

Γυνή as a Keyword for the Theological Link between Jn 2:3-4; 19:26-27 and Rev 12:1-6

An Inter-textual Study in the light of Gen 3:15, with a Mariological Approach

DENIS S. KULANDAISAMY, OSM

The Fourth Gospel and the Book of Revelation have always kindled the interest of the Biblical scholars because of their deeply theological and symbolic characteristics. Among various Johannine themes studied by many scholars, the mariological aspect of the Johannine writings has also been the object of much study in the recent past.¹

In the Fourth Gospel, whenever the Evangelist mentions Jesus's mother, he never calls her by name. He always uses the title 'Mother of Jesus' (cf. Jn 2:1,3,5,12; 19:26). There is a specific reason why he prefers this expression to her name. We will explain this in a detailed manner in the third part of this article. In the Book of Revelation, there is no explicit mention about the 'Mother of Jesus'. But most scholars are convinced that the 'woman' of Rev 12 is a symbol of Mary, the Mother of Jesus. It is also to be noted that there is no consensus among the scholars whether the

¹ Some examples of Bibliography on this theme: J. A. FITZMYER - R. H. FULLER, *The Mother of Jesus in the Gospel of John*, in R. E. BROWN et ALII (ed.), *Mary in the New Testament*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia 1978, p. 179-218; D. S. KULANDAISAMY, *The first 'Sign' of Jesus at the wedding at Cana. An Exegetical Study of the Function and Meaning of John 2:1-12*, in *Marianum* 68 (2006) 17-11; J. MCHUGH, *The Mother of Jesus in the New Testament*, Doubleday, Garden City, New York 1975; P. PERKINS, *Mary in Johannine Traditions*, in D. DONNELLY (ed.), *Mary, Woman of Nazareth. Biblical & Theological Perspectives*, Paulist Press, Mahwah NY 1989, p. 109-122; A. SERRA, *Le nozze di Cana (Gv 2.1-12): incidenze cristologico-mariane del primo 'segno' di Gesù*, *Messaggero*, Padova 2009; ID, *Maria presso la croce. Solo Addolorata?: Verso una rilettura dei contenuti di Giovanni 19, 25-27*, *Messaggero*, Padova 2011; U. VANNI, *Dalla maternità di Maria alla maternità della Chiesa. Un'ipotesi di evoluzione da Gv 2, 3-4 e 19, 26-27 ad Ap 12, 1-6*, in *Rassegna di Teologia* 26/1 (1985) 19-47.

'woman' of Rev 12 refers to the 'Church' or to 'Mary' or to both. In this article, we will try to present the various interpretations of the 'woman' of Johannine writings (cf. Jn 2:3-4; 19:25-27; Rev 12:1-6).

In interpreting the symbolic and theological meanings of the term "woman", we will use the historical critical method recommended by the Pontifical Biblical Commission.² We will try to bring out the mariological meaning of the term 'woman' in the light of Gen 3:15. Given the nature of our exegetico-theological study, we will follow the synchronic approach rather than the diachronic approach. I consider the inter-textual approach of our interpretative method as a positive element of this article. I don't claim this article to be an exhaustive work or free from limitations. For example: having to exegetically analyze and theologically explain four complicated and difficult passages (Gen 3:15; Jn 2:3-4; Jn 19:24-27 and Rev 12:1-6) restricting this article to a limited number of pages, we are not able to do justice and to give sufficient space for all the various elements of the exegesis of the biblical passages that we have chosen for our study. In the exegetical parts, we have not tried to interpret these passages word by word or verse by verse in a complete manner.

This article is divided into five parts. In the first part, we will clarify some preliminary questions regarding the continuity between the Fourth Gospel and the Book of Revelation and will also try to explain why we are going to interpret the above-mentioned Johannine texts in the light of Gen 3:15. The second part will be dedicated to the exegesis of Gen 3:15. The third part will explain the exegesis of Jn 2:3-4 and Jn 19:26-27. In the fourth part, we will present an exegetical analysis of Rev 12:1-6,13-18. The fifth part will be dedicated to the mariological meaning of the term *γυνή* in the light of Gen 3:15. Then, we will also try to give a summary of the concluding remarks of this paper.

I. PRELIMINARY REMARKS

Before getting into the core of our study, we want to clarify some preliminary questions and presuppositions. We will begin our work with a presupposition that the Gospel of John and the Book of Revelation are not

² Cf. PONTIFICAL BIBLICAL COMMISSION, *Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, Pauline, Boston MA, 1993, p. 35-42.

two isolated or independent works but that there is a theological continuity, although their literary genres are different. This continuity of theological thought can be understood from the common lexical usage of some theological terms. One of those terms is the word γυνή in Jn 2:3-4; 19:26-27 and Rev 12:1-6. Another point that we want to clarify at the very outset of this work is the reason why we want to interpret these Johannine texts (Jn 2:3-4; 19:25-27 and Rev 12:1-6) in the light of Gen 3:15.

1.1. CONTINUITY BETWEEN THE FOURTH GOSPEL AND THE BOOK OF REVELATION?

Attentively reading the Fourth Gospel and the Book of Revelation, one can find the close connection that exists between them from various points of view. The Fourth Gospel has a contemplative nature of narrating the life of Jesus whereas the Book of Revelation has a direct contact with the history of the Johannine Community of the early Church. Moreover, they don't belong to the same type of 'literary genre'. And yet they both have many theological features in common. The biblical scholars call this relationship as a kind of 'dynamic continuity' between these two blocks of Johannine writings.³

³ The relationship between these two set of writings have been the object of study, especially in the last three decades. E. Peretto provides us with a number of bibliographic evidences in favour of this argument as follows: "Cf. J. W. TÄGER, *Johannesapokalypse und Johannischer Kreis*. Versuch einer traditions-geschichten Ortsbestimmung an Paradigma der Lebenswasserthematik (Beiheft zur Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentwissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche, 51) Töpelmann, Berlin 1989, p. XI-236, dopo la rassegna delle ricerche sull'Apocalisse sulla sua relazione con gli scritti giovannei, analizza i detti dell'«acqua della vita» (Apoc 7, 16-17; 21, 6; 22, 1. 17) e le immagini dell'«acqua viva» (Giov 4, 10. 13-14; 7, 37-39) e conclude che l'Apocalisse mostra tracce vistose dell'influsso del quarto Vangelo e ritiene i detti dell'Apocalisse rimaneggiamenti dei testi giovannei e ne discute i rispettivi motivi. A. FEUILLET, *Le festin des noces de l'agneau et ses anticipations*, in *Esprit et Vie* 97 (1987) 353-362. Alcuni recenti studi di U. VANNI sono condotti alla luce del criterio della continuità dinamica tra i tre gruppi giovannei, cf. *Dalla venuta dell'«ora» alla venuta di Cristo. La dimensione storico-cristologica dell'escatologia nell'Apocalisse*, in *Studia Missionalia* 32 (1983) 309-343; ID., *Regno «non di questo mondo», ma «regno del mondo». Il regno di Cristo dal IV Vangelo di Cristo all'Apocalisse*, *ibid.* 33 (1984) 326-358. ID., *Dalla maternità di Maria alla maternità della Chiesa. Un'ipotesi d'evoluzione da Giov 2, 3-4 e 19, 26-27 ad Ap 12, 1-6*, in *Rassegna di Teologia* 26 (1985) 28-47. Questi tre studi sono stati ripresi in ID., *L'Apocalisse. Ermeneutica, esegesi, teologia*. Dehoniane, Bologna 1988, p. 279-368; S. C. SMALLEY, *John's Revelation and John's Community*, in *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 69 (1987) 549-571; E.

The main aim of this study is not to prove this internal dynamic relationship between these two writings (John's Gospel and the Book of Revelation), but rather we take it for granted that there is a strong evolutionary link between them. Regarding this point, U. Vanni writes: "tra il quarto Vangelo e l'Apocalisse c'è una continuità dinamica, sotto il segno di un'evoluzione: i valori teologici, visti più contemplativamente e quasi in assoluto nel quarto Vangelo, vengono posti, nell'Apocalisse, a contatto diretto con la storia, nell'intento di evidenziare il significato religioso profondo che essa contiene".⁴

In the same line of thought, we too presume this premise and will carry out our work. Among so many vocabularies that are common in these two writings, we want to make an analysis on the Johannine use of the word *γυνή* in Jn 2:3-4; 19:26-27 and Rev 12:1-6. We will try to demonstrate how this term refers to Mary in all these three passages and we will also present the theological meaning of the word 'woman' in these writings. We will interpret these passages from mariological point of view in the light of Gen 3:15.

1.2. WHY INTERPRET IN THE LIGHT OF GEN 3:15?

The first reason why we want to interpret these Johannine texts in the light of Gen 3:15 is based on the 'principle unity of the whole Scripture'. St Augustine says: "The New Testament lies hidden in the Old and the Old Testament is unveiled in the New".⁵ This inter-testament or inter-textual element of interpretation in the field of Biblical Mariology is highly

DELEBECQUE, *Evangelo de Jean. Texte traduit et annoté*, Cahiers de la Revue Biblique, 23, Paris 1987; R. T. FORTNA, *The Fourth Gospel and its Predecessor. From Narrative Source to Present Gospel*, Philadelphia 1988; X. LÉON-DUFOUR, *Lecture de l'évangile selon Jean*, I, Chapitres 1-4, Paris 1988; G. R. BEASLEY-MURRAY, *John* (Word Biblical Commentary, 36), Waco, TX 1987; E. PERETTO, *La voce «Donna» segno di continuità dinamica tra Giovanni 2, 3-4; 19, 26-27 e Apocalisse 12, 1-6*, in I. M. CALABUIG (a cura di), *Virgo Liber Verbi. Miscellanea di Studi in onore di p. Giuseppe M. Besutti*, Marianum, Roma 1991, p. 91, nota 1.

⁴ U. VANNI, "Dalla maternità di Maria alla maternità della Chiesa. Un'ipotesi di evoluzione da Gv 2, 3-4 e 19, 26-27 ad Ap 12, 1-6", in ID., *L'Apocalisse. Ermeneutica, esegesi, teologia*, Dehoniane, Roma 1991², p. 333.

⁵ ST. AUGUSTINE, *Quaest. in Hept.* 2,73: CSEL 28, III, 3, p. 141; Cf. VATICAN COUNCIL II, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, no. 16, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 58 (1966) 825.

recommended by the Pontifical International Marian Academy in the following words: "In Mariology, the principle regarding «the unity of the whole Scripture» has fruitful applications: As *one book*, it has *one* author, *one* people to whom it prefigures. This principle serves to unite, not in any arbitrary way, the woman of Genesis 3:15 with the woman of John 2:5 and 19:26 and, finally, with the woman of the Book of Revelation 12:1".⁶

The second reason is as follows: it is accepted by almost all the biblical scholars that the Johannine writings (especially the Fourth Gospel and the Book of Revelation) have a notable Old Testament background. R. E. Brown says: "Rev xii is unquestionably set against the background of Gen iii; [...] (there are) many echoes of the early chapters of Genesis in John i-ii, A background in Genesis for xix 25-27 is more difficult to discern but certainly the death of Jesus is the framework of the great struggle with Satan foretold in Gen iii. [...] Rev xii 17 mentions the woman's other offspring against whom the dragon makes war; thus the seed of the woman (Gen iii 15) is not only the Messiah, but includes a wider group, the Christians".⁷ Noting such a theological link between these Johannine texts and Gen 3:15, we want to apply this criterion of inter-textual approach in this study.

II. EXEGESIS OF GEN 3:15

This text is problematic from the point of view of its textual variants (cf. MT, LXX, Vulgate, Palestinian Targumic Text in Aramaic) and the biblical scholars differ in their hermeneutical method in interpreting this text.⁸ For this reason, we will present the various versions of this verse. After seeing its context, we will exegetically analyze it and then explain the theological meaning of the word 'woman' in this text.

⁶ PONTIFICAL INTERNATIONAL MARIAN ACADEMY, *The Mother of the Lord. Memory, Presence, Hope* (Translated by Thomas A. Thompson), New York 2007, no. 24, p. 12-13.

⁷ R. E. BROWN, *The Gospel according to John. A Commentary* (i-xii), Anchor Bible 29, Doubleday, New York 1966, p. 109.

⁸ For the hermeneutical problems in the interpretation of Gen 3:15, Cf. T. GALLUS, *Die «Frau» in Gen 3,15*, Carinthia, Klagenfurt 1979, p. 109-110.

2.1. VARIOUS VERSIONS OF THE TEXT

MT:

- a) אִיבָה אֲשִׁית
- b) בִּינֶה וּבֵין הָאִשָּׁה
- c) וּבֵין זֶרַעַךְ וּבֵין זֶרַעָהּ
- d) הוּא יִשׁוּפֶךָ רֹאשׁ
- e) וְאַתָּה תִּשׁוּפֶנּוּ עֲקֵב

LXX:

- a) καὶ ἔχθραν θήσω
- b) ἀνὰ μέσον σου καὶ ἀνὰ μέσον τῆς γυναικὸς
- c) καὶ ἀνὰ μέσον τοῦ σπέρματός σου καὶ ἀνὰ μέσον τοῦ σπέρματος αὐτῆς
- d) αὐτός σου τηρήσει κεφαλὴν
- e) καὶ σὺ τηρήσεις αὐτοῦ πτέρναν.

Vulgate:

- a) Inimicitias ponam
- b) inter te et mulierem
- c) et semen tuum et semen illius
- d) ipsa conteret caput tuum
- e) et tu insidiaberis calcaneo eius.

New Jerusalem Bible:

- a) I shall put enmity
- b) between you and the woman,
- c) and between your offspring and hers;
- d) it will bruise your head
- e) and you will strike its heel.

CEI (2008):

- a) Io porrò inimicizia
- b) fra te e la donna,
- c) fra la tua stirpe e la sua stirpe:
- d) questa ti schiaccerà la testa
- e) e tu le insidierai il calcagno.

2.2. SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THESE VERSIONS:⁹

Gen 3:15 is a curse against the serpent. It shows a very strong enmity put by God between the serpent and the offspring of the woman. We want to make two important observations in the texts of these versions: 1) the translation problem of the pronoun הוּא; 2) the problem with the verb שָׂרָה.

2.2.1. Is הוּא to be translated – he or they or it? Is it singular or plural?

The personal pronoun הוּא used in d) is in the masculine singular form. Thus it refers to the masculine noun זָרַע in c), whereas in the LXX, the pronoun (αὐτός) is masculine but it refers to the neutral noun *sperma*. LXX presents the descendant of the woman with a masculine pronoun, because the LXX translators saw this as a messianic prophecy. Regarding this point, P. Joseph Titus observes three kinds of opinions of various scholars, as follows:

1. It has been customary to state that the woman's seed in Gen 3:15 refers to her posterity in general. That is to say, the word זָרַע is taken as a collective, and the pronoun הוּא is a masculine singular in order to match its antecedent, and it is better rendered "it" or even "they."
2. Some interpreters understand הוּא along with זָרַע as referring to a single individual with a messianic import. [...]
3. There has also been a tendency to interpret it as referring to a single individual person without messianic import. For example, we find this interpretation already in LXX: the Greek ὁσέμματος renders Hebrew זָרַע, and αὐτός ('he,' masculine) renders Hebrew הוּא. Thus the LXX translators saw this as a prophecy of a specific individual.¹⁰

We are of the opinion that it should be translated as a singular masculine noun (he) with a messianic import. The LXX already interpreted this verse with the messianic meaning. Here the pronoun αὐτός means *anthropos* which is masculine.

⁹ For a detailed linguistic analysis and critical study on the different versions of this verse, Cf. V. COTTINI, «Io porrò inimicitia...» (Gen 3,15): *Carica profetica di un versetto difficile*, in G. A. FACCIOLI (a cura di), *La donna vestita di sole e il drago rosso* (Ap. 12, 1.3), Messaggero, Padova 2007, p. 13-20.

¹⁰ P.J. TITUS, *The Second Story of Creation (Gen 2:4-3:24). A Prologue to the Concept of Enneateuch?*, Peter Lang, Frankfurt am Main 2011, p. 373.

Some scholars such as J. Collins interpret **זרע** as referring to an individual person, but without a messianic import.¹¹ According to J. Collins, "when a writer wishes to indicate that it denotes a specific descendant, it appears with singular verb inflections, adjectives, and pronouns (Gen 3:15; 4:25; 2 Sam 7:12-15; Isa 41:8). On this basis the 'seed of the woman' in Gen 3:15 must be understood as referring to a single individual and not numerous descendants".¹²

V. Cottini, referring to the Palestinian Targum, says that **זרע** the word **αὐτός** has to be understood in a collective sense but contextually given an individual interpretation with messianic import.¹³ The following is the Targumic text we are referring to:

I will place enmities between thee and the woman, between the descendants of your children and her children, and it will come about that when the woman's children observe the precepts of the Torah, they will take aim and crush your head. Whenever, however, they forgot the precepts of the Torah, you will be the one who lays the snares and bites their heels. Nevertheless, there is a remedy for them, while for you there is none. They will find a remedy (or cure) for the heel in the time of the Messiah.¹⁴

The Latin Vulgate uses *ipsa* (fem. singular pronoun) as the acting subject. So, it refers to the woman. In the Latin Vulgate, the protagonists are the serpent and the woman. And the verb *ponam* in a) used in the future tense indicates the eschatological meaning of the verse. Thus, the Vulgate is very clearly in favour of the Marian interpretation of Gen 3:15.¹⁵

2.2.2. *The problem with the verb שרף*

Another important observation is that the MT uses the same verb **שרף** in both d) and e), whereas the Latin Vulgate uses two different verbs: *con-*

¹¹ Cf. J. COLLINS, *A Syntactic note (Gen 3:15): Is the woman's seed singular or plural?*, in *Tyndale Bulletin* 48/1 (1997) 139-148.

¹² P. J. TITUS, *The Second Story of Creation*, cit., p. 373.

¹³ Cf. V. COTTINI, «Io porrò inimicitia...», cit., p. 18.

¹⁴ This is a text found in a recension of the Targum of the Pseudo-Jonathan, as cited in: B. BUBY, *Mary of Galilee*, II, (Woman of Israel - Daughter of Zion), Alba House, New York 1985, p. 32-33.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

teret [= to crush] in d) and *insidiaberis* [to lie in wait] in e). The CEI (2008) uses two different verbs in Italian: *schiaccerà* in d) and *insidierai* in e). Why this difference? If both the verbs were to be taken in the same meaning, the battle between the woman and the serpent would not indicate any victory to the woman and thus the serpent would not seem to be punished. But the use of two verbs used by the Latin Vulgate is a sign that the serpent is punished and the woman will win over it. So, the victory belongs to her.

Comparing various versions of the text of Gen 3:15, we understand that the possibility for Marian interpretation of this text is reasonable and legitimate. V. Cottini observes that the translation of the Hebrew Text was carried out with some theological motivations and thus there is a circular movement between the interpretation and the translation. Here we quote his words:

Il passaggio dal testo masoretico alle versioni antiche testimonia uno slittamento, un ri-orientamento dei significati. Visibile in parte già nella versione greca dei LXX, diventa evidentissimo nella versione latina *vulgata*: il verbo iniziale coniugato al futuro orienta verso l'*escaton*; il pronome maschile (*autos*) del greco facilita l'interpretazione individuale della discendenza della donna; il pronome femminile (*ipsa*) del latino fissa l'attenzione su una personalità femminile. Le riletture dei Padri greci e dei Padri latini prima e le interpretazioni medievali poi chiuderanno il cerchio dando un nome alle persone attese, identificandole rispettivamente con Gesù e con Maria. La lettura esegetica ha mostrato che i testi adoperati dalle tradizioni ebraiche e cristiane lungo i secoli risultano molto importanti. Si crea un rapporto circolare tra interpretazione e traduzione: l'interpretazione da parte di un autore o di una comunità orienta la traduzione e la traduzione, a sua volta, orienta e fissa l'interpretazione.¹⁶

2.3. THE CONTEXT AND INTERPRETATION OF GEN 3:15

Like any other biblical passage, this verse too has to be interpreted in its context. Gen 1-11 can be considered as its proximate context and Gen 2-3 as its immediate context. Let us closely look at Gen 3:15 in its immediate context, where God creates man and woman in chapter 2. They are in close relationship with God, the creator. In Chapter 3, the serpent and woman come onto the scene. The serpent tempts the woman to eat the forbidden fruit and eventually she falls into sin and also leads Adam to sin. After their falling into sin, God speaks to Adam and Eve and makes them

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

realize the gravity of their disobedience. He punishes them but does not curse them. He then curses the serpent. It is in this context that v.15 of Gen 3 has to be understood and interpreted. As the evil came into this world by the sin of Eve, God prophesizes the coming of redemption through another Woman's descendant (Gen 3:15).

Regarding the Literary Genre, L. Mazzinghi writes that Gen 1-11 belongs to the category of writings that can be called *Metahistorical Etiology*. He defines this term in the following words:

Una interpretazione teologica della storia, un tentativo di ricostruire la genesi della presente situazione dell'uomo a partire dall'esperienza concreta della vita. Nella definizione non deve sfuggire la qualifica di 'metastorica': l'analisi di Gen 1-11 non prescinde infatti dalla storia ma la coglie nella sua struttura fondante, analogicamente al procedimento metafisico. [...] il concetto di 'eziologia metastorica' rimanda infatti all'importanza della storia: la 'metastoria' non è al di là della storia ma riguarda ogni momento della storia, in quanto ciò che viene narrato è il fondamento stesso della storia.¹⁷

This correct understanding of its Literary Genre helps us to see that the author of the book of Genesis, by means of this narration, communicates to us an important message: the fall of man is not the end of human history, but God promises to rectify it. The same hope for salvation seems to have its echo in Rom 16:20: "the God of peace will quickly crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you".

In the last part of this article, we will explain the connection between this verse and the Johannine passages: Jn 2:3-4; 19:25-27 and Rev 12:1-6.

III. THE TERM ΓΥΝΗ, IN THE FOURTH GOSPEL

In the Fourth Gospel, the term γυνή appears in the following verses: Jn 2:4; 4:7, 9 (twice), 11, 15, 17, 19, 21, 25, 27, 28, 39, 42; 8:3, 4, 9, 10; 16:21; 19:26; 20:13, 15. But we are going to consider only the passages where the word γυνή refers to Mary, the Mother of Jesus (Jn 2:1-12 and Jn 19:25-27). We will also refer to the pregnant woman suffering from

¹⁷ L. MAZZINGHI, *Quale fondamento biblico per il «peccato originale»? Un bilancio ermeneutico: l'Antico Testamento*, in I. SANNA (a cura di), *Questioni sul peccato originale*, Messaggero, Padova 1996, 69-70, cited in V. COTTINI, «Io porrò inimicizia...», cit., p. 24.

labour pain, when we will interpret the 'woman' of *Rev* 12:2, who is crying with pain. Here in this part, we will only see the interpretation of *Jn* 2:3-4 and *Jn* 19:25-27.

3.1. INTERPRETATION OF *Jn* 2:3-4¹⁸

The Cana episode has no parallels in any other gospel. At very first glance the Cana narrative might seem to be a very simple story to any reader but when one enters into the text to look for its meaning, one realizes that it is not so.

The narrative of the changing of water into wine at the wedding at Cana serves as a conclusion to the vocation of the first disciples, Philip and Nathanael (*Jn* 1:43-51), and also as an opening section of the latter part which extends up to the healing of the official's son (*Jn* 4:46-54). What is mentioned in *Jn* 1:51 is actualized in the first sign of Jesus where He is glorified (cf. *Jn* 1:12).

This narrative is also chronologically connected to the preceding and the following units of the Gospel. The events are arranged in a clear chronological framework. The phrase τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ τρίτῃ (*Jn* 2:1) is chronologically connected with Τῇ ἐπαύριον in *Jn* 1:43 (see also 1:29,35). And the spatial indicator 'Galilee' in *Jn* 2:1 links this event with the preceding event (cf. *Jn* 1:43). This narrative of changing water into wine as the first sign is also connected with *Jn* 17:1 where Jesus prays to the Father "My hour has come".

Commentators give a variety of divisions of the text, each one following a different literary criterion. We give a division based on 'dramatis personae' and the dramatic situations.

1. The setup (vv. 1-3a)
2. Dialogue between Jesus and his mother (vv. 3b-4)
3. The reaction of the mother of Jesus (v. 5)
4. Jesus and the servants (vv. 6-8)
5. The steward and the bridegroom (vv. 9-10)
6. Conclusion of the narrative (vv. 11-12).

¹⁸ Here I am reproducing a few paragraphs – with some modifications – from my article: *The first Sign of Jesus at the Wedding at Cana. An Exegetical Study of the Function and Meaning of John 2:1-12*, in *Marianum* 68 (2006) 17-116.

As our primary goal is to study the meaning of the term γυνή, we will limit ourselves to the second part of this episode (vv. 3b-4).

3b λέγει ἡ μήτηρ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ πρὸς αὐτόν,

Οἶνον οὐκ ἔχουσιν.

4 [καὶ] λέγει αὐτῇ ὁ Ἰησοῦς,

Τί ἐμοὶ καὶ σοί, γύναι; οὐπω ἔκει ἡ ὥρα μου.

It is a challenging task to translate these two verses, especially Jesus' response to his mother in the fourth verse.¹⁹ So, before we go into the

¹⁹ It is appropriate to present here the problems involved in the translation this verse. It is interesting to note that there has been a lot of disagreement among the scholars upon the translation of Τί ἐμοὶ καὶ σοί, γύναι; οὐπω ἔκει ἡ ὥρα μου. Most scholars, seeing the indicative mood of the verb ἔκει, prefer to render the translation as follows: 'My hour has not yet come'. But this contradicts the fact that Jesus acts positively to the request of his mother. In order to resolve this problem, some take these words of Jesus as a rhetorical question and translate: 'Has not my hour come?'. T. STRAMARE, in *Biblica et Orientalia* 44 (2002) 179-192, suggests that given the context, the correct translation would be: "Ciò che è mio è tuo. Donna, è giunta la mia ora!". Though this translation of T. Stramare ('È giunta la mia ora') seems to contradict the majority of the translations ('My hour has *not* yet come'), it is grammatically correct and also fits well in the context. E. J. GOODSPEED, *The Bible Translator* 3 (1952) 70-71, suggests that the word γύναι be left untranslated, because in his opinion there is no adequate English translation for γύναι. And he translates: "Do not try to direct me. It is not yet time for me to act". H. M. BUCK, in *Bible Translator* 7 (1956) 149-50 suggests that it be translated, "Madam, why is that our concern?".

Here is a list of a few different translations from various versions: Latin Vulgate: quid mihi et tibi est mulier?; Luther Unrevidierte (1545) (German): Weib, was habe ich mit dir zu schaffen?; King James Version (1611): Woman, what have I to do with thee?; Peshitta - James Murdock Translation (1852): What is [in common] to me and thee?; Young's Literal Translation (1862/1898): What to me and to thee, woman?; The Douay-Rheims American Edition (1899): Woman, what is that to me and to thee?; The New American Bible: Woman, how does your concern affect me?; Revised Standard Version (1951): O woman, what have you to do with me?; The Bible in Basic English (1949/64): Woman, this is not your business?; New King James Version (1982): Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me?; New International Version (1984) (US): Dear woman, why do you involve me?; Revidierte Lutherbibel (1984) (German): Was geht's dich an, Frau, was ich tue?; La Biblia de Las Americas (1986): Mujer, ¿qué nos va a ti y a mí en esto?; Reina-Valera Actualizada (1989): ¿Qué tiene que ver eso conmigo y contigo, mujer?; New American Standard Bible (1995): Woman, what does that have to do with us?; Spanish Reina-Valera Update (1995): ¿Qué tiene que ver esto con nosotros, mujer?; NVB San Paolo Edizione (1995) (Italian): Che vuoi da me, o donna?; French Bible en français courant (1997): Mère, est-ce à toi de me dire ce que j'ai à faire?; Münchener NT (1998) with Strong's: Was (ist zwischen) mir und dir, Frau?; English Standard Version (2001): Woman, what does this have to do with me?; New Living Translation: How does that concern you and me?; New Revised standard Version:

exegetical analysis, we want to clarify the translation of the expression: Τί ἐμοὶ καὶ σοί, γύναι; οὐπω ἤκει ἡ ὥρα μου. Having gone through a number of modern translations in various languages, we prefer the following translation: "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come".

The role of the mother of Jesus in these verses is very significant. So much has been commented over this dialogue between Jesus and Mary. The narrator does not give any explicit details about Mary's concern with the lack of wine but he makes his readers understand the mediating role of Mary. It is evident that the narrator wishes to give a prominent and active role to Mary.

Does Mary ask her son for a miracle? or does she simply report to her son about the problem? Some exegetes say that Mary simply reports to her son about the desperate situation and does not seem to directly and openly ask Jesus to perform a miracle. Others say that Jesus' refusal to become involved gives us a clue that something was being asked of him by his mother. That means Mary is reporting this fact hoping that Jesus would intervene with some miraculous act to solve the problem.²⁰ The initiative that Mary takes here calls for our careful attention. It is at the request of his mother that Jesus begins to perform the first of the signs. T. Okure comments: "She serves as a midwife who helps a reluctant expectant mother to push and give birth. Her words in v. 3 are a most powerful prayer offered by way of information".²¹ Jesus' reply to Mary (v. 4) has been very much discussed by many exegetes. Though the word γύναι gives us an impression that the way Jesus addresses his mother sounds strange, "it is not a rebuke, nor an impolite form, nor an indication of a lack of

Woman, what concern is that to you and to me?; For further details regarding the translation of this verse, see C. P. CEROKE, *The problem of Ambiguity in John 2.4*, in *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 21 (1959) 316-340; J. MICHL, *Bemerkungen zu Jo. 2.4*, in *Biblica* 36 (1955) 492-509; J. C. QUIRANT, *Las Bodas de Caná: La respuesta de Cristo e su Madre: Jn 2.4*, in *Marianum* 20 (1958) 157-58; J. N. RHODES, *What do you want from me? (John 2.4)*, in *Bible Translator* 52 (2001) 445-447; A. VANHOYE, *Interrogation johannique et exégèse de Cana (Jn 2,4)*, in *Biblica* 55 (1974) 157-167; E. ZOLLI, *Quid mihi et tibi, mulier?* in *Marianum* 8 (1946) 3-15. Having presented here a number of translations, we prefer the following one: "Woman, what concern is that to me and to you? My hour has not yet come".

²⁰ R. E. BROWN, *The Gospel According to St. John*, I, cit., p. 98-99, note 3.

²¹ T. OKURE, *John*, International Critical Commentary, edited by W.R. Farmer et al., Collegeville (Minnesota) 1998, p. 1464.

affection. It was Jesus' normal, polite way of addressing women".²² The expression $\tau\acute{\iota}\ \epsilon\mu\omicron\iota\ \kappa\alpha\iota\ \sigma\omicron\iota$ is a semitism. Exegetes have very diverse opinions regarding the meaning of this idiomatic expression.²³

In the Old Testament, the Hebrew expression וְלִי וְלָךְ appears in Judg 11:2, 2 Chron 35:21, 1 Kings 17:18, 2 Kings 3:13, Hos 14:8. In some contexts this implies hostility and in other contexts it implies simple disengagement. In the New Testament usage it also has both these meanings (cf. Mt 8:29). Most exegetes suggest that this expression does not express any hostility towards Mary but Jesus is just replying in another level referring to his mission. According to I. de la Potterie, "Gesù lascia intendere che egli si pone su un piano diverso da quello di Maria e in un'altra prospettiva: questa pensa ancora al vino della festa, Gesù pensa ormai alla sua missione messianica che inizia. Quindi tra loro c'è una certa incomprensione, un equivoco".²⁴

The second part of v. 4 is closely connected to the first part. Two problems arise here. First: Is the expression $\text{o}\tilde{\upsilon}\pi\omega\ \eta\kappa\epsilon\iota\ \eta\ \omega\tilde{\rho}\alpha\ \mu\omicron\upsilon$ to be taken as a statement or as a rhetorical question? Second: What does Jesus mean by $\eta\ \omega\tilde{\rho}\alpha\ \mu\omicron\upsilon$? Most exegetes take it as a negative statement. But the discussion over this point is not yet resolved. There is a lot of disagreement among the scholars in deciding whether it is a statement or an interrogative. In our exegesis, we consider it as a statement. That is why we prefer the following translation: "My hour has not yet come".

What is the meaning of this phrase 'my hour has not yet come'? It is quite clear that these words of Jesus point to the process of Jesus' glorification. The narrator presents these words of Jesus to prepare his readers to understand the link between the revelation of his glory (v. 11) and the hour of Jesus' exaltation on the cross and his return to the Father (cf. Jn 12:23; 13:31ff). The Cana narrative is not just a single event from theolo-

²² R. E. BROWN, *The Gospel According to St. John*, I, cit., p. 99, note 4. The following are the references presented by R. E. Brown: Mt 15:28; Lk 13:12; Jn 4:21, 8,10; 20:13.

²³ B. Olsson presents this problem in a very detailed manner with a lot of references and examples. For more details, cf. B. OLSSON, *Structure and Meaning in the Fourth Gospel. A Text-linguistic Analysis of John 2:1-11 and 4:1-42*, Coniectanea Biblica, New Testament Series 6, Lund 1974, p. 36-40.

²⁴ I. DE LA POTTERIE, *La madre di Gesù e il mistero di Cana*, in *Civiltà Cattolica* 130 (1979) 430.

gical point of view, but has strong links with some other Johannine passages. This theological connection is explained by J. Ramsey Michaels in the following words:

A sense of "already, but not yet" pervades the narrative. Jesus displays his glory and his disciples come to faith, but only after a clear signal to the reader that this revelation is provisional and not the final (v. 4). The proper time for Jesus' glorification" and his death (cf. 12:23; 13:31; 17:1, 5), and that time has not yet come. The miracle at Cana is a display of glory ahead of time, a display that typifies his Galilean ministry as a whole and specifically fulfills his promise to Nathanael. The juxtaposition of 1:19-51 and 2:1-11 in the text of John's Gospel allows each to interpret the other. Jesus is now "revealed to Israel" (1:31). But if the Cana narrative is the end of something – that is, the six-day sequence with its promise of glory – it is also a beginning. The first of his miraculous signs (v. 11) indicates that more will follow. [...] Jesus has said to his mother, *My hour has not yet come* (v. 4), and now, it appears, they are simply waiting.²⁵

His glory will be revealed on the cross. The Mother of Jesus will also be present there as she was present at the wedding at Cana. The role and meaning of the presence of the mother of Jesus will be explained later, while comparing this episode with the event of Calvary (Jn 19:25-27).

3.2. INTERPRETATION OF JN 19:25-27

25 Εἰστήκεισαν δὲ παρὰ τῷ σταυρῷ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ ἡ μήτηρ αὐτοῦ καὶ ἡ ἀδελφὴ τῆς μητρὸς αὐτοῦ, Μαρία ἡ τοῦ Κλωπᾶ καὶ Μαρία ἡ Μαγδαληνὴ. 26 Ἰησοῦς οὖν ἰδὼν τὴν μητέρα καὶ τὸν μαθητὴν παρεστῶτα ὃν ἠγάπα, λέγει τῇ μητρί· γύναι, ἴδε ὁ υἱός σου. 27 εἶτα λέγει τῷ μαθητῇ· ἴδε ἡ μήτηρ σου. καὶ ἀπ' ἐκείνης τῆς ὥρας ἔλαβεν ὁ μαθητὴς αὐτὴν εἰς τὰ ἴδια.

In this pericope, John presents the Mother of Jesus at the foot of the Cross. John's narration on the crucifixion (19:16-42) has a series of episodes. R.E. Brown says that this narration which can be divided into seven parts has a chiasmic structure. The episode where Mary stands at the foot of the cross (19:25-27) is at the center of the chiasmic structure.²⁶ We can present this structure as follows:

²⁵ J. RAMSEY MICHAELS, *John*, New International Biblical Commentary, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, Massachusetts 1989, p. 48.

²⁶ Cf. R. E. BROWN, *The Gospel According to St. John*, I, cit., p. 910-912.

Introduction (The crucifixion: 19:16b-18)

A Episode 1: Inscription: Jesus on the cross (19:19-22)

B Episode 2: Seamless tunic; dividing Jesus' clothes (19:23-24)

C *Episode 3: Jesus' mother and the Beloved Disciple* (19:25-27)

B' Episode 4: Jesus' thirst; handing over spirit (19:28-30)

A' Episode 5: Flow of blood and water (19:31-37)

Conclusion (The burial: 19:38-42).

As we see in the narrative structure, the pericope (19:25-27) is at the center of the important events of the 'hour' of Jesus. Jesus, hanging on the cross, is the protagonist of the scene. Next to Jesus, the mother of Jesus and the beloved disciple are given importance in this scene by the evangelist.

Jesus looks at his mother and his disciple before speaking to them. The verb (present participle referred to Jesus) ἰδὼν has a very deep theological meaning. Some exegetes observe a revelatory scheme in these two verses (19:26-27). John writes these words of Jesus hanging on the cross, following the same literary model of the other three passages (cf. 1:29; 1:35-36; 1:47).

This scene has a close connection with the Cana episode (Jn 2:1-12). They have a very strong theological link between them for the following reasons:

- a) In both the cases, Mother of Jesus is present. She is not called by her proper name ("Mary") but with the following titles: "Mother of Jesus" (2:1; 19:25) and "woman" (2:4; 19:26).
- b) The "hour of Jesus", which has not yet come at Cana (2:4) has now come at Calvary, where Jesus passes from this world to his Father (13:1; cf. 19:27b: "And from that hour..."). According to John, the 'hour' of Jesus refers to his Passion-Death-Resurrection.
- c) The wedding at Cana takes place on the 'third day' (cf. 2:1), which corresponds to the 'sixth day' of Jesus' ministry. In the same way, the event (Mary at the foot of the Cross) takes place on the 'sixth day' of the final week of eight days, in which all the events of Passion-Resurrection take place (cf. Jn 12:1; 18:28; 19:31; 20:1,19).²⁷

Another important element that we observe in this pericope is the literary style that the author of the Fourth Gospel uses in this narration. The author says that Jesus, seeing his mother and the disciple standing nearby,

²⁷ A. SERRA, *Maria a Cana e presso la Croce*, Serie Pastorale di Studio 2, Centro di Cultura Mariana, Roma 1991, p. 84.

whom he loved, said to his mother: "Woman, behold your son". And he said to the disciple: "Behold your mother" (1:26-27). Many scholars²⁸ say that John makes use of a 'Revelatory Structure' in this narration, as used in the other three passages.²⁹ In this literary formula, a prophet 'sees' (ὁράω or βλέπω) somebody and proclaims or reveals his identity introducing by using the word: ἴδε. In this pericope (Jn 1:26-27) too, John the Baptist uses the same revelatory formula. He first 'sees' Jesus and then 'reveals' his identity: "*Behold*, the lamb of God".

As in the event of wedding at Cana, here also Jesus calls his mother "woman". Jesus calling his mother "woman" in Jn 2:4 connects this verse (Jn 19:27) with the same theme of the "hour of Jesus". At the inaugural wedding of the Fourth Gospel, Mary received the same title of "woman" from her son and now at the fulfilling moment of his son's hour, Mary receives the same title of "woman" from her son. At this hour of his son's passion and death on the cross, Mary receives the fullest meaning of her identity as the "woman", a symbolic title given her by Jesus, which has a symbolic and a deep theological meaning.³⁰ The symbolism of 'woman' as found in (Jn 2:4 and Jn 19:27) can be studied in the light of Gen 3:15. The mother of Jesus who receives the title of 'woman' in the Gospel of John can be called the 'New Eve'.³¹

In this regard, A. Serra proposes an interesting interpretation of the theological connection between the Garden of Eden and the Calvary, as follows:

L'ombra di Eva si proietta in ciascuno dei quattro «giardini» [l'Eden, il Sinai, il Calvario, la Nuova Gerusalemme] assume un rilievo di spicco la figura della madre di Gesù, in quanto costituita da Gesù stesso madre universal dei credenti. In questo quadro di referenze, potremmo identificare meglio le proba-

²⁸ For example: A. VALENTINI, *Maria secondo le Scritture. Figlia di Sion e Madre del Signore*, Dehoniane, Bologna 2007, p. 318-319.

²⁹ Jn 1:29: "The next day, John saw (βλέπει) Jesus coming towards him and said, «look (ἴδε), there is the lamb of God ...»"; Jn 1:36: "John looked (εμβλέψας) towards him and said, «Behold (ἴδε), the Lamb of God»"; Jn 1:47: "When Jesus saw (εἶδεν) Nathanael coming he said of him «Behold (ἴδε), an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deception»".

³⁰ Cf. A. VALENTINI, *Maria secondo le Scritture*, p. 318.

³¹ For a detailed study of the title of "woman" (Jn 2:4 and 19:27) through the Eve-motif, cf. J. MCHUGH, *Mother of Jesus in the New Testament*, Darton Longman & Todd, London 1975, p. 361-387.

bili radici bibliche del tema «Eva-Maria» non solo a partire dalla scena dell'annunciazione, ma anche dalla presenza di Maria accanto alla croce. Anche per quanto concerne la figura di Eva si può ripetere che la protologia è annuncio profetico dell'escatologia. Ciò che u agli inizi con Eva, sarà ripreso e superato nei tempi ultimi, segnati dall'evento Cristo. Levando lo sguardo a questa donna, sposa-madre di tutti I viventi, il popolo di Dio sente vibrare in sè la nostalgia del primo amore, quando Dio camminava nell'Eden.³²

IV. THE GYNH OF REV 12:1-6

The book of revelation is divided into two parts (chapters 1-21, and then chapters 12-22). The 12th chapter is at the beginning of the second part of the Book. Thus, being at the center of the book, chapter 12 plays a vital role. There are three sections in the narrative of Rev 12:

- Vv. 1-6: Scene One in heaven, involving the woman, the dragon, and the woman's child.
- Vv. 7-12: Scene Two beginning in heaven but coming down to earth, involving Michael and the dragon.
- Vv. 13-17: Scene Three on earth, involving the dragon, the woman, and her offspring.³³

As we are interested in knowing the theological meaning of the word γυνή we will concentrate only on the first scene, the first six verses of the 12th chapter.

1Καὶ σημεῖον μέγα ὤφθη ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ, γυνὴ περιβεβλημένη τὸν ἥλιον, καὶ ἡ σελήνη ὑποκάτω τῶν ποδῶν αὐτῆς καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς κεφαλῆς αὐτῆς στέφανος ἀστέρων δώδεκα, 2 καὶ ἐν γαστρὶ ἔχουσα, ἔκραζεν ὠδίνουσα, καὶ βασανιζομένη τεκεῖν. 3 καὶ ὤφθη ἄλλο σημεῖον ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ, καὶ ἰδοὺ δράκων μέγας πυρρὸς ἔχων κεφαλὰς ἑπτὰ καὶ κέρατα δέκα καὶ ἐπὶ τὰς κεφαλὰς αὐτοῦ ἑπτὰ διαδήματα, 4 καὶ ἡ οὐρὰ αὐτοῦ σύρει τὸ τρίτον τῶν ἀστέρων τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καὶ ἔβαλεν αὐτοὺς εἰς τὴν γῆν. Καὶ ὁ δράκων ἔστηκεν ἐνώπιον τῆς γυναικὸς τῆς μελλούσης τεκεῖν, ἵνα ὅταν τέκῃ τὸ τέκνον αὐτῆς καταφάγῃ. 5 καὶ ἔτεκεν υἱὸν ἄρσεν, ὃς

³² A. SERRA, *Maria presso la Croce, Solo l'Addolorata?*, p. 262-263. (For more details, cf. *ibid.*, p. 245-263).

³³ J. A. FITZMYER - R. H. FULLER, *The Mother of Jesus in the Gospel of John*, in R. E. BROWN ET ALII (ed.), *Mary in the New Testament*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia 1978, p. 227.

μέλλει ποιμαίνειν πάντα τὰ ἔθνη ἐν ῥάβδῳ σιδηρᾷ. καὶ ἡρπάσθη τὸ τέκνον αὐτῆς πρὸς τὸν θεὸν καὶ πρὸς τὸν θρόνον αὐτοῦ. 6 καὶ ἡ γυνὴ ἔφυγεν εἰς τὴν ἔρημον, ὅπου ἔχει ἐκεῖ τόπον ἡτοιμασμένον ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ, ἵνα ἐκεῖ τρέφωσιν αὐτὴν ἡμέρας χιλίας διακοσίας ἐξήκοντα.

We need to 'decodify' the text in order to understand its exegetical and theological meaning. The first symbolic element to be explained is the 'woman' clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. She is presented as a pregnant woman (ἐν γαστρὶ ἔχουσα), in labour, crying aloud in the pangs of childbirth (cf. vv. 1-2). And the big red dragon was ready to devour her child as soon as it was born (cf. v. 6).

The huge red dragon with seven heads and ten horns (v. 3) alludes to the beast described by Daniel, a beast that persecuted the Jews (Cf. Dan 7:8, 20, 24). This dragon of v. 3 can also be related to the two beasts that represent Roman authority (Cf. Rev 13).³⁴ In our interpretation, we can connect this dragon to the serpent of Gen 3:15. Here we can also make recourse to the dragon mentioned in v. 9. In this typological reading of the text, some scholars interpret this Eve/serpent struggle in the light of 2 Cor 11:3 and Rom 16:20.³⁵

The symbolic meaning of the 'woman' of Rev 12 is interpreted by various authors in many different ways.³⁶ Some look at the 'woman' in a collective sense (that is in reference to the people of Israel or to the Church or to both of them). Some others look at her as Mary, the Mother of Jesus. P. Farkaš offers a wonderful synthesis of all these various interpretations in his Doctoral thesis published by the Gregorian University of Rome.³⁷ As the fruit of his doctoral research, he concludes:

Ap 12 cerca di far capire all'assemblea dei credenti il «come» la chiesa possa sentirsi «in certo senso» identificata con la *Donna*. La donna raffigurata in Ap

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 229-230.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 230.

³⁶ Cf. P. FARKAŠ, *La «Donna» di Apocalisse 12. Storia, bilancio, nuove prospettive*, Pontificia Università Gregoriana, Roma 1997, p. 11-160; L. ARCARI, «La donna vestita di sole» (Ap 12, 1-17). *La rilettura della genesi nel capitolo 12 di Apocalisse*, in G. A. FACCIOLO (a cura di), *La donna vestita di sole e il drago rosso* (Ap. 12, 1.3), Bibliotheca Berica. In Domina nostra 3, Messaggero, Padova 2007, p. 35-61.

³⁷ Cf. P. FARKAŠ, *La «Donna» di Apocalisse 12*, cit., p. 11-160.

12 è un simbolo e perciò il suo esistere è fondamentalmente l'«essere come». La donna «non è» Maria, e «non è» la chiesa. La donna viene descritta «come» una regina partoriente: la donna «è come» la madre di Gesù. La donna «non è come» il popolo di Dio, bensì il popolo di Dio, la comunità dei credenti, «è come» la donna che deve partorire (scoprendosi tale alla fine del capitolo).³⁸

This interpretation of P. Farkaš sounds new in the history of exegesis of Rev 12. Looking at the 'woman' as a symbol, he does not agree with any exclusive interpretation, but rather takes a stand whereby his interpretation oscillates between the two poles of interpretation: ecclesiological and mariological. We agree with him in this point. I want to highlight an important hermeneutical element to be remembered in the interpretation of Rev 12.

In my opinion, the 'woman' of Rev 12 having a very deep and profound symbolic sense, can be given a number of polyvalent meanings, especially ecclesiological and/or mariological. Though the symbol of 'woman' is predominantly ecclesiological, we cannot ignore the mariological sense of the text. These two interpretations are not contradictory, but rather complementary. A. Valentini is of the opinion that the symbolic value of the 'woman' of Rev 12 will become complete, only if we give Marian dimension to this symbol, apart from the ecclesiological reading of the text.³⁹

Having made these significant remarks on the symbolic meaning of the 'woman' of Rev 12, we want to pass on to the inter-textual elements that underlie in these texts (Gen 3:15; Jn 2:3-4, 19:25-27 and Rev 12:1-6) and we will try to arrive at some conclusions on the mariological meaning of the word γυνή.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 235.

³⁹ We want to quote here his own words: "La simbologia ecclesiale di Ap 12 suppone uno sfondo mariologico, come testimoniano gli stretti legami e la progressione tematica esistenti tra la γυνή di Apocalisse riveste un significato ecclesiale e solo indirettamente mariologico, la γυνή del vangelo presenta la madre di Gesù, ma con connotati ecclesiali. Se il vangelo rivela l'archetipo mariano della donna-Chiesa di Ap 12, l'Apocalisse sviluppa ed esplicita la dimensione ecclesiale già presente nella donna-madre di Gesù. A conclusione di tutto, pare si debba riaffermare che la densità del "grande segno" di Ap 12 non può essere limitata all'interpretazione ecclesiale. Questa suppone la tradizione mariologica giovannea, senza la quale la γυνή perderebbe un punto di aggancio fondamentale e una dimensione qualificante della sua valenza simbolica": A. VALENTINI, *Apocalisse 12 e il simbolismo della «donna»*, in E. BOSETTI - A. COLACRAI (a cura di), *Apokalypsis. Percorsi nell'Apocalisse di Giovanni*, Cittadella, Assisi 2005, p. 441-442).

V. MARIOLOGICAL MEANING OF ΓΥΝΗ IN THE LIGHT OF GEN 3:15

In this part, we will first explain the meaning of *gunh*, in Jn 2:1-12; 19:25-27 and Rev 12. And then we will try to explain it in the light of Gen 3:15.

5.1. MARIOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF THE TWO GOSPEL NARRATIONS (JN 2:1-12; 19:25-27)

Many Mariologists, such as A. Serra, say that the mariological character of the Cana episode is very significant and important, without negating the primary importance of the person of Christ and the Christological emphasis of the evangelist. The emphasis that the fourth evangelist attaches to the figure of 'the mother of Jesus' is clearly evident from the following facts:

1. This miraculous event of Jesus' changing water into wine takes place because of Mary's initiative.
2. The evangelist mentions the presence of the mother of Jesus here in 2:1-12 and also in Jn 19:25-27 and thus makes an inclusion in the literary structure of the gospel.
3. The evangelist has designed his gospel in such a way that Mary, the mother of Jesus, is present at the beginning of Jesus' ministry and at the end of his earthly life. This explains the importance of Mary's role in the earthly life of Jesus.
4. The fourth evangelist never mentions the proper name 'Mary'; he always calls her 'mother of Jesus'. This is not without any theological intention. This is not simply 'Mary' but the '*mother*' of Jesus. This title has been deliberately repeated in the fourth gospel in order to emphasize the maternity of Mary.

Taking into consideration these elements and the important role Mary plays in the Fourth Gospel, Mariologists are convinced that anyone who reads this passage cannot and should not miss the mariological connotation of this Cana episode. But there are some exegetes, who do not find any mariological symbolism in this pericope.⁴⁰ Moreover, we observe that mariological interpretations of the Cana episode (Jn 2:1-12) are not without pro-

⁴⁰ For example: G. MŁAKUZYŁ, *The Christocentric Literary Structure of the Fourth Gospel*, Gregorian Press, Rome 1987, p. 95.

blems. First of all, Jesus' reply to his mother is very ambiguous. We cannot be sure that Mary was sure of her son's intervention in resolving the problem of the lack of wine. R. E. Brown says that "Jesus' negative reply to Mary is in harmony with the Synoptic passages that treat of Mary in relation to Jesus' mission (Luke ii 49; Mark iii 33-35; Luke xi 27-28): Jesus always insists that human kinship, whether it be Mary's or that of his disbelieving relatives (John vii 1-10), cannot affect the pattern of his ministry, for he has his Father's work to do".⁴¹ This point weakens the mariological interpretation of the text.

R.E. Brown is not convinced of the interpretations of some Mariologists that despite Jesus' refusal Mary's intervention becomes the occasion of the first of Jesus' signs, because "the evangelist does nothing to stress the power of Mary's intercession at Cana".⁴² It is surprising to see that Mary asks the servants to do whatever her son tells them, as if Jesus has positively accepted her request. Moreover the negative reply of Jesus contradicts the miraculous act of Jesus. Because of these seeming inconsistencies in the sequence of the narrative caused by the dialogue between Mary and Jesus, some exegetes are of the opinion that while the wine miracle at Cana is a historical event, the dialogue between Jesus and his mother may have been the evangelist's creation inserted for the theological purposes of the gospel.⁴³

Some other exegetes suggest that "the dialogue was also part of the primitive tradition, but that the evangelist has given us only those snatches of dialogue that served his theological purpose, thus leaving us with an incomplete and inadequate account when we try to pry beneath the theological level".⁴⁴ In our mariological interpretation of this episode, we are as much concerned about the historical evidence of this dialogue as about its theological meaning.

We can also explain this Cana event in terms of the Covenant that Yahweh made with his people of Israel at Sinai. A. Serra says that Jn 2:5b is a reflection of the words pronounced by the people of Israel at the Sinai event (Ex 19:8; 24:3, 7).⁴⁵ Ex 19:8 - "Whatever Yahweh has said, we will

⁴¹ R. E. BROWN, *The Gospel According to St. John*, I, cit., p. 102.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 103.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Cf. A. SERRA, *Maria presso la croce*, cit., p. 34-37.

do”; Jn 2:5b - “Whatever he might say to you, do it”. Comparing these words of the people of Israel (Ex 19:8; 24:3, 7) with the words of Mary (Jn 2:5b), he comments:

Al Sinai, Mosè stava fra Yahwèh e l'assemblea dei suoi fratelli (Dt 5,5). A Cana, Maria si tiene tra Gesù e i servi. Essa occupa un ruolo mediatore: « Dice la madre di Gesù *a lui*: “Non hanno più vino”...Dice sua madre *ai servi*: “Quanto Egli vi dirà, fatelo” » (2, 3. 5). 2. Al Sinai, il popolo si dichiarò pronto ad ascoltare e osservare tutto ciò che il Signore avrebbe detto mediante Mosè. A Cana, Maria esorta i servi a fare quanto avrebbe detto Gesù. [...] Nell'A.T., il mediatore non è un personaggio neutro. Egli, prima degli altri, aderisce alla volontà di Dio. A pari, è presumibile che alle nozze di Cana Maria, per prima, disponesse il proprio animo ad accettare la volontà del Figlio, e comunicare così ai servi il suo abbandono totale in Lui. La frase: «Quanto Egli vi dirà, fatelo», significa allora: «Quanto Egli dirà, facciamolo». 3. Al Sinai, il dono della Legge ebbe luogo dopo che il popolo pronunciò il suo atto di fede. A Cana, il vino nuovo (simbolo, come diremo, della nuova Legge portata da Gesù) è preceduto e propiziato dalla fede di Maria, che viene trasmessa ai servi. 4. Infine, se teniamo presente che l'occhio dell'evangelista è fisso alla teofonia sinaitica, siamo in grado di comprendere perché mai Gesù si rivolga alla Madre col titolo di « Donna »... ..l'invito di Maria è identico, nella sostanza, alle parole di tutta l'assemblea d'Israele al Sinai.Da questo parallelismo si hanno buone ragioni per concludere che l'evangelista opera una identificazione indiretta fra *tutto il popolo d'Israele* e *la madre di Gesù*. Infatti Giovanni pone sulle labbra di *Maria* la professione di fede che *tutta la comunità del popolo eletto* emise un giorno in faccia al Sinai.⁴⁶

This study made by A. Serra is very interesting and attractive. F. J. Moloney also observes that this Cana event has a strong link with “the background of a Sinai tradition and the giving of a *doxa* that surpasses the Law through Moses (see 1:17)”.⁴⁷ Thus, it is clear that the role of Mary at the wedding at Cana is important and needs to be studied in comparison with the old covenant, because this first sign of Jesus is not only the beginning of Jesus' ministry but also the beginning of the new covenant.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 34-36.

⁴⁷ F. J. MOLONEY, *Belief in the Word. Reading the Fourth Gospel. John 1-4*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis 1993, p. 83.

⁴⁸ Cf. A. SERRA, *A Cana Gesù inaugura la nuova alleanza* (Gv 2, 1-12), in *Parole di Vita* 49/1 (2004) 16-25.

Having discussed the possible connections with the Old Testament background, let us now see the connection between the Cana episode and the Calvary event. This point has already been explained in detail when we exegetically analyzed the passage Jn 19:25-27. From the point of view of the whole structure of the Fourth Gospel, there is no doubt that these two episodes (Jn 2:1-12 and Jn 19:25-27) make a literary inclusion and theologically linked with each other. In both the events Mary, the mother of Jesus is present. B. Buby says: "The Cana scene mirrors the Calvary scene. What was promised is fulfilled, what was foreshadowed and anticipated is brought to accomplishment and conclusion. Jesus has changed water into an abundance of messianic wine; now he gives the gift of his Mother to the beloved disciple while pouring forth his Spirit – testified by the blood and water which flow from his side (Jn 19:34). The Christian community is born as Jesus dies breathing his Spirit upon the two most precious loved ones: his Mother and his beloved disciple".⁴⁹ The Calvary is the fulfillment of Jesus' hour mentioned in Jn 2:4. Having seen the connection between these two episodes of John's Gospel and their mariological meaning, we want to see in what way the woman of Jn 2:4 is connected with the 'woman' of Rev 12.

5.2. PARALLELISM BETWEEN THE 'WOMAN' OF JN 2:4 AND THE 'WOMAN' OF REV 12

R. E. Brown notices a parallelism between the 'woman' at the Cana event and the 'woman' of the book of Revelation.⁵⁰ Most commentators say that the 'woman' mentioned in Rev 12 refers to Mary, because the male child to whom she gives birth to is the 'Messiah' (Cf. Rev 12:5), who will win over the evil. R. E. Brown observes that a number of parallelisms are shared by Rev 12 and Jn 2:1-12, 19:25-27 in reference to the background of Genesis.

a) The figure in Rev xii is described as "a woman"; in both Johannine scenes Jesus addresses his mother as "Woman," which ... is a peculiar form of address that needs an explanation. The term would be intelligible in all these cases if Johannine thought is presenting Mary as Eve, the "woman" of Gen iii 15.

b) Rev xii is unquestionably set against the background of Gen iii; we have seen how many echoes of the early chapters of Genesis in John i-ii. A

⁴⁹ B. BUBY, *Mary. The Faithful disciple*, Paulist Press, New York 1985, p. 104-105.

⁵⁰ Cf. R. E. BROWN, *The Gospel According to St John*, I, cit., p. 108.

background in Genesis for xix 25-27 is more difficult to discern, but certainly the death of Jesus is the framework of the great struggle with Satan foretold in Gen iii, at least as that passage was interpreted by Christian theology (see John xiii 1,3, xiv 2-22).

c) Rev xii 17 mentions the woman's other offspring against whom the dragon makes war; thus, the seed of the woman (Gen iii 15) is not only the Messiah, but includes a wider group, the Christians. In both of her appearances in John, Mary is associated with Jesus' disciples. At Cana her action is in the context of the completion of the call of the disciples. At the foot of the cross Mary is made the mother of the Beloved Disciple, the model Christian, and so she is given offspring to protect.⁵¹

Against these backgrounds, we can understand better the meaning of 'woman' in the Johannine corpus and the role of Mary. We can see how the request of Mary leads to the miraculous act. According to R. E. Brown, Jesus' reply to his mother is not a total refusal (only an apparent one), but before performing the miracle he makes it clear that she cannot have any role to play during his earthly ministry; his signs must reflect the glory and power of his Father, and not any human agency; she is to receive her role at the *hour* of his passion, death, resurrection and ascension. That is why John mentions her presence at the foot of the cross. It is there at the foot of the cross that she plays the role of the mother of the Messiah in the struggle against the satanic serpent. It is at the hour of Jesus that her role comes to its climax, in reference to Gen 3:15. Thus, R. E. Brown interprets the dialogue between Jesus and Mary in the context of the hour of Jesus and according to him the role that Mary plays in the Cana event is significant only in the light of the role she plays as the new Eve at the foot of the cross.⁵²

5.3. PARALLELISM BETWEEN THE 'WOMAN' OF GEN 3:15 AND THE 'WOMAN' OF REV 12

In this section, let us see how the 'woman' of Gen 3:15 and the 'woman' of the book of Revelation have a link from mariological point of view.⁵³ Reading Gen 3:15 in its original context, the 'woman' cannot be

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 108-109.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ This section of our article adopts A. Serra's mariological interpretations found in: A. SERRA, *Genesi 3,15 riletto da Apocalisse 12,1-6.13-18*, in *Id.*, *La Donna dell'Alleanza. Prefigurazioni di Maria nell'Antico Testamento*, Messaggero, Padova 2006, p. 248-260.

understood as anybody else but Eve alone, because the 'woman' (הַאִשָּׁה : note the determinative article) refers to the woman whom the author was speaking about in the preceding narrations. And the one who is going to crush the head of the serpent is not the woman, but her offspring. As we have already seen, LXX uses a masculine pronoun in the singular form with reference to the one who will crush the serpent's head and win over it. So, it has to be understood in an individual sense, not in a collective sense.

Having said this, let us now read this verse (Gen 3:15) in the light of Rev 12. The author of the book of Revelation says that it is a great sign. The woman clothed with the sun can have a multiple meaning here. It could be Eve, because this woman who does not have a name could be easily connected with the Eve who was in enmity with the serpent. The woman of Rev 12 could also signify the people of Israel, because she has twelve stars around her head, which could symbolize the twelve tribes of the people of Israel. The woman of Rev 12 can also mean the Church.

Regarding the birth pangs of the woman, we can say that it does not allude to the birth of Jesus at Bethlehem, but to the hour of his passion-death-resurrection. It alludes to the Paschal mystery of Christ. It can be explained, making recourse to Jn 16:21-22, where Jesus himself speaks about the birth pangs of a pregnant woman. In this passage, Jesus speaks about the joy that the disciple enjoy after the resurrection of Jesus.⁵⁴

Could the woman of Rev 12 symbolize Mary, the mother of Jesus, mentioned in John's Gospel? The woman of Rev 12 can be certainly identified with the woman of Jn 2:4 and Jn 19:25-27. A. Serra makes an interesting Marian interpretation of Rev 12.⁵⁵ I want to quote here the two most important arguments he presents in this regard:

⁵⁴ Cf. A. SERRA, *La Donna dell'Alleanza*, cit., p. 254-255.

⁵⁵ For further explanations about the Marian Interpretation of Rev 12, cf. A. SERRA, *Il primo «Vangelo» della salvezza (Genesi 3,9-15.20)*, in *Il Lezionario Mariano. Commento. Commento esegetico e pastorale del lezionario liturgico*, a cura di M. Masini. Volumi complementari del PAF (La Parola per l'assemblea festiva), n. 70. Queriniana, Brescia 1975, p. 31-39, qui p. 299-301; voce *Bibbia*, in *Nuovo Dizionario di Mariologia ...*, p. 299-301; voce *Maria*, in P. ROSSANO - G. RAVASI - A. GIRLANDA (a cura di), *Nuovo Dizionario di Teologia Biblica*, Paoline, Cinisello Balsamo, Milano 1988, p. 906-907; ID, *La Madre di Gesù*, in G. GHIBERTI et ALII (a cura di), *Opera Gioannea*. Elledici, Leumann/Torino 2003, p. 517-520; cf. A. SERRA, *la Donna dell'Alleanza*, cit., p. 257, note 436.

a) Il parto della donna [...] è una rievocazione simbolica della passione e risurrezione di Cristo. Fissato questo punto fermo, la mente del lettore corre spontaneamente a Giovanni 19,25-27. In quel brano è detto che nel momento in cui Gesù passava da questo mondo al Padre, la comunità messianica (o il resto fedele d'Israele) era rappresentato da tre-quattro donne e dal discepolo amato. Fra costoro, un ruolo di primo piano è riconosciuto alla madre di Gesù, costituita "madre" di tutti i discepoli. La differenza tra Apocalisse 12 e Giovanni 19,25-27 sta qui: mentre la scena dell'Apocalisse è di tonalità ecclesiale, quella del quarto vangelo è centrata sulla persona di Maria. Ma si tratta di una differenza complementare. Avviene così che il capitolo 12 dell'Apocalisse conferma la portata ecclesiologica di Maria accanto al Crocifisso rende possibile l'estensione mariologica alla Donna dell'Apocalisse in lotta col dragone. [...] L'estensione mariologia alla Donna dell'Apocalisse non solo è possibile, ma doverosa, e proprio a livello di senso letterale. Infatti la "Donna-Chiesa" di Apocalisse 12, presentata come madre del Messia e di tutti i suoi seguaci, è la trascrizione simbolica della "Donna-Maria", la quale fu realmente Madre di Gesù e, per volontà di Gesù stesso, divenne madre di tutti i suoi discepoli. Proprio perché in seno alla chiesa giovannea viveva concretamente la Madre di Gesù, l'autore dell'Apocalisse poté creare la scena del capitolo 12, che prolunga e applica alla chiesa la missione di Maria. In altri termini: la Chiesa è esemplata su Maria. [...]

b) La Donna di Apocalisse 12 è poi la stessa Donna che sarà glorificata nei cieli nuova della Gerusalemme celeste, come «Donna-Sposa dell'Agnello» (Ap 21,1 - 22,5). Nel riverbero escatologico di questo traguardo ultimo, la comunità dei credenti eleva lo sguardo alla madre di Gesù, "Assunta" accanto al Figlio nella gloria celeste.⁵⁶

These interpretations of A. Serra make us understand that there is a close relationship between the mother of Jesus at the foot of the cross (Jn 19:25-27) and the suffering woman of Rev 12.

CONCLUSION

At the close of this article, we want to make some concluding remarks. We started our study, presupposing the dynamic continuity between the Fourth Gospel and the Book of Apocalypse. In our exegetical analysis, we could notice the connecting elements with regard to the term γυνή in these two groups of Johannine literature, though these two group of writings

⁵⁶ A. SERRA, *La Donna dell'Alleanza*, cit., p. 257-259.

differ in their literary genre. We also noted that there are some hermeneutical problems in decoding the symbolic meaning of the woman of Rev 12.

Going through the works of some important scholars, we were able to notice that there are a number of significant connections between Jn 2:1-12 and 19:25-27. It becomes much more clear when we connect the 'woman' of Jn 2:4 and 19:26, with the 'woman' of Rev 12. In the Gospel of John, 'the mother of Jesus' is called 'woman'. The Evangelist prefers this title to calling her by her proper name, because according to him, it is her role as 'mother' that counts, not her name. The mother of Jesus, present at the wedding at Cana, stands by the foot of the cross and participates in his son's hour, which has arrived at Calvary, that is the hour of his passion and death.

The interpretation of Rev 12 became much more challenging, because of the polyvalent meanings given to the symbol of 'woman'. Passing on from the 'woman' of the Gospel to the 'woman' of Rev 12, we observed a kind of evolutionary theological thought. In our inter-textual analysis, we noticed that the ecclesiological notion of the 'woman' of Rev 12 is predominant. The 'woman' represents the Church in the context of Rev 12, but at the same time the 'woman' also alludes to the 'mother of the Messiah'. This correlation between these two types of interpretations (ecclesiological and mariological) is a significant element in the interpretation of this text.

It is clear that the Johannine community, which was in close contact with the mother of Jesus, could see her identity represented in the early church. This complementary interpretation of ecclesiological-mariological interpretation helps us understand the figure of the 'woman' as the mother of Jesus and as our mother, that is the New Eve, mother of all the living. It became much more clear when we interpreted her in the light of Gen 3:15. The 'woman' of Gen 3:15, who foreshadows the Mother of the Messiah, fights against the serpent, is the same 'woman' who takes part in the sufferings of her Son for the redemption of humankind, becomes the type of the Church in Rev 12. All these three Johannine passages help us understand the true identity of Mary and her relationship with Jesus.

DENIS S. KULANDAISAMY, OSM
Pontificia Facoltà Teologica «Marianum»
Viale Trenta Aprile, 6
I - 00153 Roma

DENIS S. KULANDAISAMY, OSM

Γυνή as a Keyword for the
Theological Link between
Jn 2:3-4; 19:26-27 and Rev 12:1-6
An Inter-textual Study in the light of Gen 3:15,
with a Mariological Approach