent those who profited from maritime operations. Though Rome was not a seaport, the city of Ostia, located about twelve miles away at the bank of the River Tiber was Rome’s primary port city. However, being the capital of the empire, Rome was the centre of the empire’s trade and commerce. Because of this tremendous commercial activity, “all who had ships at sea grew rich by her wealth” (Rev 18:19). Scholars compare Tyre (Ezek 26-27) as a model to emphasize the economic idolatry that prevailed in Rome.⁵² Trade and commerce in themselves are not wicked; they are good when used for the welfare of humanity. What was happening at the seaport of the Roman empire was the “selfish luxury” to “gratify lust”⁵³ that promoted a culture that worship commercial success.

Presenting a nation at the verge of destruction, Hosea and John used a female imagery which includes two opposite traits – benevolent mother and lurid whore. Besides this imagery there are a few other points where Hosea and John meet. We shall analyse those points as “Similarity in Expression.”

⁵⁰Reddish, *Revelation*, 346.

⁵¹Sacrifice was the central means of collecting revenue for the state (cf. 2 Chron 31:4-6; Neh 10: 36-39). In contrast to the standard depiction of the complete annihilation of offerings, only a token portion of grain and animals was usually consumed in the sacrificial fires. The remainder went to the priests and their households (cf. Lev 2:2-3; 6:14-17; 7:31-34). According to Hos 4:8, the priests “feed on the sin of my people; they are greedy for their iniquity.” The priests secured their economic livelihood from practices of the cult. Because of their role in sacrifices, priests were directly involved in amassing tribute from the peasant classes to be delivered to the superpowers, Assyria and Egypt (Hos 5:13; 7:3-14; 8:9-10; 10:6; 12:1).

⁵²See for the detailed discussion, G.K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999 915; Harrington, *Revelation*, 181; Homer Hailey, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, Grand Rapids: Michigan, 364-368.

⁵³Hailey, *Revelation*, 368.

1.2. The Woman who Played the Harlot

The harlot in John's imagination is a combination of the characteristics of the harlots of prophetic writings: the conquest, rapine, and cruelty of Nineveh; the commerce of Tyre; the pleasures of Babylon; and the religious whoredom of Jerusalem.⁵⁴ John has fashioned a prophetic oracle that gathers up all that his prophetic predecessors had said against Babylon, Tyre, Israel, and Judah. Rome is the heir of Babylon in political and religious activity, of Tyre in economic activity and it is Israel that gives John the particular imagery of "playing the harlot" (Hos 9:1; 2:5,12), an image which speaks of association with other nations for the sake of material benefit as well as religious apostasy.

The book of Revelation accuses the personified city saying, "she glorified herself and played the wanton" (Rev 18:7a). In her heart she says, "I rule as a queen: I am no widow, and I will never see grief" (Rev 18:7b). John describes well the pride and haughtiness of the city of Rome that thought it ruled the world and could not be defeated.⁵⁵ The harlot's boast is reminiscent of the boasting of Babylon in Isaiah: "I shall be mistress forever... I am and there is no one beside me; I shall not sit as a widow or know the loss of children" (Isa 47: 7-8). A similar boast is made by Tyre: "I am a god, I sit in the seat of the gods, in the heart of the sea" (Ezek 28:2). Each of these boasting harlots were brought low as the book of Proverbs rightly puts it, "pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall" (Prov 16:18).

Hosea's accusation against Israel in chapter two takes a similar tone. His accusation presents her as a haughty woman who says, "I will go after my lovers, who give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, my oil and my drink" (Hos 2:5). The thread that connects Hosea and John is their thought pattern of picturing the pride of their concerned city in terms of a wanton woman who is abound with her pride and haughtiness. According to Bauckham, through the language of harlotry John is accusing Rome of associating with the peoples of her empire for her own economic benefit.⁵⁶ But Hosea, using the same language accuses Israel for attributing her benefits to Baal, the fertility god and not Yahweh the provider. However, the underlying principle of using

⁵⁴Hailey, *Revelation*, 344.

⁵⁵Reddish, *Revelation*, 343.

⁵⁶Richard Bauckham, "The Economic Critique of Rome in Revelation 18," in *Images of Empire*, Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991, 47-90.

the language of harlotry is to present a people who have gone astray.

1.3. The Woman in the Wilderness

Hosea uses the term “מִדְבָּר wilderness” five times (Hos 2:3, 14-15; 9:10, 13: 4-5, 15)⁵⁷ to describe divine actions toward Israel. Hosea uses it as a place of desolation (Hos 2:3) and restoration (Hos 2:14). In Hosea’s imagination, Yahweh uses the same place to chastise as well as to woo his wife, Israel. For he says, “I will make her like a wilderness,” “I will allure her into the wilderness” (Hos 2:3, 14). For the woman in Hosea, wilderness becomes a place of contradictory realities of life. On the one hand it is positivity where she is served the best part of life and on the other hand she goes through the humiliation and devastation of life.

When John uses this imagery “wilderness” to present two women with contradictory features, this arid land becomes a place of divine nourishment to the woman (Rev 12:6,14) as well as a wilderness of desolation drenched in her lust for power, honour, prestige, wealth and pleasure, together with hate, ill-will, self-will and malice that led to the slaughter of God’s people (Rev 17). In John’s view God does not leave her there. She was subjected to change, a change that resulted in the destruction of the harlot. She was made desolate, stripped of her grandeur and wealth, her flesh eaten and consumed and her remains destroyed by burning with fire (Rev 17:16). In her God chooses to destroy the “great world-city of pride, lust and corruption.”⁵⁸

1.4. The Stripped Woman

In Hosea (2:3) as well as in Revelation (17:16) the wronged woman is to undergo the punishment of being stripped naked. Because of the close relationship between the garment and the person the forced stripping of the garment would be a sign of humiliation and ridicule. According to Kuhl, the stripping in the OT was intended as a punishment or degrading on account of adultery.⁵⁹ An offended

⁵⁷According to scholars, Hosea along with the other pre-exilic prophets, viewed the wilderness from the perspective of the settled land. Agriculture was their ideal vision of life and the wilderness was a threat to it. Cf. P. Riemann, “Desert and Return to the Desert in the Pre-Exilic Prophets,” PhD diss., Harvard University, 1964 2-59; S.S. Talmon, “The ‘Desert Motif’ in the Bible and in Qumran Literature,” in *Biblical Motifs: Origins and Transformations*, ed. Altmann, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966, 31-63.

⁵⁸Hailey, *Revelation*, 358.

⁵⁹As cited by Paul. Kruger, “The Marriage Metaphor in Hosea 2:4-17 against its Ancient Near Eastern Background,” *Old Testament Essays* 5 (1992) 7-25, at 13.

husband can impose stripping as a punishment on an adulterous wife (Jer 13:22, 26-27; Ezek 16:37-40), either before or in place of the death penalty (Lev 20:20; Deut 22:22).⁶⁰

In the admonition of Hosea 2:3a, the purpose of the act of stripping is illustrated by the term *נִשְׂרָפָה* : to set, to place, “which in this context means “to expose to ridicule.” She will be stripped so as to exhibit her in shame.⁶¹ In the marriage metaphor of Ezekiel 16 and 23 punishments meted out to an adulterous if she was judged according to the specifications in connection with adulterers (Ezek 16:38; 23:45) are deliberated in detail.⁶² Ezek 16:39, “they shall strip you of your clothes” has a close similarity with Hos 2:3a, “I strip her naked.” In Isa 47:2-3, Babylon is humiliated as she is depicted as a whore and her nakedness is uncovered as penalty for her wrongdoings. Nahum 3:5 presents the city of Nineveh as an unchaste woman who will be uncovered on account of her countless harlotry (v. 4). In Ezekiel 16, the act of harlotry is stated first (vv. 35-37), followed by the stripping (v. 39) and then the stoning (40). In Genesis 38, a similar response is elicited of Judah towards Tamar (Gen 38:24). This is in line with the Old Testament terminology of punishment described in the book of Leviticus (cf Lev 21:9). Against this background, the punishment of stripping in Hosea 2:3 a, can be viewed as a sign of public disgrace and is in accordance with similar disciplinary measures taken against adulterous women elsewhere.

In Revelation, making the woman naked is to burn her alive. This is an allusion to Ezekiel 23:26-29, where Jerusalem is compared to a woman stripped naked, and to Ezekiel 23:25, where the survivors of Jerusalem will be burned with fire. The book of Leviticus prescribes “burning” as a punishment for a priest’s daughter who is a prostitute (Lev 21:9).⁶³ John is comparing the city of Rome to a wanton woman and he prescribes the punishment as of a prostitute of OT.

⁶⁰Anthony Philips, “Some Aspects of Family Law in Pre-Exilic Israel,” *Vetus Testamentum* 23 (1973) 349-361; Hans Walter Wolff, *Hosea: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Hosea*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974, 34; A.A. Macintosh, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Hosea*, Bloomsbury: T&T Clark, 2014, 43.

⁶¹Francis I. Anderson and David Noel Freedman, *Hosea*, Anchor Bible 24, New York: Doubleday & Company Inc., 1980, 225.

⁶²Anderson and Freedman, *Hosea*, 225.

⁶³David E. Aune, *Revelation*, 3 vols, WBC 52A, 52B, 52C, Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997-1998, 957.

2. Theological Message of the Use of Harlot Imagery in Hosea and Revelation Interlude

In his imaginative power John brings forth the imagery of a harlot to depict an empire which in his opinion was at the verge of destruction as it led a Godless path. According to John the Roman empire deserved to be called a harlot because of her arrogant claims of universal sovereignty, power and authority.⁶⁴ In Chapter 17 of Revelation John describes the harlot and the beast on which she rides. John paints the woman in luxuriant and ostentatious attire. She is clothed in purple (the colour of royalty) and scarlet (Rev 17:4). According to Reddish, these colours were symbols of the high status of the wealthy. Not only her clothing but also her accessories, gold, jewels, and pearls denote wealth and extravagance. She is a symbol of status, power and affluence. In John's understanding, the attire of woman is an expression of excess and wantonness.⁶⁵ Therefore, she represents any system or institution that tries to usurp the role and authority of God or that oppresses and abuses people. In Reddish's opinion, the use of sexual imagery as that of a harlot is appropriate because power, prestige and wealth are alluring and one can easily be seduced by them.⁶⁶

2.1. The Woman Holding the Cup of Abominations

In John's description, the harlot who holds the cup of abominations is treated with the double portion of her misdeeds. This imagery finds a closest parallel with the book of Ezekiel that presents the city of Jerusalem as a city who knows Yahweh and his laws but has reverted to idolatrous ways (Ezek 16 and 23). When this theme runs through the mind of Hosea, we find his vocabulary too voices the similar pattern: "To me they cry, My God, we Israel know thee" (Hos 8:2); "they made kings, but not through me" (Hos 8:4); "they sow the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind" (Hos 8:7). The fate of Jerusalem in Ezekiel and Israel in Hosea find a parallel for the fateful betrayal and destruction of Babylon in Revelation. So, it is evident that John's intention here is to fundamentally describe the characteristics of the city on the basis of OT prophecies. According to him, the people to be destroyed is not just a dominant and wealthy world power. It is primarily a religious centre that knows the God of Israel and has deviated from his ways because of her love for wealth and luxury.

⁶⁴Reddish, *Revelation*, 324.

⁶⁵Reddish, *Revelation*, 334.

⁶⁶Reddish, *Revelation*, 334.

2.2. People of God to Take Leave of the City

Revelation 18:4 presents a voice from heaven that urges the people of God to flee from the city so that they will not participate in its sinfulness and thus share in her punishment. Though John has modelled this section after passages from Isa 48:20; 52:11 and Jer 50:8; 51:6, 9, 45 that invoked the people to leave the ancient Babylon because of God's impending destruction of that city this call seems to be more figurative than literal as in Hos 2:14, where the wife is being allured to the wilderness in order to reinstate her real status. As Eugene Boring has noted "The call to come out is not a matter of geographical relocation but of inner reorientation."⁶⁷ It is a call to resist conforming to those aspects of culture that are antithetical to Gospel values.

2.3. Great Harlot and the Wife of Harlotry, a Paradigm for a People of God in Crisis

The message of Hosea through his metaphoric representation of Israel, the people of God as a wanton woman and the message of the interlude in the book of Revelation in its metaphoric representation of a great city of God as a "great harlot" both in status of utter humiliation become significant today for us the members of the Church. The church with its diverse and rich forms of worship catered to the faithful as a strong spiritual support is facing trying times as it struggles to answer the questions from the society and from within. It is at the state of a painful admission the frustration it undergoes to see the kind of catastrophic news emerging out on a daily basis from the clergy, nuns and the administration who are supposed to be the guardians of virtuous life of its entire people. The metaphors "wife of harlotry" and "great harlot" reveal the story of the people of God at a time when worship became mere religious practices devoid of religious values. If Hosea and the author of the book of Revelation visualized the crisis of their time as caused by religious apostasy, world of lust, seduction and the allurements of all that appeals to the flesh, what we witness in our era is not so different. What happens across the globe is excessive religious happenings and dearth of spiritual experiences. In other words, interiority that opens the hearts of humanity to embrace the whole world in compassion and genuine care is sacrificed at the altar of empty

⁶⁷M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, Louisville: John Knox, 1989, 189.

religious practices that have no resource other than to make people to compete with one another at the cost of even waging war against nations and use weapons that has the capacity not only to extinct humanity and even to endanger our ecosystem. In such an alarming phase, how can Church the largest visible body of the people of God emerge as a source of hope? The prophet and the author of Revelation used the imagery of a wanton woman to represent the people of God in crisis. What the Church lacks today is witness value. The very principle on which the Church is born and existed – the ‘Sacrificial Love’ – is being corrupted to excessive institutionalism and its related vices. What we need is an acceptance and acknowledgement of what had thus far been and submit to the mercy of God with humility like the Gomer in Hosea, “I will go back to my first husband.” A genuine return to the purpose of origin can alone bring about a restoration which is the message of Hosea, Revelation and the entire Bible. Therefore, the study of the metaphors, “wife of harlotry” and “great harlot” leads us to delve deep into the mystery of our existence as people of God.

2.3.1. *People of God*⁶⁸ in the Past

In a cursory look at the history of the Church, we begin to see that it was centred on a fellowship meal in memory of Jesus’ last Supper with his disciples. However, gradually it evolved as a ritual meal and finally as the sacrament in the church. The characteristic features that united the early Church community together were: apostles’ teaching (*Didache*), fellowship (*Koinonia*), service (*Diakonia*), breaking of the bread and prayers. *Koinonia* is understood as Eucharistic fellowship gatherings, where the believers continued to celebrate the final meal of Jesus in memory of him.⁶⁹ *Philanthropia* in *Diakonia*, love in practice became a mark of distinction for the early Christian community. In contrast to the non-Christian world, they unveiled the boundaries and broke down the racial and ethnic forces, proclaiming, “There is neither Jew, nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, but all are one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:38). This philanthropic *diakonia* got its inspiration from the teaching (Mt 25:31-46) and life of Jesus, the master who became human “not to be served but to serve

⁶⁸I use the term, “people of God” in this part of the paper with a particular significance to Church.

⁶⁹The Eucharist or Lord’s Supper was celebrated in the beginning as a meal. Richard McBrien, *Catholicism*, London: Bloomsbury, 1994, 823.

and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mk 10:45). The Acts of the Apostles mentions several times the activity of 'the breaking of bread' that signified the Eucharistic fellowship in the apostolic community (Acts 2:42, 2:46, 20:7). In the 1 Corinthians, Paul speaks of "bread which we break is a communion in the body of Christ" (1 Cor 10:16). Therefore, the term "breaking of bread" emphasizes the element of sharing. The apostolic community saw the breaking of the bread as a symbol of the unity Christ had in mind in bringing the faithful together.⁷⁰

2.3.2. *People of God at Present*

The Church as of now is passing through a period of crisis due to a plethora of reasons. Abuse of power, sexual abuse, sacramental violations and economic scandals that do not meet with clear corrective measures have created lack of love and commitment among the faithful especially the youth towards church activities. Pope Francis in his Letter to the People of God says, "with shame and repentance, we acknowledge as an ecclesial community that we were not where we should have been, that we did not act in a timely manner, realizing the magnitude and the gravity of the damage done to so many lives. We showed no care for the little ones; we abandoned them."⁷¹ To counteract the "culture of abuse," Pope invokes the people of God to promote a "culture of care"⁷² that can generate resources attuned to the Gospel. The message of the Gospel was prophetic proclamation of God's compassion for the weak and the victimized. Over the years, the Church came to focus on a false sense of security that prompted the leaders of the Church to safeguard its name by pushing under the carpet the crimes that needed serious corrective measures. It has been the inaction of those who could have acted, indifference of those who should have known better, the silence of the voice of justice when it mattered most, that has made it possible for evil to triumph.

2.3.3. *People of God to be*

Over the centuries the church has settled into a rigid and formal authority structure. There is a glaring discrepancy between the

⁷⁰Werner Alert, *Eucharist and Church Fellowship in the First Four Centuries*, London: Concordia Publishing House, 1966, 24.

⁷¹Pope Francis, "Letter of His Holiness Pope Francis to the People of God," http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2018/documents/papa-francesco_20180820_lettera-popolo-didio.html, accessed on 22-11-2018.

⁷²Pope Francis, "Letter of His Holiness Pope Francis to the People of God."

highly institutionalized church structure on the one hand and the propensity of people toward spirituality on the other, leading many people to abandon the Church. What the Church needs today is not palatial edifices, rather authentic spiritual leaders who are animated by the values of Christ. According to Pope Francis, the parish is “the church living in the midst of the homes of her sons and daughters.”⁷³ It is the presence of the Church in a given territory, an environment for hearing God’s word, for growth in the Christian life, for dialogue, proclamation, charitable outreach, worship and celebration.⁷⁴ This dream of our Pontiff will become a reality when we the Church move from the institutionalized Church which is centered around the material structure and clericalism to a decentralized Church that reveals more and more of its visibility among the people who are united in prayer and charitable outreach.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to undertake a parallel study of the representation of harlot in the two books of the Bible, namely, Hosea and Revelation. Specifically, the analysis was meant to set it as a paradigm for a people of God in crisis. Hosean representation of the people of Israel as a wife of harlotry and the metaphoric representation of the great harlot in the book of Revelation provide us the biblical view of a people of God in crisis. The first part of the study initiated a connection between Hosea 2 and Revelation 17-18. Contrasting representation of women in Revelation found a parallel in the book of Hosea. Whoring mother who represented Israel and the Mother Yahweh who portrayed the divine motherhood indicated the two opposite characteristics in Hosea which has a telling influence for the people of God in crisis. In the same way the book of Revelation too portrayed the women of opposite traits, namely, celestial mother and the great harlot to present the dichotomy of human existence. The study found that both books have certain similarity of expressions in presenting the wanton woman, namely, “the woman who played the harlot,” “the woman in the wilderness,” and “the stripped woman.” After having made the connection between the two books, a theological exploration of the harlot imagery brought about the orientation of the paper leading to

⁷³Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Trivandrum: Carmel International Publishing House, 2013, 30.

⁷⁴Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 30.

establish the imagery of the wife of harlotry in Hosea and the great harlot in Revelation as a paradigm for a people of God in crisis. The message of both the books point to the need for a reorientation from the part of people of God who face crisis in life. It is in a way to acquire courage to uncover those false and superfluous certainties around which the priorities have been constructed thus far and get immune to uncertainties and insecurities that will place the Church to the purpose of its origin.