

**AN ANALYSIS OF TRADITIONAL MARIOLGY AND GENDER  
EQUALITY IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH**

Submitted by

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## COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES

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..... Date: 15/09/21

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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this entire work to my late parents, siblings and nephews:

MaShange Zoneni Khathi, Gontsholo Khathi, Ziningi Nfomb’futhi, Ntombikayise  
Saloh, Zilungile Malungu, Bandile Khathi and Philasande Zondi.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

- CCC – Catechism of the Catholic Church
- P (p) – Page (s)
- DS – *Denzinger-Schonmetzer*, Catholic Dogmas
- ID – *Ineffabilis Deus*, Apostolic Constitution on the Immaculate Conception
- LG – *Lumen Gentium*, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church
- SC – *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, Dogmatic Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy
- GS – *Gaudium et Spes*, The Constitution of the Church in the Modern World
- MC – *Marialis Cultus* – Paul VI, To honour Mary: Apostolic Exhortation
- CIDSE – Coopération Internationale pour le Développement et la Solidarité (French) – International Cooperation for Development and solidarity (English), an umbrella organization for Catholic development agencies from Europe and North America
- SDG5 – Sustainable Development Goal 5 Concerns Gender Equality and is fifth of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals established by the United Nations in 2015. The official wording of SDG 5 is “Achieve Gender Equality and Empower all Women and Girls”.

## ABSTRACT

Women are increasingly involved in the Catholic Church, but their participation remains restricted. They are tasked to spread God's Word along with its patriarchal interpretations without being empowered to see God's Sophia in their own wisdom. They are tasked to implement programs but are not entrusted with envisioning directions. However, the Catholic Church in the Vatican II (GS 29) teaches that every type of discrimination based on sex must be overcome and eradicated, being contrary to God's intent. This study seeks to investigate how an analysis of traditional Mariology could contribute to gender equality in the Catholic Church by analysing theological statements that find expression in Marian dogmas as well as the official documents of the Catholic Church. This study further uses Christian feminist theology as a theoretical framework in its interrogation of traditional Mariology. This is a careful, critical feminist analysis of Traditional Mariology done by a Catholic male priest in the field of systematic theology. The study focuses on Mary in relation to women's experiences, who in the Catholic Church is highly esteemed. The analysis of the study highlights how traditional Mariology fails to relate to the experiences of women and their images of God. Hence, new ways of approaching Mariology are required that will bring dignity and equality among women.

Of significance to mention is that this study does not present the full teaching of the Catholic Church about Mary, which is adequately available elsewhere, but rather aims at exploring new avenues of approaching Mariology that bring about gender equality. Using Christian feminist theology, the study reveals that it is indispensable to locate Mary in the community of discipleship so that ordinary women can identify with her.

**Key Words: Mariology, Christian Feminist Theology, Catholic Dogmas. Governance and Gender, Jurisdiction and Ordination,**

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<a href="#">DECLARATION</a> .....	I
<a href="#">DEDICATION</a> .....	II
<a href="#">ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</a> .....	III
<a href="#">ABREVIATIONS</a> .....	IV
<a href="#">ABSTRACT</a> .....	V
<a href="#">CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY</a> .....	1
<a href="#">1.1 INTRODUCTION</a> .....	1
<a href="#">1.2 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXTUALISATION</a> .....	4
<a href="#">1.3 DEFINITIONS</a> .....	9
<a href="#">1.4 RATIONALE OF THE STUDY</a> .....	10
<a href="#">1.5 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM</a> .....	11
<a href="#">1.6 KEY RESEARCH QUESTION</a> .....	12
<a href="#">RESEARCH SUB-QUESTIONS</a> .....	12
<a href="#">1.7 METHODOLOGY</a> .....	12
<a href="#">1.8 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY</a> .....	15
<a href="#">1.9 BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF CHAPTERS</a> .....	15
<a href="#">CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW</a> .....	17
<a href="#">2.1 INTRODUCTION</a> .....	17
<a href="#">2.2 FEMINIST MARIOLOGY</a> .....	17
<a href="#">2.3 FOUR PROCLAIMED CATHOLIC MARIAN DOGMAS</a> .....	25
<a href="#">2.4 SYMBOLIC READING OF MARIAN DOGMAS</a> .....	26
<a href="#">2.5 THE SYMBOLIC NATURE OF MARIAN DOCTRINES</a> .....	28
<a href="#">2.6 MARIAN STATEMENTS IN LUMEN GENTIUM</a> .....	31
<a href="#">2.7 PROTESTANTS AND MARY</a> .....	33
<a href="#">2.8 CONCLUSION</a> .....	38
<a href="#">CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK</a> .....	39
<a href="#">3.1 Introduction</a> .....	39
<a href="#">3.2 Issues in Christian Feminist Theology</a> .....	39
<a href="#">3.3 An Overview of Statements from Certain Bishops On Feminist Theology</a> .....	40
<a href="#">3.4 Background of Feminism</a> .....	41

<a href="#">3.5 Rise of Feminism</a> .....	42
<a href="#">3.6 Major Types of Feminism</a> .....	43
<a href="#">3.7 Waves of Feminism</a> .....	45
<a href="#">3.7.1 The First Wave/Stage of Feminism – Mid-19th to 20th Century</a> .....	45
<a href="#">3.7.2 Second Stage/Wave of Feminism – Mid-20th Century: 1960s–1990</a> .....	46
<a href="#">3.7.3 Third Wave/Stage of Feminism – Late-20th Century: 1990s to Current</a> .....	47
<a href="#">3.8 Types of Feminist Theology</a> .....	48
<a href="#">3.8.1 Christian Feminist Theology</a> .....	49
<a href="#">3.9 The Importance of Female Experience</a> .....	50
<a href="#">3.10 Conclusion</a> .....	54
<a href="#">CHAPTER FOUR: THE TEACHING OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH ON MARY</a> .....	55
<a href="#">4.1 Introduction</a> .....	55
<a href="#">4.2 Catholic Overview of the main Teachings about Mary</a> .....	55
<a href="#">4.2.1 What is a Dogma?</a> .....	57
<a href="#">4.2.2 Four Marian Dogmas</a> .....	59
<a href="#">4.2.2.1 The Theotokos – Mary’s Divine Motherhood</a> .....	60
<a href="#">4.2.2.2 Mary’s Virginity</a> .....	63
<a href="#">4.2.2.3 Mary’s Immaculate Conception</a> .....	65
<a href="#">4.2.2.4 Mary’s Assumption</a> .....	69
<a href="#">4.3 Vatican II on Mary</a> .....	74
<a href="#">4.5 Conclusion</a> .....	79
<a href="#">CHAPTER FIVE FEMINIST CRITIQUE OF TRADITIONAL MARIOLOGY</a> .....	80
<a href="#">5.1 Introduction</a> .....	80
<a href="#">5.2 Gender and Patriarchy in the Infancy Narrative</a> .....	80
<a href="#">5.3 Mary the Mother of God</a> .....	84
<a href="#">5.4 The Immaculate Conception</a> .....	87
<a href="#">5.5 Mary – New Eve and Perpetual Virgin</a> .....	89
<a href="#">5.6 The Assumption</a> .....	92
<a href="#">5.7 Low Mariology/Mariology from Below</a> .....	94
<a href="#">5.8 Mariology from Above/High Mariology</a> .....	96
<a href="#">5.9 Mary and Problem with Contemporary Culture</a> .....	101
<a href="#">5.10 Conclusion</a> .....	102
<a href="#">CHAPTER SIX: THE EMERGING THEMES IN CONTEMPORARY MARIOLOGY</a> .....	103
<a href="#">6.1 Introduction</a> .....	103
<a href="#">6.2 Mary amongst Women</a> .....	103
<a href="#">6.3 Mary within the Christian Community</a> .....	106

<a href="#"><u>6.4 Liberating Themes</u></a> .....	107
<a href="#"><u>6.5 Luke’s Infancy Narrative</u></a> .....	108
<a href="#"><u>6.6 The Church as Humanity Redeemed from Sexism</u></a> .....	110
<a href="#"><u>6.7 The New Meaning of Marian Dogmas Arising from the Poor and the “Spirit” of Our Age</u></a> .....	116
<a href="#"><u>6.7.1 Some Assumptions for Re-reading Marian Dogmas</u></a> .....	117
<a href="#"><u>6.7.2 The Mystery of Mary, the Mother of God, the Theotokos</u></a> .....	119
<a href="#"><u>6.7.3 Perpetual Virginity</u></a> .....	120
<a href="#"><u>6.7.4 The Immaculate Conception</u></a> .....	121
<a href="#"><u>6.7.5 Victorious and Our Lady: The Assumption</u></a> .....	122
<a href="#"><u>6.8 The Political Landscape of Women in the Catholic Church</u></a> .....	124
<a href="#"><u>6.9 How Mariology Could Help to Bring about Gender Equality in the Catholic Church?</u></a> .....	126
<a href="#"><u>6.10 The Community of Equals</u></a> .....	126
<a href="#"><u>6.11 Conclusion</u></a> .....	128
<a href="#"><u>CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION FOR FURTHER RESEARCH</u></a> .....	130
<a href="#"><u>7.1 Introduction</u></a> .....	130
<a href="#"><u>7.2 Five Phases of Mariological Thought</u></a> .....	131
<a href="#"><u>7.3 Mary the Model of Faith</u></a> .....	134
<a href="#"><u>7.4 Where is the voice of Women in the Catholic Church?</u></a> .....	136
<a href="#"><u>7.5 Women in the shaping of Catholicism</u></a> .....	143
<a href="#"><u>7.6 Recommendation for Further Research</u></a> .....	143
<a href="#"><u>7.7 Conclusion</u></a> .....	146
<a href="#"><u>BIBLIOGRAPHY</u></a> .....	151
<a href="#"><u>ANNEXURES</u></a> .....	159
<a href="#"><u>Annexure 1</u></a> .....	159

# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

## 1.1 Introduction

Agnes Rafferty (2015) maintains that throughout the years, the traditions binding the Catholic Church have been ruffled with making the church system not appealing to its various members. Furthermore, with feminism gaining popularity since its introduction, the leadership structures are compelled to comprehend the educational and empowering ideology of feminism which is about the sharing of power (314). This is aligned with the document of Vatican II, *Gaudium et spes*, which addresses the different types of discriminations that are particularly based on gender, encouraging the faithful to explore God's intention to overcome and abolish them (Latinovic et al., 2018; GS29). According to Rafferty (2015) the document further speaks to the ideas of the church that must be nurtured to support the seed of feminism. Therefore, disregarding the rigid power and politics surrounding the Curia feminist theologians and Christian activities are coining ideas required for change. Pierli and Peter (2014) define gender equality as being when men and women have equal access to opportunities that enhance their individual capacities to participate in socio-economic activities and as equal beneficiaries who share the societal and church responsibilities (37). Since the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the feminist movement has inspired women to advocate for themselves, speak out against inequality and fight for equal opportunities. In his 1963 encyclical, Peace on Earth (*Pacem in Terris*), Pope John XXIII acknowledged and applauded the shift towards recognizing the full humanity of women that began in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, saying,

*It is obvious to everyone that women are now taking a part in public life. This is happening more rapidly perhaps in nations of Christian civilization, and more, slowly broadly, among peoples who have inherited other traditions or cultures. Since women are becoming ever more conscious of their human dignity, they will not tolerate being treated as mere material instruments, but demand rights befitting a human person both domestic and public (Pacem in Terris #41).*

It would seem that the Roman Curia, following the words of (Saint) Pope John XXIII, willingly stood in solidarity with the marginalised in critiquing political agendas and becoming a voice of resistance to the imagination of the state that imposed its power by the principle of divide and rule, and speak out against the global economic system that brought about oppression (Rafferty, 2015: 304). As of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Rafferty (2015) explains that the imagination of the church in its approach to poverty; torture and discrimination against women is a positive one. According to Pierli and Peter (2015) , “gender refers to the social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female and the relationships between women and men, boys and girls, as well as the relations between women and those between men, and sex relates to biological characteristics that define humans as males and females” (p:15).

Gender concerns encompass both men and women, claiming that both women and men are human beings who are equal, questioning the traditional gender relations in society that are characterised by a gender-based division of labour, patriarchy and, in most cases, discrimination against the female gender (Pierli & Peter 2014: 15). For Uchem (2005), gender is a social construct, therefore the roles assigned to men or women in families, communities and churches are designed and centred around the expectations of society. Gender encompasses the paramount understanding of one’s self as a man or woman culturally, self-awareness and social actions in society (Uchem 2005: 44-45). Therefore, the notion of gender equality addresses the equal recognition and respect as human beings which also extends to access to social, political, cultural and religious opportunities (Uchem 2005: 47).

In the case of the Catholic Church, Pope John Paul II, in a *Letter to Women* in 1987 known as *Pontificum Concilium Pro Lacilium*, stipulates that “women’s dignity has often been unacknowledged and their prerogatives misrepresented: they have often been relegated to the margins of society and even reduced to servitude” (*Pontificum Concilium Pro Lacilium* 1987 #3). With this statement affirming that the dignity of women has been discarded he further writes to the laity, stating (John Paul II),

*The contribution of women is indispensable for the fullness and harmony of the church’s life. It is understandable that many women suffer from certain forms of paternalism and discrimination. The Christian community must enhance the value of the contribution and the responsibility of women, and be grateful to them for it.*

Power struggles within the Catholic Church often indicate that gender inequality is not yet a thing of the past.

Nnamani’s (2005: 33) argument that “the question should be asked as to what is being done to make people, men and women, recognize the fact and importance of gender equality”, points to his idea of gender equality as being truly achieved when men and women take into account true feminine dignity that must be restored. (Nnamani 2005: 22). He further puts emphasis on the patriarchal structures and monopolised power of men that does not advocate for gender equality. With the above mentioned he encourages women to be aware of their power and become change agents responsible for their own empowerment (Nnamani 2005).

In espousing that gender equality is not gender uniformity, Nnamani (2005) describes equality as embracing the difference in roles, abhorring discrimination, subjugation, exploitation and disparagement in the exercise of the same (Nnamani 2005:7). Following the Catholic Church’s Marian themes, the study seeks to bring to light the dominant Marian traditional themes that inform the understanding of traditional Mariology and also to highlight the feminist’s rejection of this traditional approach to Mariology that presents Mary as a docile handmaid, or slave.

## 1.2 Background and contextualisation

The Catholic Church does not ordain women and that automatically exclude women from holding key strategic positions that shape Catholic faith. This is a problem within the church and the society because women have a capacity to perform all the church duties that are reserved for men. Miller (2009: 1) argues that women's voices are silenced in the shaping of Catholicism, hence some prominent women in the history of the church are not included in the scholarship. We even have what is called the Patristic era in the history of the church, but no Matristic era, while women in roughly the first hundred years of Christian life were relatively active in the public sphere. This is because Christianity has been under the shadow of an androcentric culture (Miller 2009: 2). This study is trying to figure out how Mariology assists women to carry out their struggle, since Mary holds such an esteemed position in the Catholic Church. The situation of women remains the same in the Catholic Church. The figure of Mary the Mother of Jesus, who is in the tradition of the church, is the imaginary symbol of a female and is regarded a role model for women as per the Vatican documents (Rafferty, 2015).

Following Balasuriya (1990), Rafferty (2015) contends that there is a need for Mariology to further identify Mary's political position that provides an analysis of social justice structures. In so doing, Mary will not be limited to social service and charity but will be relatable as a role model who can hold unjust social relations structures accountable. Rafferty (2015) bemoans the fact that the politics underlying the governance of the institutions associated with the Catholic Church, and the related principles integral to and upholding the theology and associated symbolic system used in the liturgy of the Eucharist, are all under the control of the all-male Curia based in the Vatican (Rafferty, 2015: 305).

Rafferty (2015) further maintains that the challenge for women in the Roman Catholic Tradition is not necessarily the church as the institution *per se*, but rather lies with the ideological and ethical stance of the governing structures. The difficulty of whether the power intrinsic to its office is played out as power over or power with seems imperishable. Concerning the role of the institution which encompasses authority and power awards, makes those who administer it important, therefore politically conveying and establishing ideological and political views. According to Rafferty (2015), the political view “power is kept solely in the control of men betrays the patriarchal power system at work in the church and the gender politics at the heart of liturgy of the Eucharist is believed to be divinely mandated, calls into question not only the politics of the Vatican, but also for women, who are at the bottom of the hierarchical power structure of patriarchy, the nature of the divine is itself brought under scrutiny” (305).

The decree called *Spiritus Domini*<sup>1</sup> (2021), gives permission to women to participate as readers and altar servers. Furthermore, to administer the Holy Communion and to assist Priests during the celebration of the Mass. In many dioceses, the implementation of this decree has provided women an opportunity to carry out such activities. This decision, as formally endorsed by Pope Francis who actively advocates for diversity and inclusion within the church, serves to challenge conservative bishops from enforcing male-only altar services in their jurisdictions (Pope Francis 2021). However, Pope Francis in *Spiritus Domini* reiterated that ministerial priesthood continues to be a male-only path. The liturgy of the Eucharist which is proclaimed publicly does not only define, but also enacts the belief in the salvific nature of the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth as indicative of the kind of relationships we are called to endorse in our lives (Pope Francis 2021).

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<sup>1</sup> *Spiritus Domini – The spirit of the Lord*, is an apostolic letter in the form of *motu proprio* by Pope Francis signed on the 10<sup>th</sup> of January 2021 and released the next day. It changed the code of Canon Law to allow women to be admitted to the instituted ministries of lector and acolytes, which had until then been exclusively available to men.

In view of Rafferty's (2015) stance, the Eucharist recalls our own places, because it constantly and publicly reiterates the understanding of the role of men and women as complementary, which in practice translates as women's role being complementary to men's (305). She bemoans the fact that "women are not held to have a discrete subjectivity but are, in the mind of the Roman Curia, complementary to the male, basing this belief on the biblical creation narrative and the fact that Jesus, as the incarnation of God in the world, was male" (Rafferty 2015: 305).

It follows then that only men can be priests able to preside at the Eucharist and represent Jesus as Christ, the image of the unseen God, and that Eucharist in the Roman Catholic Church can be celebrated by a gathering of males but not by a gathering of females. This disappearance of the female body from the leadership of the Eucharist of the Church barred them from the ordained priesthood whose office carries authority; women have no means within the structure of the Church of being given authority to influence the theology and decision-making or the politics that define their role. Theology of priesthood is so intimately linked to the theology of the Eucharist that if women were to enter into priesthood it would necessitate a huge perspective to this idea of the nature of the divine. It might be concluded that the many documents referring to women's role in the church coming from the Vatican in the last decades, to be precise, are symptomatic of the challenge that including the other, the 'not me', the women would demand in the theologies of priesthood and the Eucharist (Rafferty 2015: 305).

The term 'Mariology' was coined in the 17<sup>th</sup> century to describe the distinct tract that concentrated on Mary's unique privileges and her universal role in salvation. According to Johnson (1995), Mariology is a branch theology that focuses on the Blessed Virgin Mary and her relation to God and the people of God. In addition, Mariology is that part of the science of systematic theology that treats Mary as the Mother of God (Johnson 1995: 460). Pelikan et al. (1996) state that over the years, Mary as a symbol of inspiration has inspired many more people than any other woman who has ever lived. However, from a feminism point of view such a statement arouses questions about meanings attached to Mary, the people she has inspired and the extent to which she is a source of inspiration (De Haardt 2011: 168).

Besides, Mary is a very important figure in the eyes of the Catholic Church. She is the only one who forms an integral part of Mass, the summit of Catholic worship. Mary is mentioned in the Penitential Rite,<sup>2</sup> Nicene Creed,<sup>3</sup> and in the four canonical Eucharistic prayers<sup>4</sup> (*The Essential Mary Handbook* 1999: 63-64). According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC 1992), the Mass, as the perfect sacrifice, gains its efficacy from the sacrifice of the cross, which the Mass continues (CCC 1362). All other biblical women are relegated to devotions and para-liturgies. The Catholic Dictionary (1980) defines para-liturgy as when Catholics do not adhere to the regulations of the Catholic law during worship by removing and altering the liturgical words and actions as prescribed by the Church.

An influential international alliance of 17 Catholic development agencies from Europe and North America (CIDSE 2014), together with SDG5, has recently published a position paper on gender, under the title *Gender Equality*. It defines and adopts a gender approach that requires an in-depth analysis and understanding of the qualities of men and women in all spheres of development including food security, economy, etc (CIDSE 2014: 2). From the concept it does not seek to erase or deny biological differences between women and men. However, by focusing on social fabric, explore how gender-based inequalities come about and question the essential roles and activities that are perceived as ‘neutral’.

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<sup>2</sup> First, she is named in the confession in the Preparatory Prayers of the Mass: “I ask blessed Mary ever virgin, all the angels and saints, and you, my brothers and sisters, to pray for me ...”

<sup>3</sup> Mary is also named in the Profession of Faith in the Nicene Creed when it is said: “Came down from heaven, by the power of the Holy Spirit he was born of the Virgin Mary ...”

<sup>4</sup> Mary is called in the Eucharistic Prayers of the Mass. She is commemorated in the Ancient Roman Canon, in descriptive words of doctrinal significance: “In union with the whole Church we honour Mary, the ever-Virgin Mother of Jesus Christ our Lord and God.” In Eucharistic Prayer no. 2, Mary is included in the words: “By the power of the Holy Spirit he took flesh and was born of the Virgin Mary.” Further, we say in the communion prayer, “Make us worthy to share eternal life with Mary, the Virgin Mother of God ...” The Community says in the Eucharistic Prayer no. 4: He was conceived through the power of the Holy Spirit and born of Virgin Mary ...”

Thus, for CIDSE and its member organizations, the gender concept refers to:

*The socially constructed roles, attributes, activities and opportunities that are given, society considers appropriate for women and men, learned through the socialization process and institutionalized through education, politics, culture, tradition and religion. It relates to the stereotypes that shape and condition the relations between women and men and their roles in society, affecting their access to resources, health, education and decision-making (CIDSE 2014: 2).*

Gender politics which are embedded within theology and transmitted through symbols such as the Eucharistic gatherings of the Roman Catholic Church have proven to be detrimental for women. Therefore, raising questions whether the meaning behind symbolic food is one that nourishes or negatively affects health since power and gender politics are at play. Concerning the Feminist theological vision, can it provide an alternative recipe for sustainable food to equally be shared by all in Eucharistic communities? The celebration and understanding of the divine/human relationship is political, however, the Body of Christ embodies that all are equal members. Rafferty (2015:305) highlights how this belief has been widely influenced by the wider economic and political locations leading to inequality. Chapter three of this research, which is the theoretical framework of this study, is wrestling with this question of the alternative recipe that would sustain all.

### 1.3 Definitions

**Vatican II** – also called Second Vatican Council, 1962–1965, 21<sup>st</sup> Ecumenical Council of the Roman Catholic Church, announced by Pope John XXIII on January 25, 1959, as a means of spiritual renewal for the church and as an occasion for Christians separated from Rome to join in the search for Christian unity.

**A Papal Encyclical Letter** – This is one of the highest forms of communication by the Pope and usually deals with some aspects of Catholic teaching, clarifying, amplifying, condemning or promoting one or a number of issues. A papal encyclical historically is addressed to bishops and priests of a country or region or to all clergy. Encyclicals can also be addressed to all Catholic faithful (Rice 2015).

**The *Theotokos*** – It is a title of Mary, mother of Jesus, used especially in Eastern Christianity. The church confesses in the *Theotokos* that the Son of the flesh and that Mary, who gave birth to Him according to the flesh, was the mother of God.

**Perpetual Virginity** – It is the doctrine that Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ, was a virgin *ante partum, in partu, et post partum* – before, during and after the birth of Christ.

**Immaculate Conception** – It is the doctrine that God preserved the Virgin Mary from the taint of original sin from the moment she was conceived.

**The Assumption** – The Assumption of Mary is, according to the beliefs of the Catholic Church, Church of the East, and some Anglo-Catholic churches, among others, that the bodily taking up of Mary, the Mother of Jesus, into Heaven at the end of her earthly life.

***Munificentissimus Dei*** – The most beautiful God: it is the name of an apostolic constitution written by Pope Pius XII. It defines *ex cathedra* the dogma of the assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. It was the first *ex cathedra* infallible statement since the official ruling on papal infallibility was made at the Vatican I.

*Ex-Cathedra* – From the chair: Issued with the full authority of the office. Originally, it applied to decisions made by Popes from their thrones, speaking on matters of faith and morals.

*Motu Proprio* – describes an official act taken without a formal request from another party. In the Catholic canon law, it refers to the document issued by the Pope on his own initiative and personally signed by him.

## 1.4 Rationale of the Study

The motivation for choosing this topic is to bring to light Mariology, as it offers a powerful critique of the androcentric perspective narrative of both the Scriptures and the church tradition. The purpose of the study is to explore, among other things, dominant conceptions of Mary in the Catholic Church. It is also to evaluate and analyse the alternative theoretical readings of Mary that emerge from a feminist scholarship. The study further seeks to produce new theological resources for gender equality in the Catholic Church. I am hoping to achieve this by employing an ecumenical approach to Mariology. An ecumenical approach to Mariology requires a distinction between the Catholic reading of Marian dogmas and meditative reflections for Protestants. I am bring to the picture the protestants because they played a significant role in the Vatican II in shaping Catholic Mariology. The Catholic bishops wanted to introduce a new marian dogma, but the Protestants objected to that saying that a new marian dogma will divide more the Christian church and destroy the strides made by ecumenical exercise. In the conclusion, I argue that Mariology bring together women across denominations to study Scriptures together.

This study is important for Catholics, because “next to God and the sacred Humanity of Christ, Mary holds the highest place among creatures in the order of grace and glory” (Carol 1987: 325-326). Secondly, this study is important for all Christian churches. As Susan Rakoczy (2004: 340) remarks, “although formal theological positions continue to divide the churches, feminist interest in Mary is helping to evolve contemporary interpretations of her person and place in the community which unites women in their common discipleship”.

### **1.5 Statement of the Problem**

Mariology is an enduring issue in theological circles, but contemporary approaches to Mariology have established that traditional Mariology is problematic to contemporary culture, particularly for women. Contemporary women challenge the traditional approach to Mariology, saying that it negates women’s sexuality, liberation and gender equality, and contributes little to women’s emancipation. Traditional Mariology also impedes the development of female symbols of God (Rakoczy 2004: 344). The Marian spirituality has often been described as passive for presenting Mary, the Virgin Mother as docile and faithful. This is not in alignment with how the Gospels describe her but a result of how traditional theology has described and interpreted the role of Mary throughout ages (Balasuriya 1994: 202).

## **1.6 Key Research Question**

How could an analysis of traditional Mariology contribute to gender equality in the Catholic Church?

### **Research Sub-Questions**

1. What are the dominant conceptions of Mary in the Catholic Church?
2. What alternative theological readings of Mary emerged from the feminist scholarship?
3. How can feminist readings/revisions of Mariology produce new theological resources for gender equality in the Catholic Church?

## **1.7 Methodology**

This research followed the non-empirical method and used published material as a method of collecting data. Research methods are the techniques or procedures used to collect and analyse data (Grix 2001: 29). Research methods or techniques refer to the methods the researchers apply to conduct research. Nevertheless, research methodology is a systematic way of solving a research problem (Kothari 2004: 7-8). This research used a qualitative method within a critical thematic analysis. Critical analysis interrogates values and assumptions, exposing power, ideology and injustice, challenging conventional social structures and engaging in social action (Crotty 1998: 157).

This study adopts a feminist ethnography. Feminist ethnography is a qualitative research methodology emerging out of anthropology – a discipline that examines the lived experience in its natural habitat (Creswell 2007: 69). The research sought to analyse the theological statements that find their expression in the proclaimed Marian dogmas.

This research was conducted from a Catholic perspective in the field of systematic theology. Here, I examined the Marian dogmas, finding expression in documents and statements. The research analysed the formulation and the definitions of Marian doctrines, namely the *Theotokos*, the perpetual virginity of Mary, the Immaculate Conception, and the Assumption. There are many titles of Mary in the Catholic Church and feasts that are celebrated in honour of Mary. For example, in Vatican II, a number of bishops wanted the *Mediatrix*<sup>5</sup> to be defined as a dogma in Vatican II, but with the presence of Protestants as observers, they objected to that, saying the Catholic Church should not define more Marian dogmas, because it continues to cause divisions among the Catholics and Protestants. Hence, the *Mediatrix* was left as devotion, not as a dogma (Johnson 2003: 130).

At this level of devotions, there are many titles of Mary that are found in her *Litany* (*The Essential Mary Handbook* 1999: 135), but they are not included in this document due to limited space and time. Under the subject of devotions, there are novenas, rosaries, grottos, and pilgrimage sites that fall under the cult of Mary. The feasts of Queenship of Mary, Birth of Mary, Our Lady of the Rosary, and the Presentation of Mary are also important topics for feminist scholarship regarding Mary, although they were not dealt with in this paper. However, I touched base on the feasts of the Annunciation and Visitation of Mary as they relate more with the foundation of contemporary Mariology. Furthermore, the document of the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II), the *Lumen Gentium* – Christ is the light of all nations – on Mary is analysed because it is one of the most influential and important documents of the Catholic Church post-Vatican II. The purpose was to respond to the main objections of feminists as influenced by Protestants who were present at the Council as observers and to study the dominant themes of traditional Mariology.

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<sup>5</sup> The *Mediatrix* in Catholics Mariology. The title *Mediatrix* refers to the intercessory role of the Blessed Virgin Mary as a mediator in salvific redemption by her son Jesus Christ and that he bestows grace through her.

Furthermore, the Second Vatican Council presented a theological change in the meaning and place of Mary, which can be summarised as “from a cosmic Mary to a Biblical Mary” (Logister 1995: 172). Logister (1995) also remarks that it can also be characterized as strengthening the theological subordination of Mary to Jesus and Christology (Logister 1995: 172). To be sure, the Council did not do this to minimize the relevance of the dogmas, but the choice was made for a more historicizing, biblical and therefore a more ecumenical direction. Logister (1995) further notes that this had liturgical consequences, “many daily Marian devotions such as hymns, prayers or the rosary are now banned from the ordinary liturgy” (Logister 1995: 172). Since then, the subordinating functionality resounds in the renaming of the classical feasts: Candlemas (2 February became the feast of the presentation of Jesus at the Temple); and the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary (25 March, is now called ‘The Annunciation of the Lord’). Thus, as Mary is presented as the first and exemplary believer through her faith and motherly love, that positions her as the Mother of the Church (Logister 1995: 173). However, Catherine Halkes (1991), a Dutch scholar and feminist theologian, questions the significance of limiting recordings about Mary and if valuable pieces of and about her story were not lost in this process (Halkes 1981: 82).

Theoretically, the different perspectives about Mary have changed offering a relativization in the role and exemplary functions that Mary holds for women. Even more so in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Mary is the prime and obvious model of the ideal wife and mother (Logister 1995: 173). Logister’s (1995) discussion on how Mary is important for women highlight how the images and ideas constructed by the Catholic Church’s tradition about Mary connect her to every woman (173). Hence, many Catholic women not only reject traditional images of Mary as they are symbols of self-sacrifice, obedience, humility and servitude, chastity and self-effacement, which women perceive as imposed onto them and create positionalities of oppression. This image of the Mother who was a virgin, whereby virginity was above all seen as a moral qualification, is for many women not only inimitable, but has also become unacceptable. “Women saw Mariology as a powerful weapon in the hands of the clergy, to control women and to minimize their influence in the church and public life.” (Logister 1995:173). Consequently, many women have an ambiguous relationship with the Holy Virgin.

## **1.8 Limitations of the study**

This research followed a non-empirical method and used text and theological histories as a method of collecting data and anticipating encountering validity of the sources to be used. The sources may demonstrate elements of personal bias. It is critical that the researcher verifies the authenticity of the sources and has scholarly text that backs the personal opinion of the author given the fact that not all researchers in the field of feminist theology are feminists. However, I have sought to use official documents of the Church in order to overcome this challenge instead of engaging theologians. Another challenge I anticipated in my study is that I am a man in the field of feminist study, which requires lived realities and experiences in nature. If I am not careful enough, I could end up speaking on the experiences of other people which should be avoided at all costs. Another problem which Covid-19 brought about, is the issue of national lockdown. Access to literature was a negative factor since the school library was closed. This confined me within the borders of secondary qualitative analysis that opens up the questions of reliability of my sources as well as their validity. However, e-Books and online journals are ever accessible and were utilized for the purpose of this study. Moreover, it could have been difficult to access African literature, particularly from an African viewpoint of Mariology, even by means of e-Books and journals.

## **1.9 Brief Description of Chapters**

### **Chapter One**

This chapter covered the background and the introduction of the topic, followed by the methodological framework, rationale of the study, problem statement and research questions.

### **Chapter Two**

This chapter deals with the literature review and the presentation of the data pertaining to this study.

### **Chapter Three**

Chapter three will deal with the theoretical framework upon which the study was constructed.

### **Chapter Four**

In this chapter, relevant councils of the Catholic Church pertaining to the question of Mary, the role of the Magisterium and the infallibility of the Pope in matters of faith and morals, Faith and Revelation, Dogma and Doctrine are investigated.

### **Chapter Five**

This chapter will deal with the feminist critique of traditional Mariology. In this chapter I will analyse and discuss the data collected from published materials from feminist scholarship.

### **Chapter Six**

This chapter will deal with the feminist contribution to Mariology, the question of gender. What are the alternative ways of doing Mariology in modern world coming from feminist scholarship?

### **Chapter Seven**

This chapter will be a conclusion of my findings; highlighting what I already knew when starting with the study; what I have learned presenting the project; and what the project revealed to me. Five ways of thinking about Mary will be presented in this chapter and a picture relating to Mary as a model of faith will be drawn.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Introduction**

The aim of this chapter is to present and review the literature on Catholic Mariology that will explicate the main assumptions and parameters of the study. The chapter is divided into three sections highlighting traditional Mariology as developed by the Roman Catholic Church, particularly the four Marian doctrines. The first section pays attention to Mary's stance in the Church as far as feminism is concerned and how she relates to all women. The devotion to Mary often carries with it some superstitious practices that exaggerate Mary's power and position, some of which seem to treat Mary like God (Rakoczy 2004: 333). The second section through providing insight into the four Marian dogmas history brings to light how various scholars and the church perceive Mary. The chapter concludes with discussions focusing on Mary's symbolism and how Protestants relate to her.

### **2.2 Feminist Mariology**

Feminist theologians such as Elizabeth Johnson (2003), Rosemary Ruether (1998), Luise Schottroff (1991), Aliane Wainwright (1994), Ivone Gebara and Maria Clara Bingemer (1989), Elizabeth Fiorenza (1995), and Mary Daly (1976) have different approaches to the subject of Mariology, however, they all agree that Traditional Mariology is not good for women (Levine 2005:1). Johnson (2003) argues that the genealogy of Jesus is terribly androcentric. The matriarchs of Israel are not mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus' women who bore the sons of each generation go largely unnamed, hidden by the patriarchal construct that considers women as vehicles of reproduction rather than historical agents. The only four women who are mentioned in that genealogy of Jesus are women who acted outside the patriarchal family structure. These four named women ancestors are Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and the wife of Urea, are not the revered Israelite matriarchs from Genesis (Johnson 2003: 211).

Reuther's (1998: 634) argument, on Mary's *Magnificat*, the Lukan narrative describes Mary as a pregnant and liberated Israelite woman which is a different perspective and an alternative from traditional Mariology. Schottroff (1991: 66) argues that Mary represents all powerless, hungry and despised women whose bodies God does not overlook. Wainwright (1994: 635) calls for the re-reading of the scriptures, saying that it needs to offer a powerful critique of the androcentric perspective narrative.

For Fiorenza (1995: 171), traditional Mariology is inherently patriarchal; she provides insight into feminist Marian thought in a way that will not enlarge the marginalization of women the way that previous thought has done. Gebara and Bingemer (1996: 170) call for the re-reading of the Marian Doctrines in the light of anthropological and hermeneutic assumptions in terms of key themes affecting the church today. Daly (1985: 32) argues that the Catholic Mary who develops from the story is portrayed or betrayed as a total rape victim – a pale derivative symbol disguising the conquered Goddess who is the creative divine life and integrity in concrete parthenogenically. Fiorenza (1995:171) further argues that Mary has been mythologized beyond recognition, requiring us to fully deconstruct the Marian cult as well as the history and images. She argues that the existing Mariology is patriarchal; hence a new way of doing Mariology needs to be constructed in a way that does not marginalize women.

Indeed, Traditional Mariology finds its bases from tradition more than from the teaching of the Scriptures. Tradition has never been friendly to women because society from the time of immemorial has decided to exclude women from participating in public life. However, in the contemporary world, things have changed a lot in favour of women trying to bring them on board in many spheres of life. The engagement of women in the subject of Mariology will surely benefit both men and women complementing counterparts. Contemporary women and men write critical texts that are liberating and Mary is characterized as an obedient woman. Male theologians in particular from the context of liberation theology reflects the distinctive relationship of the female, woman, Mary and God. This leads into studies to which Mary is seen as the female or motherly face of God (Boff 1989: 15).

Nonetheless, feminist theologians focus on these attempts with suspicion. Johnson (2003: 24) remarks that these men coined a branch of feminism that suited and supported the ideas of men about women therefore making no contribution towards transforming the lives of women. She goes on to say that Mariology affected the dominant male image of God with its motherly image of God. Considering such developments, women are still perceived as incapable of representing the divine.

This is an absurd perception that women are incapable of representing the divine. The human person is not a biological sex but a composite of soul, body and spirit. Women are nothing lesser than that. Therefore, women must be allowed and encouraged to express their own images of God rather than being satisfied with male images of God.

For Johnson (2003: 86), the overall Marian reduction led to a reevaluation of the historical Mary of Nazareth and the question of her meaning for present-day women and men. Rakoczy (2004, citing Daly 1975: 61) states that since women are encouraged to identify with this passive Mary: this has devastating effects on women. Rakoczy (2004: 341) continues to say that amongst those devastating effects is women's acceptance of 'enslavement' which was accomplished symbolically in the cult of the Virgin Mother of God, who is glorified only in accepting the subordinate role, assigned to her. She further notes that the genealogy of Jesus is violently patriarchal, and the infancy narrative raises endless questions based on the experience of women.

Ruether (1983: 150) observes that the Marian doctrines are shaped from a male perspective, thus causing violence to women. In the patriarchal Mariology the Virgin Mary becomes the theological personification of the Psyche and Mother church as Virginal Bride and Mother of Christians. Two points coming from the comments of Rakoczy (2004: 342) on traditional Mariology: (a) Mary as Virgin Mother is highly problematic for women. She goes on to say that Mary "has been idealized for her virginity (which Catholic and Orthodox teaching maintains was life-long) even as the Christian tradition has maintained a very negative view of female sexuality".

In her view, the implication in the life-long virginity of Mary is that women who live a life of virginity are closer to God than those who express their sexuality in committed relationships. The second comment Rakoczy (2004) makes on traditional Mariology pertains to Mary's motherhood, the *Theotokos*. She maintains that Mary's motherhood has not served women well. She goes on to say that the glorification of Mary's motherhood has reinforced the perception that motherhood is the sole reason for women's existence, thus setting up an insoluble tension between Mary as a virgin model and as a mother. "Only Mary can be both, what are other women to do?" (Rakoczy 2004: 342). Johnson (1992: 97) asks: "What image of a woman is assumed here?"

The point being raised here demonstrate that Traditional Mariology does not recognise the experience of women. In our world of experience, no woman can be both a virgin and a mother as the same time. If women in the church are encouraged to be like Mary, how is this possible in real life? The status of Mary needs to be brought to the level of humanity where by ordinary women can relate with Mary. Then, they can be able to emulate her.

Mary is at the centre of different debates, controversies, evangelization and velleications, however, she remains an object of devotion and admiration for many. This brings to light a question about her theological and dogmatic significance in Christianity and the controversies surrounding devotional practices dedicated to her. The oppressive, liberating, nationalistic, and political elements connected to Mary concern women in particular. At the same time, Mary is considered an example by scholars, theologians and anthropologists, as she plays a role in inter-religious meetings (De Haardt 2011: 168). They further argue that the competing and diverse interpretations struggle for attention, power and influence while there is hardly any historical or scriptural data available or continuous debates about Mary. They also maintain that Mary is a polyvalent figure: she is not just full of grace; she is above all full of meaning. Smith and Haddad (1989: 169) therefore inquire "Can a feminist theological reflection on the phenomenon of Mary still bring something new?"

Another difficulty with Mariology is that theologians and feminists in particular, point out that scriptural data on Mary is few. Hence, as for Mariology, Smith and Haddad (1989: 169) remark that it is partly a matter of filling in the gaps to the biblical text. Moreover, the basis of theological interpretations is formed by the dogmas, which time and time again give rise to all sorts of devotional, artistic and astray representations. The influence of other, older and in any case different religious traditions, on the meanings assigned to Mary, should therefore not be underestimated. To illustrate this, Althaus-Reid and Isherwood (2007) relate the dogma of Virgin birth with that of the worship of Virgin Goddess. Attention is thereby drawn to different traditions of the great goddess or the mother goddess from Roman-Hellenistic culture, but also to the Isis cult from which the Marian title “Queen of Heaven” is supposed to be derived (Althaus-Reid & Isherwood, 2007: 75).

Logister (1995) criticizes Johnson (2003) and Fiorenza (1995) for making attempts at bringing into light what they describe as dogmatic mystification of Mary although there is lack of historical data to support their findings. He contends this by saying that their intention is to relativize the theological importance of Mary’s motherhood in the theological importance of Mary’s motherhood, in those dimensions that have led to an extremely ambiguous, alienating, oppressive and frustrating effect on concrete women (Logister 1995: 173). According to Logister (1995), Johnson juggles with the positions of Mary, an ordinary Nazarene, the Mother of a chosen Son, although endowed with strong faith, she is poor, lives in a concrete social and religious context, and in occupied territory. Mary is the mother of the large family, and stands in the grace of God; she becomes visible. Consequently, the dangerous memory which this Mary is, this suffering and poor mother, still can be and is today central to Johnson. Logister concedes that “only this Mary can be both an inspiring and a dangerous example and the companion of concrete women and men, and only thus can she really be our sister” (Logister 1995: 173).

Marcella Althaus-Reid's (2006) analysis of Mariology in Latin America addresses the role of Mary as a relevant model for women. She further challenges Reuther (1998), by pointing to Mary's Magnificat as speaking to liberation therefore nullifying the constructs discrediting her sexuality and hetero-patriarchal notion of decency that has little relevance to real women. "Mary is the colonial spirit of servitude to patriarchy incarnated to such an extreme that she could not be represented as a common human being. Mary is a patriarchal gender performer going solo." (Althaus-Reid 2006: 72).

According to Killian McDonnell (2005) the Mariology male authors have projected Mary as passive and obedient and in addition to this that "the virgin resulted in the image of the gutless, sexless stick in blue" (538). He quotes Marina Wenner's, *Alone of all her sex, XXI*, stating that some feminists reject Mary because of the manner in which the church has presented her chastity. The Mariology's Annunciation exegesis is read by many women who deem it as a source of direction for their lives although it has been critiqued as demanding of submission (Schneiders 1991: 97).

Althaus-Reid (2001: 538) argues that men also read the same Mariologies stressing submission and obedience. The Catholic Church must also be aware that some women have difficulties with relating to Mary as pointed out by Pope Paul VI saying that in her peasant mores she is not a model for modern women (Paul VI 1974: MC 35). Althaus-Reid (2000) bemoans the point that the projection by the male authors of Mariologies is of the obedient, passive, Virgin Mary that creates an image of gutless sexless stick in the blue. However, by letting feminist theologians present the lived experiences of married and single women into biblical text would alter text that came from the male experience in a hermeneutics of suspicion (Althaus-Reid 2000: 72). This would include those whose experience of virginity, vowed and unwowed, led to integrity, wholeness, and freedom.

According to McDonnell (2005: 350), virginity is about sexuality and concerning Mary's fiat, she states that is an indication of how she accepts motherhood as well as virginity signifying obedience and heteronomy. She further notes that Mariologies from the perspective of heteronomy and Christology, involve subordination and submission. In Latin expression, it is said that *Quidquid recipitur in modo recipientis recipitur*, which means that whatever is received is received according to the mode of the recipient; thus, men see only what male experiences allow them to see; they write what male consciousness allows them to write.

Furthermore, in the view of McDonnell (2005: 540), Thomas Aquinas can stand as a representative of some offensive texts in the tradition of the church. He is quoted as saying,

*Woman is defective and misbegotten, for the active force in the male seed tends to the production of the perfect likeness in the masculine sex, while the production of women comes from a defect in the active force or from some material indisposition, or even some external influence, such as the south wind, which is moist, as the philosopher (Aristotle) observes (Summa Theologiae 1, q.92, adi).*

Angry reaction to the texts of scripture and tradition denigrating women formed some of the supposition to feminist hermeneutics, exegesis and Mariologies (MacDonnell 2005: 240). Furthermore, the significant contribution made by feminist Mariologies into Marian literature sheds light on the magnificent with its spirituality of Israel's poor and lowly together with its aggressive prophetic Mary. With the above said, Ruether (1990: 181) perceives Mary's fiat as a dismissal of heteronomy.

McDonnell (2005: 540) notes that Ruther's interest is elsewhere as she begins her systematic presentation not with Mary's fiat, but with her magnificent and its ascent on social iconoclasm, which is a reaction to the contemplative, privatized, subordinate virgin (Ruether 1990: 158). The focus on the magnificent is part of the emphasis on the social location of Mary, in Ruether, Gebara and Bingemer, and Johnson, who supply the deficit of Vatican II, which paid no attention to cultural anthropology in its chapter on Mary in *Lumen Gentium*.

Feminists, including Gebara and Bingemer (1989), Ruether (1990), Johnson (2003) and Rakoczy (2004), think social location is more important than a matter of cultural anthropology, but involve epistemology (McDonnell 2005: 541). Without doubt, this is a permanent contribution of these theologians to Mariology.

McDonnell (2005: 548) argues that in applying cultural anthropology Gebara and Bingemer (1989) have made a significant change in the way Mariology is written, thus preparing the way for Johnson's social location of Mary. Following Gebara and Bingemer's (1989) discussion on the reign of God in their systematic framework, not only do they look beyond the person of Jesus but highlight how both men and women have active positions within the reign of God. McDonnell's (2005: 548) work on the reign of God takes from Jesus's proclamation and selflessness by putting emphasis on God's concrete action and the signs of God's reign, where there are no political, cultural or gender limits. By distancing Mary from Christ indicates a yearning for Mary who is a real woman and stands at the opposite end of the over-idealised Mary (ideal woman, ideal disciple, ideal virgin, ideal mother, and ideal icon) (McDonnell 2005: 552). The over-idealized woman's character can be questionable in a sense that how can a plastic devotional fiction, with only supernatural qualities be a model for contemporary women, who quarrel with their male employers and husbands, burn the roast, wreck the car, while being CEO of an advertising firm, a construction engineer or a president of a university, while living full sex lives within marriage? The said women are real women of our times who are asked by the Church in sermons and homilies in pilgrimages to imitate Mary. Hence, there is a need for a renewed Marian devotion that is able to speak to the experience of women who are on the receiving end at the spectrum of gender inequality in the church.

Pope Paul VI (1974) also announced the need for a renewed form of devotion to Mary in *Marialis Cultus*:

*The piety of the faithful and their veneration of the Mother of Jesus have taken on many forms according to circumstances of time and place, the different sensibilities of peoples, and their different cultural traditions. Hence, this devotion should show the need for renewal that will permit people to substitute elements that are transient, to emphasize the elements that are ever new and to incorporate the doctrinal data obtained from theological reflection. This revision has to be respectful of the wholesome tradition and open to the legitimate request of the people of our time (MC 24).*

### **2.3 Four Proclaimed Catholic Marian Dogmas**

To comprehend the feminist critique of traditional Mariology, it is imperative to look at Marian dogmas as proclaimed by the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church has four proclaimed dogmas regarding Mary. Chronologically they are the *Theotokos* proclaimed at the Council of Ephesus in 431; Mary's perpetual Virginity proclaimed at the Lateran Council in 649; Immaculate Conception proclaimed by Pope Pius XI in 1854 in *Ineffable Deus*; and the Assumption of Mary proclaimed by Pope Pius XII in 1950 in *Munificentissimus Deus*. Mary's divine motherhood has deep and solid support in Scripture. The Christian Scriptures give Mary the title Mother more than twenty-five times. The Council of Ephesus declared Mary to be *Theotokos*, Mother of God. The second Marian dogma is the perpetual virginity. This dogma teaches that Mary, the Mother of Jesus Christ, was a virgin *antepartum, in partu, et postpartum* – before, during and after the birth of Jesus her son. Furthermore, the virginity of Mary is scripturally based (Matthew 1:18-25 & Luke 1: 26; 28).

The third Marian dogma, the Immaculate Conception, declares that Mary, in the first moment of her conception, by the grace of God was preserved from all stains of original sin. This dogma does not have the explicit biblical roots like the previous ones. The reference of this dogma is the text of Genesis 3:15, it is also called *proto-evangelium*, in which the woman and her descendants appear as moral enemies of the serpent, whom she finally destroys by crushing its head. The fourth dogma is the Assumption, the most recent of the four dogmas promulgated by the Catholic Church. The teachings concerning this dogma claim that the Virgin Mary was assumed into heaven “body and soul”. Without biblical reference to Mary’s death, in the fourth century her assumption was instituted through tradition and became more effective by the sixth century with the feast of Dormition.

The four proclaimed marian dogmas are the subject matter of this research. This research will further demonstrate that Marian dogmas are not scriptural based but they are based on the tradition of the Church.

## **2.4 Symbolic Reading of Marian Dogmas**

In the period between *Lumen Gentium and Redemptoris Mater* (1964–1987) a debate took place concerning the symbolic character of statements made by the Church about Mary. This debate questions how the Catholic Church’s Marian doctrines are able to articulate their truth within the variety of contexts in which they are received. Following Garafalo (1989), Doyle (1983), Bernard Lonergan (1972), and Johnson (1985b), the debates surrounding the church’s symbolic statements about Mary find their expression in Marian dogmas and also challenge the connection between Marian doctrines and historical events. As much as such debates have taken place in the theological community, the Catholic Church believes that what has been promised to us has been realized in Mary.

Therefore, the debate between the publication of *Lumen Gentium* and the *Redemptoris Mater* questions the nature of religious language, the ecclesial documents that depict Mary as a type of the church and model of faith, precisely because what has been promised to us has already been realized in her. However, this debate has not yet been reproduced within the official *Magisterium*.

Garafalo (1989: 216) explains that these documents have a tendency of meshing Marian symbols that is the dynamic memory of Mary who is structured into Catholic tradition and shapes the church's self-understanding through Marian doctrines, as if believers could be expected to make the same quality of affirmation to every statement. These documents, for him, are set out to speak to the entire church, employing both symbolic and rational discourse. Garafalo (1989: 217) bemoans the church's lack of appreciation of the symbolic nature of all religious language, which retains its capacity to manifest the transcendent without annihilating it or confining it within the immanent. He further observes that "the main difficulty with the Catholic Church's position lies in its inability to explain precisely how believers may imitate Mary in her uniqueness". It seems Marian doctrines; Perpetual Virginity, Immaculate Conception, and the Assumption generally remove Mary from the human condition that all attempts at imitation must be accomplished at the price of denying one's humanity (Garafalo 1989: 226).

I agree with Garafalo's sentiment about these Marian doctrines if they are not read symbolically, they generally remove Mary from humanity. If we read them symbolically, they will only apply to women, but to the whole humanity. Then, the call to all of us to imitate Mary will make sense and be realistic.

## 2.5 The Symbolic Nature of Marian Doctrines

Johnson (1985b: 313) proposes the view that

*Theological statements about Mary have a symbolic structure, so that while they refer immediately and in an obvious way to this one woman, they reach their intended theological referent when interpreted finally as statements about the church, the community of faithful disciples, of which she is a member and in which she participates.*

Garafalo (1989: 226) distinguishes the position of Johnson (1985) from the one that uses historical facts to locate the meaning of such statements— that is the Catholic position – and one whose opinions on these statements is based on the life of faith declaring them as meditative reflections— that is the classic Protestant position. He insists that the church is able to discern about her Mary and the church of which she is a type through symbolic understanding.

Garafalo (1989: 323) further points out that although Johnson (1985b) pays attention to symbolic language's dual capacity, she distances herself from a strictly centrist position on the basis of the unequal primacy in the order of Christian truth which belongs to statements about God and God's saving self-revelation in Jesus Christ (Johnson 1985b: 323). As far as referring to Christian symbolic language is concerned, Garafalo (1989: 218) states that the work of God in Jesus Christ, events and historical figures discussed in these statements are of secondary importance because of soteriological interpretations. With that said, Johnson (1985b: 323) goes on to say that

*Marian statements originate in the imaginative faculty of the community brought into being by the Christ event, and one uttered as expressions of its search for self-understanding in faithful and active response (one of its members assumes corporate personality in reflecting back to the community its own gift and task).*

A question arises particularly about two modern Marian dogmas (Immaculate Conception and the Assumption) and how they contribute to gender equality, because they render Mary distant from ordinary women. Garafalo (1989) follows Johnson's (1985b) view, by identifying the stance of corporate symbolism constituting two modern Marian dogmas.

*Since the truth of Christian dogma refers to aspects of God's salvation in Christ which can never be embodied in the clear unequivocal formulae without remainder, the Marian dogmas signify that at the beginning and the end of life we are surrounded and affected by redeeming grace of God, more powerful than any evil" (Johnson 1989b: 330).*

It should be noted that these particular dogmas which refer to both Mary and the late members of the church are separate from other Marian statements Johnson (1985b: 330).

*It is not as though the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption are historically based statements of unique prerogatives of this individual woman which separates her from the rest of us ... Neither is it thought these statements affirmed some truth about ekklesia which at the semantic could not truly be said of Mary for as a member of the Church she shares reality.*

Hence, Garafalo (1989: 219) remarks that Johnson eventually comes to a position that differs from her original thesis, the content of her life in the redemptive and saving love of God through the merits of Jesus Christ, but this is not a situation unique to this one woman. He argues that

*In the theology of the Catholic Church, however, this is a situation unique to this one woman, and Johnson's ecumenically sensitive argument does nothing to reduce the tension between the exegetical observations of the symbolic structure of Marian statements and the Church's deliberately defined dogmas.*

Johnson's (1985b) position is ecumenically sensitive, attempting to establish a dialogue on the basis of the symbolic significance of Marian dogmas, and reserving the discussion of historical fact to the redemptive communions. Flanagan's (1987) opposing view questions the Church's selection of Mary and not any other figure to act as a vehicle for its symbolic articulations. Flanagan (1987: 175) draws a primary symbolic conclusion that the reflections of Mary in art should flow from historical memories establishing her as a primary Christian model. He further highlights that Mary is not yet a perfect symbol within the church. However, her appropriate and historical fact is the one that is remembered and celebrated by the church. Garafalo (1989) remarks that Johnson has the effect of concealing the historical person or event behind the symbolical and its primary referent. The symbolism of Marian dogmas is a link between the Church's relationships with God's saving working through Christ and does not call for reflections on Mary's personhood. Johnson's position which has gained opposition among those that interpret and refer to symbolic language, both the historical and the ultimate in the case of the Marian dogmas, both the person of Mary and the Church's ideal realization (Garafalo 1989: 219).

Therefore, for Doyle (1981: 449), the new symbol does not simply point away from itself, but it is a particular manifestation of that which is being presented. Doyle (1981) explains that the validation of Marian dogma by the church as appropriate symbols of God's redeeming work, contribute towards a normative relationship between the believer, God, and the world, as articulated in the dogma. Doyle (1981) insists that within the framework of the new symbol, the ontological status of dogma is possible. For Doyle (1981), dogmas are presumably true, while they can change and grow, the relationship they affirm between God, humankind, and the world remains timelessly true.

The truth of dogmas not necessarily lies in their historical verifiability, nor ever in their alleged facticity, but in their relationship, they describe an effect for the believer (466).

*The believer who adopts a faith stance does not disregard the virginity of Mary. One does not necessarily believe that this is historically true in the sense that it corresponds to a biological fact. One believes however, that it is literally true in the sense that it discloses something about the nature of reality that corresponds with the actual relationship between humankind and the transcendent.*

Gerafalo (1989) believes that, while Johnson's (1985b) argument on Marian dogmas and their truth and value is centred around the church as a cooperating persona, Doyle (1981: 219) presents an argument by reflecting on the relationship between God, humankind and the world, and to create that proper relationship in the life of their believer. Furthermore, according to Johnson's (1985b: 330) view, the Marian dogmas point beyond themselves to a theological reality as an event (Immaculate Conception) and as a promise (the Assumption).

## **2.6 Marian Statements in *Lumen Gentium***

Johnson (1985: 326) points out that one of the most important documents of the Catholic Church, post-Vatican II, the *Lumen Gentium*, “repeatedly employs symbolic language both in its presentation of Mary and in describing her relationship to Christ and the church” The *Lumen Gentium* states that from the mystical body of Christ image the background for statements that present Mary as Mother of the members of Christ is stipulated (LG 53).

Also, describing the relationship between Mary and the Church, *Lumen Gentium* emphasizes that “the Mother of God is a type of the church in order of faith, charity and perfect union with Christ”(LG 63). In the eyes of the Catholic Church, Mary is not just a symbol however she is a symbol filled and overflows with deep embedded meanings, so that devoutly meditating on her and contemplating her is the light of the Word made man.

Therefore, the church penetrates into the great mystery of the incarnation and becomes her spouse (LG 65). There is then the plenitude in the figure of Mary that invites reflection and has the power of transforming lives. Through imitating Mary the church becomes more like her lofty or type, and continually progresses in faith, hope and charity, seeking and doing the will of God in all things (LG 65). Therefore, one is then drawn to the conclusion that *Lumen Gentium* recognises the symbolic nature of its statements about Mary, by not denying their meanings but putting emphasis on the mysteries they refer to. The symbolism of these statements are made clear to those who participate in the mystery. Thus making conversion a requirement to manifest itself in new commitments and behaviours (Dulles 1983: 331). Furthermore, through shaping associations the Second Vatican Council intended its theological statements about Mary to be tensive symbols, and also maintained their primary referent to the historical figure of Mary (Garafalo 1989: 217).

It is important to recall that there is a history leading up to the foundation and proclamation of each dogma. The historical, political, social, and cultural contexts of the moment proclamation are very significant, for when the circumstances in which each dogma was proclaimed are explained, the content of the proclamation is also clarified (Gebara & Bingermer 1989: 93). With the above said, the church's inability to extensively explain how believers can imitate Mary in her uniqueness has proven to be a challenge. (Johnson 1985: 330). It seems that the Church's own doctrines removed Mary from the human condition that all attempts at imitation must be accomplished at the price of denying one's humanity. What is lacking in the symbolic nature of all religious language that retains its capacity to manifest the transcendent without annihilating it or confining it within the immanent (Garafalo 1989: 217).

In as much there is some truth in the position of Elisabeth Johnson that there is historical, political, social, and cultural contexts of the moment when proclamation are made, but this still raises a number of questions for me. Do these social considerations include women voices and their experiences as well? If not, we still have a problem even if they are considered in our day and age.

## **2.7 Protestants and Mary**

With the Reformation in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Mariology quickly began to fade among Protestants. Even in the Roman Catholic Church, Mariology was still speculative and did not have dogmatic status. Neither the Immaculate Conception nor the Assumption had been declared dogmas. In criticising Rome, the Reformers did make the devotion to Mary a problem, in fact Martin Luther's sermons reflected medieval piety for the virgin. His affirmations on Mary's dignity were that of truth and that as a humble believer she received the grace of God. As Martin Luther acknowledges Mary as the first believer he believed that if there were special blessings awarded to her they had nothing to do with merits, but however were about the dignity of Christ (Ruether 1979: 58).

Furthermore, three aspects of Protestant thought were important in reducing Marian devotion. First, there is the Protestant devotion to the Bible. Since stories such as the Assumption were not part of the biblical record, their status is in doubt. Yet the Reformers also recognized that reduction from what is contained in scripture may be true biblical teaching. On these grounds both Calvin and Luther accepted the title 'Mother of God' for Mary. This title expressed the mingling of the attributes of the human and the divine in the incarnate nature of Christ. Calvin, however, declined to advocate the title, because he believed its strict theological meaning was not properly understood by the people (Ruether 1979: 58).

A second important change made by the Protestant Reformation, according to Ruether (1979), was the abolition of monasticism. As the Reformation rejected institutionalised celibacy, virginity considered as the highest expression of Christian devotion was also rejected (Ruether, 1979). The anti-sexual spirituality that supported celibacy thus began to disappear. Instead, the Reformation identified itself with the patriarchal tradition of the Old Testament and the pastoral letters of the New Testament. The family was made the foundation and model for the religious community or the church. Perceptions about marriage being inferior in Christian life and sex being a venial sin in marriage changed (Ruether 1979: 35).

The biblical blessings upon children were restored. The Christian was no longer seen as someone trying to live 'angelically' as in that heavenly age to come where there is no marrying anymore (Luke 20: 35). Thus marriage, in the view of Ruether (1979: 35) became a normal state for the Christian, both clergy and laity. With this reaffirmation of married sexuality, the impulse behind doctrines such as the Immaculate Conception and the perpetual virginity of Mary was cut off. Protestants did not immediately reject all these traditions, but Mary's sinless status began to be re-evaluated by the Reformers. The way was opened for a later biblical scholarship to recognize that Mary and Joseph probably lived as a normal married couple after Jesus' birth and that the brothers and sisters of Jesus mentioned in the gospels were probably indeed siblings and not 'cousins'. In addition, this reaffirmation of the goodness of marriage was also important on the level of psychology. Ruether (1979) concedes it may not be possible to repress our sexual instincts without that repression reappearing in some other form.

Ruether (1979) asserts that at a psychological level people compensate for lack of sexual relations by creating fantasy love objects. She goes on to say that for twelve centuries, the theologians and clergy of the Western church had been celibates who suppressed their sexual feelings for the opposite sex. Thus, Ruether (1979: 60) concludes that the beautiful virgin of heaven was then a safe idealization to whom these feelings could be directed. At the same time, according to her, such devotion reinforced aversion to real women who were thought to be defiled by sex and procreation. Despite their reaffirmation of the goodness of marriage, the Reformers showed no disposition towards elevating the role of women to be representatives of Christ in the preaching and teaching of the church. On the contrary, the teachings of Genesis and Paul were piously reaffirmed to maintain the subordination of women in the church, in the family, and the society. It was assumed that women should take on only that subordinate role of a creaturely person reacting to the masculine actors: God, his Son, and his representatives, the clergy. According to Ruether (1979: 62), Protestant Theology the symbols of male and female represent divine headship and creaturely subordination. Meaning, as God is the Lord over all His creatures, the husband is the head over his wife. This represents masculine headship over female obedience.

In Protestant pietism, the feminisation of Christ is compensation for the extinct image of an independent female. This feminized Christ may have something to do with the secularization of public power in modern society. The church then becomes confined to the private, domestic sphere of society. Christ's human nature appears as feminine, but his dominant divine identity is masculine. Thus, the church's leadership is overwhelmingly masculine. Nonetheless, liberal Protestantism, under pressure from secular liberal trends in society, has recently allowed a small number of women into its ordained clergy. Yet, the intense tension and discord generated by this new militancy of women in the churches and seminaries and great reluctance to place ordained women as full pastors of congregations, manifest basic contradiction between a token acceptance of equality and the actual subordination of women that is still a part of Christian theology (Ruether 1979: 62).

Nevertheless, the biblical and the psychological reasons for the fading of Mariology in Protestantism are only part of the story. According to Ruether (1979: 62), there is also a theological element in Reformation thought that undercuts Mariology. This third element in Protestantism diminishes the role of the 'feminine' as the symbol of the human nature of the church in relation to God. The radical protestant definition of justification by faith alone redefines human nature in a negative way. In the Mariology of the Roman Catholic Church and Eastern Orthodox traditions, there is a concept of the goodness of the created being that links it with the holy being of God.

Ruether (1979: 62) further argues that grace reaffirms the true holiness of natural being, which is itself founded on creative grace. Hence, Mary, as a coordinate symbol with Christ, joins together the holiness of created being and the holiness of divine being. In the dogma of Immaculate Conception, Mary is 'pure nature', who affirms the capacity of created beings to bear the holiness of divine being. Moreover, coordination between nature and grace was abhorrent to the strict theology of the Reformation. The image of God in the human being was believed to be inappropriate after the Fall. Nature, here and now, is ruled by sin. God's grace must be seen as totally beyond what are now 'natural' capacities. Humanity stands in a purely passive relation to God's grace. Neither the church nor Mary as its symbol can be seen as co-operators in the drama of salvation, the feminine, as excluded from visibility. The only actors in view are the Father and his agent, the God-man, Christ (Ruether 1979: 62).

The point being raised by Rose-Mary Ruther here is a question of the head of the house in family setting. The Protestants had done away with monasticism and embraced the family values. The family values as we understand them today mean that the head of the house is the father. If the father is the head of the house, then women and children must serve the Father as serving their God. This point makes me wonder, how is the feeling of a woman pastor who is married to a just member of the church?

Can she be viewed as the image of God or still it is the father who is the image of God in this family despite the fact that it is a woman who is anointed/ordained in the family? These questions make a call to protestants as well to revisit their Mariology.

Thus, preliminary literature read includes Kilian McDonnell (2005), *Feminist Mariologies: Heteronomy/Subordination and the Scandal of Christology*, Maaike de Haardt (2011), *The Marian Paradox: Marian Practices as a Road to a New Mariology?* Agness Rafferty (2015), *Woman Eucharist and Politics*, Gerald O'Collins (1981), *Fundamental Theology*, Josef Nuener (2004), *Mary, Mother of the Saviour, Lumen Gentium* (1964) (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church), Pope Paul VI (1974), *Marialis Cultus*, John Paul II (2000), *Catechesis on Mary, Mother of God: Theotokos, Woman, Mother, Disciple*, Elizabeth Johnson (2003), *Truly Our Sister*, Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza (1995), *Mariam's Critical Child in Feminist Sophia's Christology Prophet*, Susan Rakoczy (2004), *In Her Name: Women Doing Theology*, Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Mary the Feminine Face of the Church* (1979), Ivone Gebara and Maria Clare Bingemer (1989), *Mary Mother of God, Mother of the Poor*. John Macquarie (1990), *Mary for All Christians*. Mary Daly (1986), *Beyond God the Father*. Elia Wainwright (1994), *Shall we look for Another? A Feminist Rereading of the Matthan Jesus*. Elizabeth Johnson is one of the most productive and creative women theologians, as seen in scholarly depth in a number of venues, and specifically Mariology. Through her Marian articles and *Truly Our Sister* she has made a substantive contribution to the field beyond any other feminist scholar and most male scholars. The sources attributed to different popes are important because they contain the official position of the Catholic Church since the study is done within the Catholic Church, even though it is not limited to it, as John Macquarie (1990) says that Mary is for all Christians. The other sources are important because they contain new perspectives, comprehensive and ecumenical approaches to the study of the theology of Mary. While the list is not exhaustive, these books have been chosen according to their importance to the study.

## 2.8 Conclusion

This chapter reveals that traditional Mariology presents Mary as a submissive woman, a recipient of God's favour, a woman who is willing to consent to a very unusual proposal of God. Rakoczy (2004) states that contemporary women challenge this approach to Mariology saying that it negates women's sexuality, liberation and gender equality, and contributes little to women's emancipation. Ruether further argues that the traditional Mariology functions in the patriarchal theology primarily to reflect and express the ideology of the patriarchal feminine (Ruether 1983: 149-150). Furthermore, the various perspectives also demonstrate that the documents of the church, particularly on Mary, are formulated from a male perspective. They completely overlook women's experiences which renders it violent to women respectively. In this sense, the documents of the church lack experience and this makes Mary to be inaccessible to women themselves. They prioritise theory over praxis.

Hence, new conceptions are to be reconstructed. To deconstruct traditional Mariology, the research applies Christian feminist theology. In this research the text concerns Mary, and the discourse concerns the relationship of women to Mary. The essence of this research is the Virgin Mary. The research looks at the formulation of four proclaimed Marian dogmas by the Catholic Church. Johnson (1985b: 313), in her ecumenical approach to Marian Dogmas, calls them theological statements. She maintains that theological statements about Mary are statements of historical fact for Catholics and statements of meditative reflections for the Protestants (Johnson 1985b: 313). This study also points out that the preoccupation with Mary's virginity and her motherhood tend to obscure her role as a disciple. As a disciple, Mary is a model for women and is seen as identifying with the struggle and participating actively in their lives. This line of thinking, coming from feminist scholarship serves to bring about liberating themes of Mary in order to effect gender equality in the Catholic Church. The next chapter will look at the theoretical framework for this research.

## **CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **3.1 Introduction**

In the previous chapter, I reviewed the literature upon which this study is constructed. In this chapter, I am going to present the theoretical framework which is the Christian feminist theology that guides the study. I have applied Christian feminist theology to analyse and critique traditional Mariology and reconstruct contemporary Mariology. Christian feminist theology, as a theology belonging to liberation theology, was founded upon the experience of the oppressed women (Khathi 2018: 5). Thus, feminist theology requires a structure that encompasses women's experiences, favours praxis over traditional wisdom and logic, and advocates for the oppressed. The context of this study is the Catholic Church within systematic theology, using Christian feminist theology. According to Hassey (1989) the objective behind Christian feminism is to provide an understanding and advancement for the equality between men and women morally, socially, spiritually, and in leadership from a Christian perspective (1). Christian feminists believe that humans were created equal by God regardless of race, sex and gender (McLeod-Harrison 2014: 255, GS 29).

### **3.2 Issues in Christian Feminist Theology**

The major issues of Christian feminist theologians include the ordination of women, biblical equality in marriage, recognition of equal spiritual and moral abilities, reproductive rights, integration of gender-neutral pronouns within the reading of the Bible, and the search for a feminine or gender transcendent divine (McEwan 1999: 79, McIntosh 2007: 236, Polinska 2004: 40). Because feminist theology is related to liberation theologies, the oppression of women is its inception point that explores the socially constructed gender roles (Rakoczy 2004:15).

As believing communities desire and seek to understand through faith their relationship with God, Christian theology emerges as a medium for interpreting the temporal and contextual beliefs (Clifford (2002). She goes on to say that the theology presented by Christian feminists is no exception to this broad description. Christian theology also presupposes a faith that is at once personal and shared with other Christians. This presupposition also affects feminist theologians as they seek to contribute to the Christian belief. Christian feminist theology provides theology with an appreciation for many elements in the Christian tradition, particularly its prophetic and liberating elements (Clifford 2002: 28). Feminist movement as advocacy groups seek to abolish oppression, discrimination, and violence experienced by women and to achieve equality and human dignity for every woman (Clifford 2002: 15).

### **3.3 An Overview of Statements from Certain Bishops On Feminist Theology**

Over the years the question surrounding the place of women in the Church and society has gained momentum. Feminism was once regarded by many as a fad or a fringe movement but now it has moved to the centre stage in the church and society. According to the German bishops' conference (1981), the church has got a mandate to overcome any form of discrimination against women (Lane 1985: 663). Furthermore, in the United States of America, over five pastoral letters have been issued about the role of women in the life of the church by different bishops. In as much as the pastorals expose the sinful nature of sexism, recognition and acknowledgment of the role and the voice of women in the Christian community is significant (Lane 1985:663). In the Irish Bishops pastoral letter, *Love is for Life*, feminism is seen as the impactful (Lane 1985: 163).

The Catholic Church has got good policies but most of them remain a theory. Implementation of those good policies on the ground is very poor. The exclusion of women from strategic position can be the cause of this poor implementation of good policies. Even though the church is supposed to be a reflection of heavenly life, but it should also consider the real lived realities of the people they are serving.

### **3.4 Background of Feminism**

Mary Veeneman (2018: 147) notes that one term that is central to any conversation about feminism is patriarchy. Patriarchy is commonly understood as a system in which privileged men oppress women. However, patriarchy can involve the marginalization of men, and it can involve women as oppressors. Gloria Albrecht (2004: 27) maintains that privileged women in the workforce often achieve their work-life balances only through the work of marginalized women who must leave their own children to work in the homes of the privileged women. Nevertheless, there is clear evidence on societal and religious discrimination on women who have been regarded as second class citizens. The stereotypical roles of dependence, submission and passivity are attached to the beliefs that declare them as inferior to men. Therefore, excluding them from society and church's power and decision-making structures and processes (Lane 1985: 164).

Dermot Lane (1985) is concerned with the fact that such positions of leadership and decision-making are still the underlying assumptions for many, often unconsciously, around which society and the church are organized and administered. We live in a world that is patriarchal in structure and androcentric in outlook. This state of affairs is still regarded by many as natural, belonging as it were to the designs of nature itself. Not only that, but this state of affairs was seen by some as divinely pre-ordained, as part of God's plan for the world, and therefore, as something built into God's revelation in history. These particular positions have been called into question and are now seen by many to be more cultural constructs than natural or revealed 'givens' in history. Lane (1985: 665) states that one way of explaining the development of this extraordinary state of affairs is to note that history, both sacred and secular, has been put together by men.

Lane (1985: 665) states that the history of humankind is written and reflected from a male perspective that dismisses the narratives and accounts of women. Lane goes on to say that another way of accounting for the existence of so much discrimination against women in the past is to remember that it has been men who have been in positions of power, both in organization and administration of society and church. This highlights how the needs and interests of women have not been presented adequately in decision-making mechanisms of society and the church. Yet it is these political decisions that determine to a large extent the shape of the world. A third way to explain the inequality that exists between the sexes, for Lane, is to note that the experiences informing our understanding of life, political, philosophical and religious, have been taken to be normative for all. Thus, the experiences of women have not been incorporated into the reigning theories about life.

### **3.5 Rise of Feminism**

“Feminism is defined as a social vision, rooted in women’s experiences of sexually based discrimination and oppression, a movement seeking the liberation of women from all forms of ‘sexism’, and an academic method of analysis being used in virtually every discipline” (Clifford, 2002: 16). From a feminist perspective people who share its ideology are change agents advocating for a life that colours a person’s hopes, commitments, and actions (Clifford, 2002). Clifford (2002, citing Conn 1991), further defines feminism as both a coordinated set of ideas and a practical plan of action, rooted in women’s critical awareness of how a culture controlled in meaning and action by men, for their own advantage, oppresses women and dehumanizes men. This definition highlights the fact that the problems faced by women are associated with sexism – the overt and sometimes more subtle male control of females on the basis that males by nature are superior to females (Clifford 2002: 17). However, feminism unequivocally rejects biological determination as a reason for assigning specific roles to either males or females. Feminists maintain that roles for women such as domestic work or ‘homemaking’, which were long treated as if biologically determined, are actually rooted in attitudes about gender that are socially constructed. They reflect beliefs about cluster behaviours and roles designated as appropriate to either males or females by society at a particular time (Clifford 2002: 17).

Like many movements in the world today, one will find different forms of feminism. In its early stages, feminism tended to be somewhat strident and aggressive. In a struggle to prove and legitimize itself, certain forms of feminism appeared to be purely negative, reactive and oppositional.

### **3.6 Major Types of Feminism**

Liberal Feminism speaks to women's civil rights and expresses the right to privacy, inclusion and empowering women to freely make decisions concerning their sexual and reproductive health. It seeks equality for women with men in all facets of social life, especially in the economic and social and political life. On the other hand, Cultural Feminism, also called 'romantic feminism' and 'reform feminism', highly regards the moral superiority of women over men and the values traditionally associated with women, such as compassion, nurturance, and peace-making. Cultural feminism also seeks the betterment of society by stressing the contributions made by women. It is rooted in two premises, namely the presumption of the moral superiority of women associated with their maternal role and the need for that moral superiority to make societal life more humane. In contrast to liberal and cultural feminism, which focuses on social agenda, radical and socialist feminism seeks more extensive, revolutionary change (Clifford 2002: 22, Veeneman 2018: 144).

Radical and Socialist Feminists not only challenge the subordinate position of women in society, but question the legitimate contribution made by societal structures. In short, Radical feminism challenges the perverseness surrounding male domination that negatively affects social fabric, and devalue the importance of women-centred culture, characterized by nature, closeness to nature and compassion. Therefore, its aim is to abolish the patriarchal structure to liberate women from male control in every facet of life, including family life. Socialist feminism which believes that white male dominance's by-product is the division of labour according to sex and race which leads to economic class struggle in capitalist societies where the work of a woman is devalued, especially the work of raising children.

Socialist feminism's main aim is to empower women to be economically independent from men, to achieve major reforms that will end class divisions and to access the same opportunities as males for gainful employment and at the same time be active parents (Clifford 2002: 23; Veeneman 2018: 144). However, social feminists have been critical of the radical feminists for solely identifying patriarchal males only as a cause for women's oppression. Influenced by Marxist principle, socialist feminists locate women's oppression within the broader context of an economic struggle (Clifford 2002: 24). Many feminists now make a distinction between what they call the first stage or wave of feminism, the second stage or wave of feminism, and the third stage or wave of feminism.

Before presenting these waves of feminism, it is important to describe who is a feminist. According to Delmar (1986) a feminist is someone who takes into cognisance the suffering and discrimination that women are subjected to, who acknowledges the specific needs that remain negated and unsatisfied, and that the satisfaction of these requires a radical or revolutionary change in social, economic and political order (8). At the level of theology, the uniqueness of feminist theology lies not in its use of the criteria of experience but rather in its use of women's experience, which has been almost entirely shut out of theological reflection in the past. Women's experiences in feminist theology, therefore, are a critical force for exposing classical theology, including its codified traditions, as based on male experience rather than on universal human experience (Ruether 1992: 13).

It is without a doubt that the paramount role played by feminists raises conscious awareness of women's imagination and domination in a male-centred world. Addressing the important questions about who women are in the society and within the church confronts the distorted male are neither being equal to them nor worthy of being created in the image of God. The quest to emancipate women has revealed the oppression of women in the course of history within the spheres of society.

Although, in today's world there are still women who reject the notion of male supremacy, these feminists have managed to expose the plague of women's oppression, patriarchal domination, marginalization and domination. Women have been empowered to detest and oppose patriarchal views that demonise women as being deviant, uncompleted, physically mutilated, emotionally dependent, unstable, naturally weaker, unintelligent and rationally weaker (Delmar 1986: 8).

### **3.7 Waves of Feminism**

#### **3.7.1 The First Wave/Stage of Feminism – Mid-19th to 20th Century**

The first stage of feminism was largely critical, providing a protesting voice to the point of anger and frustration experienced by so many women in society and church. The real value and the significance of this first stage of feminism are that it raised the consciousness of those who sometimes unwillingly were the causes of such oppression. In doing this the first wave of feminism also created a new form of bonding among women. The actions taken in the first wave of feminism further created a new form of bonding among women, giving women an important momentum and agency they would not have achieved otherwise. Lane (1985: 666) notes that the first wave alerted one half of the human race to the great injustices against women that exist in society and the church. On the negative side, however, it turned the women's movement in on itself by creating a separatist movement that removed and isolated women from the other half of the human race; therefore, running the risk of replacing one form of oppression with distortion, forgetting that a major part of the problem stems from men's particular perception of women. Lane (1985: 666) contends that it is now emerging quite clearly that an essential moment in the liberation of women is the liberation of men from an exclusively patriarchal culture.

It should be noted that men cannot simply co-opt this second stage of feminism without experiencing some sense of the pain, injury and suffering that have been inflicted upon women. The experience of men concerning the first stage of feminism is crucial to understand the potential and the implications of the second stage of feminism properly. Without appreciation, the anguish that women have suffered creates a real danger that men will see feminism as a move to bring women up to the level of men. This particular conception of feminism is a complete distortion of the real meaning of feminism. Many women have no interest in acquiring the so-called status achieved by men in society and church. They see this status as a dubious achievement, especially in terms of the kind of world that has resulted from an exclusively male approach to the problems of life in matters such as militarism, domination and individualism. Instead, as we shall presently see, feminism is a movement that seeks to go beyond the *status quo* of women and men alike.

### **3.7.2 Second Stage/Wave of Feminism – Mid-20th Century: 1960s–1990**

In contrast to the first wave of feminism, the second wave of feminism is inclusive and holistic, as it sets out to address women and men together from ingrained prejudices about one another. Furthermore, it seeks to establish new equality among men and women in all areas of life aiming to bring about new forms of freedom, trust and mutuality in human relationships. It also intends to recover the importance of the female experience in understanding the full meaning of life. What is distinctive about the second wave of feminism is that it is not anti-male. Instead, it seeks to promote and develop the whole of what is inhuman in our world and does not get out to create conflict; it seeks to remove conflict and misunderstanding that already exist between women and men in life. This form of feminism is not something confined to women; rather, a feminist within this perspective is a person, female or male, who tries to overcome the exclusivity of the male bias by working towards a joint understanding of human existence, human relations, the story of humanity, and the meaning of religion. To this extent, feminism is not something confined to women, nor something solely about women.

Lane (1985: 668) maintains that men can and should become 'feminists' in their approach to life. Yet, women as victims of male injustice and misunderstanding have a particularly important contribution to make to the feminist movement.

### **3.7.3 Third Wave/Stage of Feminism – Late-20th Century: 1990s to Current**

According to Clifford (2002), the complex contours that take into account the great variety of women's experiences are not captured fully in this wave. For example Clifford (2002: 25) notes that, during the early years of the second wave of the women's liberation movement in the United States, the vast majority of its spokeswomen were well educated, white, middle-class women. Most, uncritically presumed that their perspectives on the reality of women were true to the lived experiences of all women. Women of colour have been critical of white feminists for not taking into consideration their lived experiences that are only unique to them and not universal. In as much as social location plays a critical role in the liberation of women, from the third wave of feminism point of view the struggles of black women are different from those of white Euro-American women; many African-American women today identify themselves as womanists. Alice Walker is quoted as saying that a womanist is a black feminist (Clifford 2002: 25). 'Womanist' in African American terms refers to women, especially young women, who display self-assertive or wilful behaviour, behaviour judged unsuitable for black women because of the place society has assigned them. It is said that the movements that embrace previously overlooked racial and cultural differences and interconnections between human behaviour and the plight of the earth constitute the third wave of feminism. This movement's advocacy role is not limited to social, political and economic equality of women with men, but extends to the understanding of humanity in relation to the whole of reality, including the non-human creation (Clifford 2002: 27).

### 3.8 Types of Feminist Theology

Clifford (2002) gives three helpful categories within which to understand feminist theology. These categories can be understood as falling on a spectrum. The group Clifford (2002) names as the first one is that of reformist Christian feminist theologians. These theologians approach the biblical text in itself as fundamentally liberating women. As a result, the changes this group seeks are relatively modest and do not require the reworking or overthrowing of current church structures. This group acknowledges that liberation has not been the experience of women. This reality is the result of patriarchal interpretations of text throughout much of Christian tradition. As a result, the problem does not lie in the biblical text itself, but rather in the way fallible human beings in a patriarchal context have read and interpreted the Bible (Veeneman 2018: 148).

Veeneman (2018: 148) asserts that the other end of spectrum is made up of what Clifford (2002) refers to as revolutionary feminist theology. These feminist theologians often identify with radical feminism and have the opposite assumption from reformist Christian theologians. For these scholars, the fundamental problem is not only the Christian tradition, but also the patriarchal biblical text that has driven that the biblical text and the Christian tradition are irredeemably patriarchal. As a result, there is nothing redeeming for women, neither in text nor tradition. These scholars argue that the best way forward for women seeking liberation is to move beyond Christianity and seek new religious forms. The third group of feminist theologians that Clifford identifies are referred to as Reconstructionist Christian feminist theologians. These scholars neither claim that the Bible is fundamentally free from patriarchy, nor do they claim that the Bible is so entrenched in patriarchy that there is nothing redeemable for women. Rather, they argue that the biblical text comes out of a patriarchal context and therefore contains sections that are deeply problematic (Veeneman 2018: 148).

Reconstructionist thinkers argue that there is a liberating core to the biblical text, and that the text is and tradition has evidence of women's voices that they may have been silenced or downplayed because of the patriarchal setting. Reconstructionist Christian feminist theologians are interested in retrieving and emphasizing the liberating core of the biblical text. They do not hesitate to point out places in the biblical text that are the product of patriarchal context, and they insist that part of the task of doing this is to attend carefully to the experience of women. By doing this work, they argue that they can articulate a Christian theology that is aware of its patriarchal heritage and that seeks to be a more liberating force for women and other oppressed people. Veeneman (2018: 148-149) asserts that many feminist theologians fit into this category.

### **3.8.1 Christian Feminist Theology**

Christian theology stems from the desire of a believing community and need to understand how it relates with God through the interpretation of its contextual and temporal beliefs (Clifford 2002: 33). Lane (1985) further argues that it is within the context of the second wave of feminism that we can begin to talk about the emergence of a specifically Christian form of feminism. According to Lane (1985), Christian feminism, in the spirit of the second wave of feminism, is concerned with the relationship of the life of the Christian community, the recreation of the full freedom of all daughters and sons of God in Christ and the redemptive healing of all the ecclesial persons with special reference to the brokenness of those women who have become alienated from the church. Thus, Christian feminism does not become an end in itself. It is not about replacing one particular bias by another particular bias; instead, Christian feminism insists on the necessity of giving equal weight to the female point of view, and then goes on to say that only when this is done, with all the pain that this may involve initially, can the real goals of Christian feminism begin to take shape. In other words, these goals are not the reversal of male domination and patriarchy by a new form of female domination and matriarchy (Lane 1985: 669-670).

Christian theology also presupposes faith that is at once personal and shared with other Christians. This presupposition also affects Christian feminist theologians as they seek to contribute to Christian belief. Christian feminist theologians apply theology with an appreciation of the different elements in the Christian tradition, particularly its prophetic and liberating elements. In the biblical prophetic tradition, God's messengers drew attention to the community's neglect of God's saving truth. By paying attention to the neglected position of women who are also people of God is what makes Christian feminist theology stand out. Christian theology has been liberated by this prophetic truth which paves away from the age old patterns of patriarchal myopia where women and their experience of God are concerned. With its uniqueness, feminist theologies does have similarities with other branches of theology which is the commitment to bring faith in God revealed by Jesus Christ from the perspective of women's experience (Clifford 2002: 33).

### **3.9 The Importance of Female Experience**

The important catalyst in bringing about a new perception of life is the acceptance and recognition of human experience as an important source of human understanding. Clifford (2002: 35) states that for feminist theology to be sincerely true to the word 'feminist' it cannot begin from the abstract theory about God and the things of God, but however must first explore and gather narratives centred around experiences since individual life situations and contextual settings shape human experiences. Lane's (1985: 668) argument is centred on the ontological experiences of women and the different spaces they exist in which is different from that of a male. He further states that in saying this we should avoid the divisive and unhelpful debate about one form of human experience that is superior to another form of human experience. Therefore, from the second wave of feminism emerges both male and female experiences which provide meaning and truth about life. Although there is hesitation from feminism to accept that in the future female experiences will have to be taken more seriously, the present-day misunderstandings within society and the church manifest from lack of attention to female experiences. The pain and alienation experienced by women in society and the church is the end result of invalidating women's experiences and not acknowledging them as unique.

With regard to Christianity, Lane (1985: 668) remarks that it is pointed out by many feminists that the experiences of one half of the church have been taken as normative and constitute the whole church. The reason for much disaffection by women from institutionalized Christianity today is the apparent neglect of that which is unique and specific to the female experience. For example, women relate to life and other persons in a manner quite different from men although this is not visible in the language of faith and worship employed by the church, resulting in a number of women finding it challenging to relate and identify with the language of faith and worship that reflects a different type of human experience. The most obvious instance of this can be found in the persistence of imagining God as male in worship. Therefore if God was wholly male, would it be that everything in life be measured and evaluated in male terms. Of course we know from revelation and from all that is best in the Christian tradition like analogy, dialectic and symbol that God is portrayed exclusively male.

The issue of experience, therefore, is central to a proper application of the feminist movement. Lane (1985: 669) remarks that to highlight the importance of experience, many women point out that up to now the human family, both society and the church, have been seeing with one eye, hearing with one ear, walking only on one leg, and working only with one hand. Hence, feminism is a call and a challenge to the human family in society and church to see with two eyes, to hear with two ears, to walk on two legs, and to work with two hands. In effect, it is when female experience is taken seriously that the ultimate goal of feminism comes into fruition. These include the social reconstruction of life, the transformation of the lifestyles and relationships between women and men, and the full participation of women in the social and political centres of power and decision-making bodies. Thus, the language of feminism working towards these goals is the language of wholeness, connectedness, and inclusiveness. For Lane (1985: 669), these goals are not the reversal of the male domination and patriarchy by a new form of female domination and matriarchy rather, about the creation of a new synthesis, the development of a different but mutually enriching understanding of life, history, society and Christian faith by women and men working together.

According to Christian feminism, the quest for wholeness that is represented by women's movements is said to be fulfilling the new life of grace and salvation offered to all by the liberating death and resurrection of Christ. Inspired by the Gospel of Christ and the Church's universal peace and reconciliation teachings, Christian feminism is particularly being shaped by the preaching and teaching of Jesus, the practice of the first community and the basic theological doctrines of the church. Notably, women are very visible in the mission and ministry of Jesus. Women have been present as disciples of Jesus from the beginning of his public ministry. Luke, the evangelist, lists among the disciples of Jesus, Mary called Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna, and many others who accompanied Jesus at the beginning of his preaching in Galilee (Luke 8: 2-3).

In addition, special reference is also made to the special place of Mary, the mother of Jesus, throughout the life of her Son. Thus, the relationship between Mariology and Christian feminism is something that merits reflection, which is the interest of this research. Outstanding visibility of women as disciples can only be explained by the introduction of a new attitude by Jesus towards women. The spirit of this new attitude can be gleaned from the preaching of Jesus about the coming Reign of God and his call to a new discipleship of equals. The Brazilian feminist theologians, Ivone Gebara and Maria Clara Bingemer, are the champions of re-reading Marian dogmas based on the coming Reign of God. Chapter six of this paper deals with the announcement of the coming of the reign of God where the poor and rich, Pharisees and Sadducees, women and men, Jews and Gentiles, are invited without distinction. Within this new Reign of God there will be no more division of discrimination or domination; all are called to new oneness, equality and freedom before and in the presence of God. This Reign of God reverses the existing values of the world. The poor have a special place, and those who are marginalized begin to move to the centre stage (Lane 1985: 669).

Rakoczy (2004: 17) states that feminist theology has two tasks: the deconstruction and critiquing the male cultural paradigms in theological thought, and the construction and formulation of new perspectives. She further states that these tasks proceed in three interlocking steps. The first step is to deconstruct and critique what has been received in the Christian theological tradition. Women's absence and silence in church history and theological writings are brought to the fore and questions are asked about why this happened. This research took the similar approach as described above; that is, to critique traditional Mariology, using feminists' lenses and then reconstruct a contemporary Mariology as emerging from the feminist scholarship. In this deconstructive moment there is both a critique of what has been written, and a search for the cause of the exclusion of women and the distortion of their reality. The second step was to search for an alternative history and tradition to support the inclusion of women as full human beings. The final step is the most creative since the challenge is to reconstruct and formulate the teaching of Christianity. It is not a matter of "add a few women and stir them into history ... No, a whole new way of thinking and expressing the Christian tradition, it is the agenda" (Rakoczy 2004:18). Furthermore, feminist theology uses all the resources available to the traditional patriarchal theology but in a new way. Scripture and Christian tradition, and culture, its depth and complexity are deconstructed according to the basic principle of the full humanity of women. In addition, the writings and witnesses of women form part of the theological resources (Rakoczy 2004: 18).

Among three categories given by Clifford (2002) to understand Christian feminist theology (Reformist, Revolutionary Feminist theologians, and Reconstructionist feminist theologians), this research is within the parameters of reformist Christian feminist theology. This research approaches the biblical text and the Christian tradition with the assumption that the biblical text in itself is fundamentally liberating for women. As a result, this research is not an attempt to overthrow current church structures. The approach of this research acknowledges that liberation has not been the experience of most women.

However, the research does hold the view that the reality is the result of patriarchal interpretations of the biblical texts throughout much interpretation of Christian tradition. Hence, the researcher puts much emphasis on re-reading Marian doctrines, the scriptures or the Bible, and the Christian tradition to produce inclusive and liberating themes.

### **3.10 Conclusion**

This chapter was able to give us an insight of what is meant by Christian feminist theology, its method and the types of feminist theology. Whilst feminist theology can be done from any number of religious perspectives, feminist Christian theology seeks to address the experiences of women and the relationship between those experiences, the biblical text, and Christian tradition. The first-wave feminists largely argued for the legal equality of men and women, which successfully earned women the right to vote from the period of 1940s–1950s. The second wave of feminism gives us a balanced view of the purpose of feminist theology which its pursuit is human equality and a holistic approach to understanding human life. At the same time, second-wave feminism as a whole tends to represent the interests and concerns of well-educated, white, middle- and upper-class Western women and seem less relevant to women of colour in the West and women from the non-Western world. Third-wave feminism acknowledges that women come from different contexts, and it holds that one's context will also have an effect on one's theological context. The third wave also turns to concern about ecology. This is often referred to as eco-feminism. These thinkers argue that any move toward the liberation of women is incomplete without an accompanying move toward the liberation of earth. The value of human experience also stands out in feminism as an important component of the tools of understanding social issues as well as God's revelation. The next chapter will help us to understand the official position of the Catholic Church in relation to Mariology and Marian statements finding expression in dogmas.

## CHAPTER FOUR: THE TEACHING OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH ON MARY

### 4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented the theoretical framework upon which the study is constructed. This chapter aims to look at the official teaching of the Catholic Church on Mary by discussing the pronouncements of the Magisterium in relation to Mary the mother of Jesus. “Mary the mother of Jesus has attracted a loving devotion and avid dedication among Christians for two thousand years” (Pelikan *et al* 2005: V). The Catholic Church teaches that Mary is the perfect realization of the Church’s holiness and its model. This sets Mary as an exemplary model for men and women in the answering of God’s call. Fathers of the Second Vatican Council brought enlightenment about the doctrine and the reality of the history of salvation and the people of God which was completed with an illustration of Mary’s role in the work of salvation. Chapter eight of *Lumen Gentium* (LG8) emphasizes the ecclesiological significance of Marian doctrine, and highlights the contribution made by what the figure of the Blessed Virgin offers to our understanding of the Church’s mystery (John Paul II 2000: 17).

Today, the Catholic Church still looks to Mary for inspiration, because she lived a life of faith as the associate of her Son in the work of redemption. With that said, this chapter will examine traditional Mariology as it finds its expressions in the pronounced statements by relevant councils and competent authorities of the Catholic Church (the Marian Dogmas), and the contribution of Vatican II on Mary. These two aspects of Mary, in my view, are the ones that contributed to the current state of Mariology. However, this is not a work of doctrinal theology in the traditional sense. Thus, it does not present the full teaching of the Catholic Church about Mary, which is adequately available elsewhere.

### 4.2 Catholic Overview of the main Teachings about Mary

The overview of the Marian dogmas is important because it determines, to a large extent, the presentation of Mary in popular preaching, in theology and spirituality of the Catholics. Hence, in the words of Balasuriya (1994: 179): “The Marian dogmas highlight the special

privileges and graces that Mary received from God rather than her active role in the life and ministry of Jesus in the contemporary social situation.” The four foundational Marian Dogmas are the *Theotokos* (Mary the mother of God), Mary’s Perpetual Virginity, Immaculate Conception, and the Assumption. As far as these Marian teachings are concerned their evolution has had an impact on their presuppositions, ideologies and imagination. Furthermore, with the influence they have on Christian spirituality they are declared high Mariology in nature. As God remains ineffable, the truth behind His divine mystery is irreplaceable which is why a dogma is only an expression of truth. According to the Vatican I, Gerald O’Collins (1981: 19) states that

*The divine mysteries by their very nature transcend the created intellect that, even when they have been communicated in revelation and received by faith, they remain covered by the veil of faith itself and shrouded as were in darkness (DS 3016).*

With the above said, the enunciation of dogmas clarifies existing misconceptions and to establish the parameters of revelation. For example, as the Councils of Nicaea and Constantinople addressed the misconceptions surrounding Arianism by declaring the divinity of Christ however never questioning the revelation truths that were not stated dogmatically (Komonchak 1987: 295).

The declaration of Christ as the universal Redeemer is not a formulated dogma as this truth is upheld to be not requiring proclamation. It should be understood that although the words dogma and doctrine have been used interchangeably throughout history, they mean different things. Dogmas are said to be the expressions of the truth of revelation and doctrines serve a guideline on how to understand such. It is from doctrines where the theological interpretations emerge and its dynamic intrinsic value may be reflected in the preaching, liturgy, papal encyclicals, the work of theologians, and the example of the lives of the saints. This cements its sole purpose which is to enable people to “internalise the meaning of the world that God has revealed in Christ” (Komonchak *et al* 1987: 293). Therefore, a dogma is immutable and doctrine is more dynamic and contextualized which is why in the 16<sup>th</sup> century the canon of the Bible was dogmatically proclaimed at the Council of Trent, after it was challenged by the Reformers. The dogma’s expression of commonly held

beliefs does not mean that they have been articulated. As Gebara and Bingemer (1989: 90) state that, “to perceive dogma as formulaic is to misunderstand its intent” which explains the *Magisterium*’s responsibility of assessing beliefs and validating by through discernment. It is then important to take into cognisance that dogmas have to be true and their existence does not lie on their popularity. “It is, therefore, quite possible to speak of an evolution of dogma in the service of a deepening of the Christian mystery” (Gebara & Bingemer 1989: 90). The understanding of Marian dogmas calls for their re-evaluation to highlight their unifying, multidimensional aspects that support the essence of the dogma. As for their revised interpretations, their theology has not been altered which relates to Mary as the mother of God, perpetual Virgin, Immaculate Conception, and Assumed into heaven. As much as such mysteries are not isolated from history, they are however connected to the mystery of God although their feminist interpretations have taken a paradigm shift on their contemplation.

#### **4.2.1 What is a Dogma?**

Veeneman (2018: 59, citing Lonergan (1992), says that there are two types of doctrines, namely doctrine of the original message and doctrines about the doctrines. The original message is the Scripture, and the doctrines about doctrine come through the interpretation of the original message. The scripture and tradition are both the sources of dogmas although their revelations are not clear. However, Nuener (2004: 79) argument esteems the teaching and authority of the *Magisterium* of the Church which declares dogmas as revealed by God therefore are divine truths. Furthermore, O’Collins’ (1981:188) definition of a dogma aligns with the above and highlights that as the revealed truth it is infallible and forever binding to the faithful. According to the *Lumen Gentium* , the bishops proclaim the doctrine of Christ infallible based on the following conditions which are when, even though dispersed throughout the world, but preserving for all that among themselves and with Peter’s successor the bond of communion, in their authoritative teaching concerning faith and morals, they are in agreement that a particular teaching is to be held definitively (L G 12).

The Vatican I Council settled comparatively the nature of the dogma in 1870 where it was stated that with its divinity and the Catholic Church's faith it is reflected in the word of God. Therefore, the Church either by a solemn judgement or by her ordinary and universal *Magisterium*, cements the belief as having been divinely revealed (Neuner & Roos 1967: 91). Although the dogmatic formulas are not detected by God, however, because of His creation and acts in human existence dogmas become the expression of the perceived truth of divine revelations. Hence, they interpreted and translated into dogmas. The interpretation and the understanding of dogma is not a matter of merely semantic elucidation, but is the result of reflection on the nature of God and God's action in the world.

The Catholic Church insists that God's revelation is to all humankind, not only to Christians and that is consequently, the interpretation of this revelation which is the task of all people. This is particularly the opposite in natural law. "The whole body of the faithful who have an anointing that comes from the Holy one cannot err in matters of faith" (LG 12). This means that, while all people are recipients of revelation, only the faithful can determine the dogma. All humanity is the recipient of revelation and the interpretation and expression are protected by the Holy Spirit, the *Magisterium* is nevertheless required to articulate it. O'Collins (1981: 197) expresses the relationship between revelation and the *Magisterium* as follows:

*Believers not only confidently commit themselves to a personal relationship with Christ, but also confess the divine self-communication which they experience in him. They respond to that definitive revelation of God by expressing and formulating their experience of faith. In the first instance, the members of the Magisterium belong to the believing and confessing church, but they also serve to express in a fully visible and authoritative way, the common faith. Among the general body of believers the Magisterium enjoys an obvious visibility and clarity when it formulates matters of faith.*

The Church does not impose dogmas on the faithful but seeks to articulate faith. However, the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption have been at the centre of inquiry as far as the beliefs of the Christian faithful are concerned.

Therefore, as the Magisterium articulates an existing belief rather than an imposing, it accords the basis of belief to the people of God. Moreover, since content and form constitute dogma, it is crucial that all of its contents be revealed to all people and must be formally proclaimed by the Church. This ensures continuity and protects the faith from radicalism. One example of such radicalism was the Albigensian heresy of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, which claimed a dualistic reality in which the material was evil, and only the spiritual was considered good. For the Catholic Church, a dogma and a revelation occupy essentially the same role, which is the engagement of the human with the truth. This sacramentality of the dogma is pivotal if it is not to degenerate into a mere repetition of formulae. This is why it is important that the believing community is instrumental in the interpretation of truth, and that the church leadership, having consulted the community, enunciates what is held by them to be true. In addition, the revelation occurs within history and must also be understood within the currency of time (Komonchak *et al* 1987: 294).

#### **4.2.2 Four Marian Dogmas**

Theological doctrines are said to have a particular function as they are a medium for offering instruction and directives to the believing community, they show the origins of the community and give a community direction for the future (Veeneman 2018: 59). In the Catholic Church all Marian dogmas are instituted for the foundations of faith in action and to understand their significance the person of Mary who is part of the mystery of the Church is important. Mary has been described as poor,<sup>6</sup> simple,<sup>7</sup> and dispossessed,<sup>8</sup> and it is these characteristics which are exalted in the dogma and are essential to the Church, a community of salvation, which is striving to be a sign in the world of the Kingdom of God.

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<sup>6</sup> Luke 1: 53 “He has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.”

<sup>7</sup> Luke 1: 48 “For he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant.”

<sup>8</sup> Luke 1: 52 “He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly.”

The works of Mary as observed by the Church among the vulnerable and the poor have allowed humanity to appreciate the uniquely feminine gifts which are part of God's creation. These truths are seen in the titles that have been given to the virgin mother over the centuries: the Greatest of all Creatures, the Sole Boast of the Human Race, the Dawn of our Salvation and the Tower of David.

#### ***4.2.2.1 The Theotokos – Mary's Divine Motherhood***

Mariology begins not with Mary alone, but with Mary in relation to Jesus. The divine motherhood has a deep and solid support in scripture. In the Gospel narratives, Mary is above all Jesus's mother. In the New Testament Mary is referred to as the mother twenty-five times and only two gospels refer to her as a virgin. The primary view of Mary is as the Mother of Jesus, which locates Marian dogmas within the ambit of Christology – the divine and the human nature of Christ. The term *Theotokos* appeared first in the Provincial Council of Alexandria, preparatory to the Council of Nicaea in 319–320, but was proclaimed officially only in 431 at the Council of Ephesus. Prior to this, elements of the theology were visible at the Councils of Constantinople I in 381 and Chalcedon in 451. According to Saint John Paul II (2000: 150),

Mary's Motherhood does not extend to all the Trinity, but only to the second person of the Trinity, the Son, who in becoming incarnate took his human nature from her.

*Motherhood is a relationship of person to person: a mother is not only the mother to the body or of the physical creature born of her womb but of the person she begets. Thus, having given birth according to his human nature to the person of Jesus, who is a divine person, Mary is the Mother of God* (John Paul II 2000: 150).

As Neuner (2004: 43-55) questions the nature of the *Theotokos*, therefore, nature of Christ is the inception point for this inquiry Mary and Jesus are inseparable and the question of Jesus is the focus of the gospels.

Furthermore, Jesus is not a prophet who receives a mandate from God. He is unique in that his person and his mission are the same. Notions of Mary's motherhood are affected and determined by Alexandrian and Antiochian Christologies which disagreed about the nature of Christ, and which resulted in both Nestorianism<sup>9</sup> and Monophysitism.<sup>10</sup> The implications from Mariology concern the *Theotokos* giving birth to Jesus' diminished body, or the *Anthropotokos* giving birth to the man Jesus. The Council of Ephesus expressly declared Mary the *Theotokos*– the Mother of God– and this statement has been a key to the understanding of the two natures of Christ (fully human and fully divine). (John Paul II 2000: 150) The Council of Chalcedon did not add to this doctrine, though it gave it more weight. Its statement reads, “the Son was [is] born of the Father before all times as to his divinity, born in recent times for us and for our salvation from the Virgin Mary, Mother of God, as to his humanity” (Nuener & Roos 1967: 252). The purpose of this statement was to accentuate the reality of the maternity of Mary in the face of Monophysitism whose claim of Christ's one nature after the incarnation would render impossible Mary's motherhood of Christ. It continues to support Christ's hypostatic union (Gebara & Bingemer 1989: 97).

Saint John Paul II (2000: 150-151) is explicit on this issue:

*Mary's divine Motherhood refers only to the human begetting of the Son of God, but not his divine birth. The Son of God was eternally begotten of God the Father. And is consubstantial with him. Mary, of course, has no part in this eternal truth. However, the Son of God assumed our human nature 2000 years ago and was conceived by and born of Mary ....*

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<sup>9</sup> Nestorianism held that Christ had two natures; divine and human.

<sup>10</sup> Monophysitism arose in reaction to Nestorianism, which held that Christ had only one nature, as human nature was part of the divine nature. Both positions were condemned as heretical at the Council of Chalcedon.

Jesus's divinity does not come from Mary; however, *homoousios* nature of Christ ensures Mary's motherhood of his totality in the world. As the *Theotokos* title reflects the unique vocation God has endowed. It further highlights that Christ became Incarnate after God had obtained consent from Mary which signifies her freedom in accepting the responsibility God was about to give her. Early Marian devotions refer to Mary as the mother of God, *Theotokos*, as early as the third century. St John Paul II (2000: 148) quote from the *Liturgy of Hours* (the Divine Office), "We fly to thy patronage, O holy Mother of God. Despise not our petitions in our necessities, but deliver us from all evil, O glorious and blessed Virgin." The only mention about her at Constantinople I is "incarnate of the Holy Spirit and Virgin Mary", which is more a statement of her maternal role in the incarnation than about her virginal motherhood. The juxtaposition of the Virgin Mary and the Holy Spirit in this statement is intentional. It is doctrinal as well as semantic. The two are co-responsible for the incarnation. The dogma insists that Mary's literal being, as the mother of the Son of God, and her spiritual being, as an instrument of salvation are indivisible. Jesus became the Messiah through his bond with Mary. Her biological motherhood gave rise to her spiritual motherhood. So the message humanity takes from Mary's fiat is the indivisibility of biological and spiritual exercise (John Paul II 2000: 148).

Chapter eight of *Lumen Gentium*, besides further emphasizing divine motherhood, insists upon its soteriological aspect. Thus, Mary is a figure of the Church for all time, rather than a figure located at a fixed time. The decision of Vatican II to situate Mary in the context of the Church is very significant for feminist studies because, in the locus, she becomes one with the faith instead of being a separate entity. In effect, by accepting the *Theotokos* one is compelled to accept that Jesus is the Son of God (LG 8).

#### 4.2.2.2 *Mary's Virginity*

The Catholic Church has always professed her belief in the perpetual virginity of Mary. The most ancient text, when referring to the conception of Jesus, simply calls Mary 'virgin', inferring that they considered this quality a permanent fact concerning her whole life. The early Christians expressed this conviction of faith in the Greek term *aeiparthenos* – ever virgin – created to describe Mary's person uniquely and effectively, and to express in a single word the Church's belief in her perpetual virginity. St John Paul II (2000: 130) says that

*We find it used in the second symbol of faith composed by St. Epiphanius in 374, in relation to the Incarnation, the Son of God, was incarnate, that is, he was generated in a perfect way by Mary, the ever blessed Virgin through the Holy Spirit.<sup>11</sup>*

St John Paul II goes on to say that "the Second Council of Constantinople (533) took up the expression 'ever-virgin' and affirmed, the Word of God, incarnate of the holy and glorious Mother of God and ever-virgin Mary was born of her" (John Paul II 2000: 130). This doctrine is confirmed by two other ecumenical councils, namely the fourth Lateran Council (1215) and the Second Council of Lyon (1274).

The church traditionally presents Mary as a 'virgin before, during and after giving birth', affirming by these three moments that she never ceased to be a virgin. Of the three, the affirmation of virginity 'before giving birth' is undoubtedly the most important, because it refers to Jesus's conception and directly touches the mystery of the Incarnation. From the beginning, it has constantly been present in the Church's belief. On the other hand, her virginity during and after giving birth, although implicit in the title 'Virgin' already attributed to Mary from the Church's earliest days, became the object of deep doctrinal study, since some began explicitly to cast doubt on it.

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<sup>11</sup> St John Paul quotes Ancoratus, 119, 5; DS 44 Saint John Paul II quoting (DS 422).

Nonetheless, Vatican II confirmed this doctrine and stated that the firstborn Son of Mary “did not diminish his Mother’s virginal integrity, but sanctified it” (LG 7).

Concerning her virginity, after the birth, it must be pointed out that there are no reasons for thinking that the will to remain a virgin, which Mary expressed at the moment of the Annunciation (Luke 1:34), was then changed (John Paul 2000: 130). According to Vatican II (LG 7), the Catholic Church refers to the book of John (19:26) “Woman, behold, your son!”, “Behold, your mother”, which Jesus addressed from the cross to Mary and his beloved disciple, implying that Mary had no other children. Those who deny her virginity after the birth thought they had found a convincing argument in the term ‘firstborn’, attributed to Jesus in the Gospel of Luke (2: 7), almost as though this word implied that Mary had other children after Jesus. However, the word ‘firstborn’ literally means ‘a child not preceded by any other’ and, in itself, does not refer to the existence of other children. According to some, Mary’s virginity after the birth is denied by the Gospel texts, which record the existence of four “brothers of Jesus: James, Joseph, Simon and Judas” (Matthew 13: 55-56; Mark 6: 3) and several sisters. It should be recalled that no specific terms exist in Hebrew and Aramaic to express the word ‘cousin’, and that the terms ‘brother and sister’ therefore included several degrees of familial relationship. The phrase ‘brothers of Jesus’ indicates ‘the children’ of Mary who was a disciple of Christ (Matthew 27:56) and who is significantly described as ‘the other Mary’ (Matthew 28: 1). The defenders of the perpetual virginity such as Jerome and Luther describe these other kinsmen as children of Joseph by a previous marriage or as children of another Mary and Cleophas (Pelikan *et al* 2005: 84).

*They are close relations of Jesus, according to an Old Testament expression. (CCC 500) Because of the biblical problems, the identification of Mary as a perpetual virgin has not been supported as badly across the churches of Christendom as has the doctrine of the Theotokos, and despite Luther’s espousal of it, the number of Lutherans and other Protestants who would make it their own today is quite probably small (Pelikan et al 2005: 89).*

Moreover, in his general audience of August 28, 1996, Saint Pope John Paul II, says that “Mary Most Holy” is thus the “ever-virgin”. He affirms this saying that her prerogative is the consequence of her divine motherhood which totally consecrated her to Christ’s mission of redemption (John Paul II 2000: 132).

It is important to see Mary’s virginity, like her motherhood, in the context of salvation. The Catholic Church teaches that salvation occurs as a result of a gift given by God, but accepted by humanity. Nuener (2004: 57) argues that in most religions, virginity is more than mere abstinence from sexual relations and expresses purity and self-control, which is the basis of spiritual growth. In the case of Mary, unlike the mother-goddess figures of Mediterranean mythology, this virginity is permanent and juxtaposed with motherhood. Old Testament concepts of virginity are associated with sterility and the New Testament abounds with examples of sterile women being made fertile.

#### *4.2.2.3 Mary’s Immaculate Conception*

Down the centuries, the conviction that Mary was preserved from the stain of sin from her conception so that she is to be called all holy, gradually gained momentum in the liturgy and theology. At the start of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the development led to a petition drive from the dogmatic definition of the privilege of the Immaculate Conception. Around the middle of the century, with the intention of accepting this request, Pope Pius IX, after consulting the theologians, questioned the bishops about the opportuneness and the possibility of such a definition, convoking as if it were a council in writing. The result was significant, since the vast majority of the 504 bishops gave a positive response to the question. Saint John Paul II says that “after such an extensive consultation, which emphasized my venerable predecessor’s concern to express the Church’s faith in the definition of the dogma, he set about preparing the document with equal care” (John Paul II 2000: 100).

The special commission of theologians which Pius IX set up to determine the revealed doctrine assigned the essential role to ecclesial practice. The criterion influenced the formulation of the dogma, which preferred expressions taken from the Church's lived experience, from the faith and worship of the Christian people to a scholastic definition. Finally in 1854, with the *Bull Ineffabilis*, Pius IX solemnly proclaimed the dogma of the Immaculate Conception:

*We declare, pronounce and define that the doctrine which asserts that the Blessed Virgin Mary, from the first moment of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege of almighty God and in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, Saviour of the human race, revealed by God and, for this reason, must be firmly and constantly believed by all the faithful* (John Paul II 2000: 101).<sup>12</sup>

The proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception expresses the essential datum of faith.<sup>13</sup> Saint John Paul II says that:

*Pius IX's definition, however, rescinds from all explanations about how the soul is infused into the body and attributes to the person of Mary, at the first moment of her conception, the fact of her being preserved from every stain of original sin.*

The freedom from every stain of original sin entails a positive consequence, the total freedom from all sin as well as the proclamation of Mary's perfect holiness, a doctrine to which the dogmatic definition makes a fundamental contribution. The negative formulation of the Marian privilege, which resulted from the earlier controversies about original sin that arose in the West, must always be complemented by the positive expression of Mary's holiness more explicitly stressed in the Eastern tradition. Pius IX's definition refers only to the freedom from concupiscence. Granted by a singular grace and privilege of almighty God, "this preservation from original sin is an absolutely gratuitous divine favour, which Mary received at the first moment of her existence" (John Paul II 2000: 102). The virgin mother received the singular grace of human being immaculately conceived because of the merits of Jesus Christ, saviour of the human race. The text of the dogmatic definition does not expressly declare that Mary was redeemed, but the Bull *Ineffabilis* states that she was redeemed most sublimely.

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<sup>12</sup> Saint John Paul II quoting DS 2803.

<sup>13</sup> Saint John Paul II quoting DS 2017.

The Vatican Council II proclaimed that the church “admires and exalts in Mary the most excellent fruit of the redemption”, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (SC 103). This solemnly proclaimed doctrine is expressly termed a doctrine revealed by God. According to Pope Pius IX, “it must be firmly and constantly believed by all the faithful. Consequently, whoever does not make this doctrine his own, or maintains an opinion contrary to it, is shipwrecked in faith and separates himself from Catholic unity” (John Paul II 2000: 102).

In proclaiming the truth of this dogma, Pope Pius IX was conscious of exercising his power of infallible teaching as the universal pastor of the church. Furthermore, several early Fathers of the Church, who were not yet convinced of Mary’s perfect holiness, attributed imperfections or moral defects to Mary. Some recent authors have taken the same position. However, “the Gospel text cited to justify these opinions provides no basis at all for attributing a sin or even a moral imperfection to the Mother of Jesus Christ” (Neuner 2004: 87).

In traditional Mariology concerning Mary’s holiness there are two significant relationships. The first of these is the relationship of Mary and Eve. Mary has come to replace Eve who became a cause of sin and death; who listened to the serpent and challenged God. She is contrasted with Mary who listened to Gabriel and who became the new source of life. The feast of Mary’s nativity, instituted in the seventh century, celebrates the tradition of her conception by Anna; hence Mary was conceived naturally, but as a result of God’s intervention. Elizabeth’s conception of John the Baptist was similar. Through this action, God’s intervention sets the stage for the incarnation of Christ and human redemption. The dogma of the Immaculate Conception cannot be understood unless it is considered alongside the doctrine of original sin. Humanity develops in an existential paradox: the original sin of the human condition and the redemption to which it is called. The dogma of the Immaculate Conception separates Mary from the rest of humanity, in that she was born into a situation of possible non-salvation. Her whole being, body and soul, is graced and she becomes the sign of the redeemed world (Neuner 2004: 87).

The misunderstanding surrounding this dogma has occurred over time, particularly with the controversies on original sin. Augustine, in trying to sustain the fact of salvation through grace alone, implied the sinfulness not only of the saints but of the Virgin as well. His response that Mary had conquered sin nevertheless implied that she had been created sinful, and his insistence on this being resolved through the ‘grace of rebirth’ increased the problem in the Western Church. If Mary is human, she is a sinner and her sanctification can only be after her conception. We are caught in a double bind. St Thomas Aquinas states that original sin is inherited through natural generation, and therefore, includes Mary.

Aquinas is quoted by Neuner (2004: 87) as saying that

*it was proper that Christ should be conceived by a virgin ... on account of the dignity of this humanity in which sin had no place ... But it was impossible that in a nature which is already corrupt through cohabitation; a flesh was born from the infection of original sin. Thus Mary is in need of healing.*

The second relationship that gave rise to debate was that between Mary and Jesus, Mary’s special relationship to the sinless Jesus requires of her to be sinless as well. However, if Mary were sin free she would not require redemption, and this negates the universality of Jesus’ redemptive work. Because it cannot be risked that Mariology outranks Christology, the question of Mary’s sinlessness has been resolved, though not to the satisfaction of all, by asserting two levels of grace, healing grace and redemptive grace. Mary did not need forgiveness from sin, but she needed redemption from the effects of sin in the world. This issue can be resolved if one remembers that “Jesus’s redemptive work is free of both space and time” (John Paul II: 50). Therefore, although in worldly terms Jesus’ redemptive act took place after Mary’s conception, in the divine order it takes place simultaneously. However, this eternal presence renders the distinction irrelevant. The matter remained controversial until the Council of Trent exempted Mary from original sin and declared the way for *Ineffabilis Deus* in 1854. In this case, the law of the Jews has been superseded by the covenant with humanity, and the God of the temple in Jerusalem is now available to all people (Gebara & Bingemer 1989:112).

While many Catholics find profound truth in the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, there are some difficulties posed by this dogma. Anglicans doubt the appropriation or even the possibility of defining the Immaculate Conception and Assumption as essential to the faith of believers. Some Protestant theologians reject the Immaculate Conception, partly because it is an arbitrary innovation not justified by scripture, and purely on the grounds that it seems to contradict the principle of *Sola gracia* (Macquarie 1990: 54). Still others think that Mary has been “exalted into the place that belongs to Jesus Christ alone, as indeed Protestant critics of what they call ‘Mariology’ have constantly claimed” (Macquarie 1990: 74).

Macquarie goes on to say that by acknowledging that the difficulties posed by this dogma are the real ones, the Catholic Church has to be careful not to allow the impulse of Marian spirituality to lead the Church into exaggerated claims for Mary.

*Like all Mariological doctrines, it can be seen and should be seen as implication of Christology and other central doctrines of Christian faith, and is in no sense an independent glorification of the virgin, though it certainly is an acknowledgement of the feminine contribution to the work of salvation* (Macquarie 1990: 74).

Mary has her significance not in herself but because of her relation to Christ. Thus, the dogma of the Immaculate Conception has a special contribution to make toward a better appreciation of the place of women and men in the Catholic Church and of the gifts, which all people can bring to it (Gebara & Bingemer 1999: 390).

#### **4.2.2.4 Mary's Assumption**

Following the Bull *Munificentissimus Deus* of Pope Pius XII, the Second Vatican affirmed the immaculate Virgin “on the completion of her earthly sojourn was taken up body and soul into heavenly glory” (LG 59).

The Council Fathers wished to stress that Mary, unlike Christians who die in God's grace, was taken up into the glory of heaven with her body. The dogma of the assumption affirms that Mary's body was glorified after her death. While for other human beings the resurrection of the body will take place at the end of the world, for Mary the glorification of her body was anticipated by a special privilege. On November 1, 1950, in defining the dogma of the Assumption, Pius XII avoided using the term 'resurrection' and did not take a position on the question of the Blessed Virgin's death as a truth of faith. The Bull *Munificentissimus Deus* limits itself in affirming the elevation of Mary's body to heavenly glory, declaring this truth, a divinely revealed dogma. Saint John Paul II (2000: 201), in his General audience of July 2, 1997, says,

*How can we not see the assumption of the Blessed Virgin has always been part of the faith of the Christian people, who by affirming Mary's entrance into heavenly glory, have meant to proclaim the glorification of her body?*

He goes on to say that the trace of belief in the Virgin's assumption can be found in the apocryphal accounts entitled *Transitus Mariae*, whose origin dates to the second and third centuries (John Paul II 2000: 204). Later, there was a long growing reflection on Mary's destiny in the next world. This gradually led the faithful to believe in the glorious raising of the Mother of Jesus in body and soul, and to the institution in the East of the liturgical feasts of the Dormition and the Assumption of Mary. Belief in the glorious destiny of the body and soul of the Lord's Mother after her death spread very rapidly from East to West and has been widespread since the 14<sup>th</sup> century. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, on the eve of the definition of the dogma, it was a truth almost universally accepted and professed by the Christian community in every corner of the world.

In May 1846, "with the encyclical *Deiparae Virginis Mariae*, Pius XII called for a broad consultation, inquiring among the bishops and through them among the clergy and the people of God as to the possibility and opportuneness of defining the bodily assumption of Mary as a dogma of faith" (John Paul II 2000: 204). It is said that the results were extremely positive; only six answers out of 1 181 showed any reservations about the revealed character of this truth.

The Bull *Munificentissimus Deus* therefore states:

*From the universal agreement of the Church's ordinary magisterium we have a certain and firm proof demonstrating that the Blessed Virgin's bodily assumption into heaven... is a truth revealed by God and therefore should be firmly and faithfully believed by all the children of the Church (John Paul II 2000: 204).<sup>14</sup>*

The definition of the dogma, in conformity with the universal faith of the People of God, definitely excludes every doubt and calls for the express assent of all Christians. After stressing the Church's actual belief in the assumption, the Bull *Munificentissimus Deus* recalls the scriptural basis for this truth.

Although the New Testament does not explicitly affirm Mary's assumption, it offers a basis for it, because it strongly emphasizes the Blessed Virgin's perfect union with Jesus's destiny. This union, which was manifested from the time of the Mother's participation in her Son's mission, and especially in her association with his redemptive sacrifice, cannot fail to require a continuation after death. Perfectly united with the life and saving work of Jesus, Mary shares His heavenly destiny in body and soul. Josef Neuner (2004: 101) presents the basis for the belief as biblical:

*It is biblical teaching that those who are united with Jesus Christ in their life and work are sure to share in his glory. The same Bible presents Mary linked to Jesus in a unique manner, not only giving him his earthly life but also sharing in his saving mission. So she is with him also in his resurrection. It is right, therefore, to say that the faith in Mary's assumption has a basis in the Bible.*

Furthermore, the Bull *Munificentissimus Deus* cited above refers to the participation of the woman of the proto-Gospel in the struggle against the serpent, recognizing Mary as the New Eve, and presents the assumption as a consequence of Mary's union with Christ's saving work.

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<sup>14</sup> Saint John Paul II quoting *Munificentissimus Deus*: AAS 43 (1950): 757.

Just as the glorious resurrection of Christ was an essential part and the final sign of this victory, so was, for John Paul II (2000: 205), the struggle, which was common to the Blessed Virgin and her divine Son, should be brought to a close by the glorification of her virginal body. Saint John Paul II concludes his speech to his General Audience of July 2, 1997, by stating that “the assumption is the culmination of the struggle which involved Mary’s generous love in the redemption of humanity and is the fruit of her unique sharing in the victory of the cross” (John Paul II 2000: 205).

Nevertheless, the significance of the Assumption of Mary is not without challenges. Firstly, the perception of Reformation Churches with this dogma is that it is not attested in scripture. The Assumption is often understood as a gift exclusive to Mary, thereby seeming to separate her from the condition common to all human beings (Blancy & Jourjon 1999: 102).

From a feminist theology point of view, Johnson (1985b: 461) states:

*By dividing Mary from all other women (the Eve-Mary dichotomy) creates a tool of disparagement since no other woman can measure up to Mary’s unique prerogative. The idealized Mary stands out “alone of all her sex”, an unreachable norm by which all other women are judged to be deficient.*

From a Catholic perspective, difficulties with this dogma often arise from mistaken ideas that can affect the very understanding of the dogma. Thus, the Assumption of Mary may be confused with the Ascension, which refers to Christ alone. Above all, it risks being linked to the belief that the Virgin did not experience death, but this is not by any means part of the definition of the dogma. When poorly understood, the doctrine of the Assumption keeps alive a disincarnate vision of Mary as though she did not fully share the condition of humanity (Blancy & Jourjon 1999: 102).

The four Marian dogmas show that Mary has received special privileges and graces from God and also have both scriptural and traditional foundations highlighted through the eyes of the Catholic Church. Various facets of each dogma have been carefully considered, and the conclusion reached that Marian dogma is informed by Christology exists to serve Christ and give hope to humanity. The dogmas address and resolve the eschatological issue of assumption for all in Christ. Marian dogmas are therefore deeply Christological, as at every point Mary's life coincides with, and are dependent upon Christ.

According to Nuener (2004), dogmas are enunciated to clarify misconceptions and to establish the parameters of revelation. However, some truths of revelation have never been stated dogmatically as they have never been questioned. I have also stated that dogma and doctrine, though frequently used interchangeably, are different in the sense that dogmas relate to the truths of revelation while doctrines explain how they may be understood. The doctrine may vary as theological interpretations develop, but the dogma may not. Thus, dogma is immutable and doctrine is more dynamic and contextual. This definition of dogma and doctrines gives us an opportunity to redefine the Marian dogmas in terms of our current needs and context.

The attempt to redefine Marian dogmas does not change the dogmas *per se*, but changes the doctrine, as the doctrines depend on the theological interpretation of that particular dogma. Not all believers have accepted these dogmas, nor the doctrines that surround them. The Reformed tradition challenges them on numerous issues. While Christians from the other Churches may find some of these dogmas not biblically based, Catholics continue to honour and venerate her because she is the perfect example of the type of spiritual and divine mother of God.

### 4.3 Vatican II on Mary

Chapter eight of *Lumen Gentium* is said to be the summary of the Catholic theology of Mary, but there has been a high contestation of ideas between those who wished to go on making new concepts for Mary with more titles, privileges, and dogmatic definitions and those who desired to renew Marian theology and devotion by a return to the sources. The latter position was the result of three movements and had started up earlier in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, namely the biblical, liturgical and ecumenical renewals. The hierarchical church initially opposed these movements. Reading the biblical movement brought the good news of God's gracious ways in salvation history once again to the forefront. Promoting prayer to the Trinitarian God by the worshipping community, the liturgical movement placed the Eucharist at the centre of the Church's public life, aligning Mary and the saints as part of the praying community. Opening a dialogue with separated brothers and sisters, the ecumenical movement brought reforming intuitions to light and allowed Catholics to hear how deviant Marian maximalism sounded to Protestant ears (Johnson 2003: 123-124).

In addition to these three movements, the impetus for reform also came from Catholic scholars who had been returning to the sources of early Christian theology and a more gospel-oriented approach to Mary for some decades. Each of these developments re-established the powerful truth that salvation comes copiously from God through Jesus Christ and reaches even now through the power of the Spirit. The whole purpose of the debate was to bring Mary back into the community of believers, which went by successfully. Then, the question came whether the teaching on Mary should be dealt with in the schema of the church or not. The issue was joined during the second session of the Council in autumn 1963. Those promoting the glories of Mary opposed the move to include, supporting instead a separate document that would give Mary due regard as superior to the church. Those in favour of inclusion thought it would be more ecumenically profitable as well as keeping with the main theme of the Council itself to check exaggerations by bringing Mary back into the theology of the church. To reach an amicable decision, in a more fully informed manner, a plenary session debate was arranged. Cardinal Rufino Santos of Manila spoke for the 'spate schema' party and Cardinal Franz Konig of Vienna for the 'inclusion in the church' party (Johnson 2003: 126).

Santos presented ten arguments in favour of a separate schema that included the theological argument that, given her relations to Trinity, Mary has a position of priority concerning the church beyond the level of the laity and hierarchy, the pastoral argument that the faithful would see her inclusion in the church as reduction and loss; and the practical one that the constitution on the church as already composed had no place where she might be harmoniously added. König in turn articulated four reasons why teaching on Mary should be incorporated into the schema of the church. These included the theological one that Mary belongs there because she is type of the church, prefiguring its eschatological fulfilment; the pastoral one that the faithful were being encouraged to purify their own devotion to Mary and get back to the essentials based on scripture; and the ecumenical one that an ecclesiological Mariology made possible a conversation with the Oriental and Protestant traditions. On October 29, 1963, the vote was finally taken to incorporate Marian teaching into the schema of the church (Johnson 2003: 125-126).

Notwithstanding, no theologian in the Catholic Church can talk about Mary without referring to Chapter eight of the Second Vatican Council, the Dogmatic Constitution of the Church, *Lumen Gentium*. Nonetheless, it does not intend to give a complete doctrine on Mary, nor does it wish to decide about those questions which the work of theologians has not yet fully clarified. Chapter eight of *Lumen Gentium* begins with a survey of Mary in the divine plan of human salvation (LG 52-54). As the title indicates, the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, is inscribed in the mystery of Christ and the history of salvation (LG 55). Mary begins the New Testament, at the Annunciation, where her faith, her Immaculate Conception and her Divine Motherhood move into focus (LG 56). She is a close associate in the work of salvation throughout the life of the Saviour, her Son; Mother at Nazareth, Disciple from Cana, to the Cross itself, where Jesus at the point of death gives her as Mother to John (LG 57-59).

Another controversy after the one of ‘including/excluding’ Mary in the schema of the church in Vatican II was that the Christotypical or ‘Marian privilege’ theology group continued to urge the Council to solemnly define the dogma that Mary is mediatrix of all graces, who is closely engaged in the work of redemption as an associate of her Son, or at least to declare that she is the mother of the church. On the other side were those who urged that the cause of unity would be hindered by new dogmas; what was needed was to learn to utter the name of Mary, a woman of faith, as part of the vision of the church. Out of the fierce debate, the final text crafted a middle ground that despite compromises still managed to restore Mary to an original pattern of the first millennium. It was entitled, “The role of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, in the Mystery of Christ and the Church” (Jonson 2003: 128). The Council fathers also emphasized that the reality of the church does not end here on earth. Therefore, the constitution goes on to consider the faithful dead, those “friends and fellow heirs of Jesus Christ” (LG 50) with whom the livings form a community. Then within the context of the whole church, living and the dead, the constitution discusses Mary, a pre-eminent member of the church and faith-filled mother of Jesus Christ, once a pilgrim on earth herself and now with God in glory. Be it noted that this placement is a delineation of the program to develop a theology of Mary amid the communion of saints (Johnson 2003:129).

Besides relating Mary to Christ, Chapter eight of *Lumen Gentium* also positions Mary as a member of the church. Here, the Council carefully declared that “the Blessed Virgin Mary is invoked in the church under the titles of Advocate, Auxiliatrix, Adjutrix, and Mediatrix” (LG 62). However, these are to be so understood that they neither take away from nor add anything to the dignity and efficacy of Christ the one Mediator. Instead of a doctrinal definition, the title ‘Mediatrix’ is relativized here in three ways, namely it is placed in a row of other titles; it is set in the context of piety rather than doctrine, thus being descriptive of practice rather than prescriptive; and it is hedged about with Christological reservations. “As St Ambrose taught, the Mother of God is a model of the Church in the matter of faith, charity, and perfect union with Christ.” (LG 67). Thus, Chapter eight of *Lumen Gentium* depicts Mary in her role in the life of the Catholic Church. Her mediation does not obscure or detract from the One Mediator.

The Catholics see Mary as the sign of eschatological hope (LG 66-69).

*Now still, exalted above all the Angels and Saints, the Mother of God continues to intercede before her Son, in communion with all the Saints, until all families of people ... may be happily gathered together in peace and harmony into one people of God for the glory of the Most and Undivided Trinity (LG 69).*

Thus Antoine Nacheff (2002: 4) observes, “It is the most comprehensive synthesis of the Catholic Church’s teaching concerning Mary that an ecumenical council has ever formulated.” Nacheff (2005: 5) goes on to say that

*The way Vatican II spoke about Mary is essential for the theology of the twentieth-century Church. In fact, before summarizing two thousand years of the Church’s belief in the Mother of the Lord, Vatican II prepared the ground for many years to come.*

In its final draft, the Council presented Mary in her relationship with Christ in order to recapture the dynamic dimension of her presence in the mystery of her Son.

*The Fathers of the Council inserted Mary in the ‘Constitution of the Church’, not to diminish Mary’s personal privileges, but to show her direct connection with the mystery of Christ and the Church. Mary is the Mother of Christ and a member of the Church. In this way, instead of being isolated, all the personal privileges of Mary are viewed in the light of Christ and the Catholic Church, as they were handed down through the Apostles (Nacheff 2002: 6).*

The Second Vatican Council, in the Dogmatic Constitution of the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, summarizes the Catholic Church’s belief about Mary and devotion to her in these words,

*We turn our eyes to Mary who shines forth on the whole community of believers as a model of virtues. Faithfully meditating on her and contemplating her in light of the Word made man, the Church enters more intimately into the great mystery of the Incarnation. Mary unites in herself the great teachings of faith, and she calls believers to her Son and sacrifice and the love of the Father (LG 65).*

Seeking the glory of Christ, the Church becomes more like Mary and progresses in faith, hope, and love, seeking and doing the will of God in all things.

*Just as the mother of Jesus, glorified in body and soul in heaven, in the image and beginning of the Church as it is to be perfected in the world to come, so too, does she shine forth on earth, until the day the Lord comes, as the sign of sure hope and solace to the pilgrim people of God on earth (LG 68).*

In accepting Protestant theological challenges to the cult of Mary, Vatican II attempted to cut back the excesses of Marian piety in order to connect the Catholic Marian cult more strongly with scripture and to place Christology once more at the centre of theological reflection. In the decrees of the Council, the Protestant Christocentric emphasis thus became an essential part of Catholic theology. For that reason, Vatican II did not confirm Mary as mediatrix of all grace or as co-redemptrix with Christ, but instead proclaimed her as the ideal representative and central symbol of a more human church oriented towards the world. This chapter reveals that traditional Mariology is essentially androcentric. It lacks the feminine perspective and women's experience aspect. Johnson (1989: 625) notes that the forces of patriarchal tradition "have excluded certain good elements from the idea of God and transferred them in diminished form to the Marian symbol, there to function as a restricting ideal female person". In effect, like the Reformation, Vatican II did not address the question of the marginal ecclesial position of women and the kyriarchal church structures that undergird it. Hence, this new 'Protestant' inspired formulation of Mariology was not able to develop an impetus for ecclesiastical change. Rather, Vatican II ended up further masculinizing theology and church, because it repressed the almost divine female symbol of Mary in Catholic life and piety.

Fiorenza (1995) also notes that the Second Vatican Council attempted to correct hierarchical church structures of domination. Nevertheless, it was not able to do so because it did not touch the status of women in the church. The exclusion of women from ordained leadership of the church resulted in a new emphasis on the scriptural patriarchal-theological 'bride mysticism' in which Mary as the bridal representative of the Church and world remains subordinate to Christ, her head, just as wives are subordinated to their husbands.

Thus the hierarchy remains representing the Christ's masculinity and God's father power, all so-called lay Christians, men and women, are exhorted to imitate Mary, who perfectly represents the feminine qualities of receptivity, subordination, humility, malleability, obedience, and passivity (Fiorenza 1995: 170-71).

Hence, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium* neither discusses female ordination nor women in key strategic leadership positions. Phyllis Zagano notes that the Canon Law holds that women cannot participate in governance, although they may consult and cooperate in it (Zagano 2012: 40).<sup>15</sup> According to this canon, the only way to include women into formal governance and ministry is by restoring women to the ordained ministry.

#### 4.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have stated the significance of the difference between dogma and the doctrine, from which we learned that dogma does not change, but a doctrine might change given space and time where it is engaged. This distinction between dogma and doctrine is fertile ground for new approaches to traditional theology; in our case it is Mariology as the study seeks to find an approach to Mariology to bring about gender equality in the Catholic Church. I deliberately use the catechism of Pope John Paul II because the Pope is a chief catechist of the universal church in the Catholic Church. This chapter has also highlighted the significance of *Lumen Gentium* (Chapter eight of Vatican II) and its success to place Mary as a disciple of Christ. However, this achievement alone does not help women in their struggle to emancipate women in structures of governance and decision-making bodies in the Catholic Church.

The next chapter will look at the feminist critique of traditional Mariology, which includes deconstructing high Mariology or Mariology from above that owes its existence and propagation to male-stream theology and patriarchal church, and reconstructing Mariology from below, or low Mariology that focuses on Mary the human being, Mary of Nazareth.

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<sup>15</sup> Phyllis Zagano quotes the Canon 129 of the 1983 *Code of Canon Law*, which states who can exercise the power of governance.

## **CHAPTER FIVE FEMINIST CRITIQUE OF TRADITIONAL MARIOLOGY**

### **5.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter highlighted the Marian dogmas as finding expression in the official statements of the Catholic Church, their formulation and their impact on Christian life. This chapter will discuss the feminist critiques on traditional Mariology. Most feminist theologians agree that Marian dogmas are androcentric, but they do not suggest that traditional Mariology should be dismantled; rather, suggesting deconstructing the male domination aspect of it and reconstructing a Mariology that will bring about equal human dignity for all persons. The chapter will further highlight the problems that traditional Mariology brings about as identified in feminist scholarship by paying attention to the infancy narrative of Jesus in respect to his genealogy that is said to raise biblical gender issues. This section of genealogy of Jesus is important for this study, because feminist scholarship builds upon the gospel of Matthew in criticising the traditional Mariology and uses the Gospel of Luke to reconstruct an alternative Mariology that is designed to bring about the community of equals. As feminist theology also makes a distinction between low Mariology and a high Mariology, these two approaches to Mariology will be investigated in order to identify how they can assist in the project of constructing a Mariology that promotes equal human dignity. A relationship between a Protestant and feminist approach to Mariology will also be investigated further, because they both seem to be related, but they are not the same.

### **5.2 Gender and Patriarchy in the Infancy Narrative**

Ruether (1979: 26) notes that Matthew's infancy narrative is quite different from Luke's, although they are read together. Matthew does not, in fact, make Mary an important figure at all. Wainwright (1998: 58) also remarks that the Mary who conceives and gives birth to the child, neither speaks nor acts, is not addressed, nor are her feelings and thoughts or characteristics recorded, even the details of her situation are surrounded by innuendo. She goes on to say that Jesus' birth is legitimized through the righteous man, Joseph.

As we read in the Gospel of Matthew, it is Joseph who receives the visit of the angel informing him of the miraculous nature of Jesus' birth. It is he who receives the second message from the angel telling him to take Mary and the child and flee to Egypt. In the genealogy that begins his gospel, Mathew traces the Davidic descent of Jesus (Matthew 1: 1-17). Hence, in the case of the genealogy of Jesus, there is a serious gender problem as we encounter it in the Gospel of Matthew (1:1-17).

Johnson (2003: 222) argues that the genealogy of Jesus is terrible androcentrism. It does not mention matriarchs of Israel. The women who did the work of bearing the sons of each generation go largely unnamed, hidden by the patriarchal construct that considers women as vehicles of reproduction rather than historical agents in their own right. The only four women who are mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus are women who acted outside the patriarchal family structure. These four named female ancestors are not the revered Israelite matriarchs from Genesis, such as Sara, Hagar, Rebekah, Leah and Rachel. Instead, the text names Tamah, Rahab, Ruth, and the wife of Uriah. These women all found themselves at some point outside the patriarchal family structure, and consequently in danger. They took unconventional initiatives to improve their lot. Nonetheless, their enterprise becomes the vehicle for advancing the divine plan of redemption. In the genealogy these four women overshadow the mother of the Messiah, who found herself in a similar perilous situation. The common point among these four women that links them with the fifth woman named in Matthew is Mary. Although they were all sinners in contrast to Mary, they were looked upon with respect and praised for their deeds. Thus the genealogy of these four women foreshadows the mother of the Messiah, who found herself in a similar perilous situation. She belonged in the company of these unconventional foremothers (Johnson 2003: 223).

Furthermore, the story of Mary as a woman is not explored in any of the scriptures where she is mentioned by her name. As Ruether remarks, references to Mary by name appear only in the gospels and the book of Acts. In these writings references to her are of two different types: (1) the infancy narratives, which appear only in Luke and Matthew; and (2) to "the stories that describe the relationship of Mary to Jesus' historical mission" (Ruether 1979:25).

The version of the infancy narrative of Luke is going to be explored in the next chapter (Chapter six). The scholars have long sought a common point among these four ancestral women that would link them with the fifth woman named in Matthew's genealogy. A number of contemporary thinkers argue that the link between Mary and the other women exists in the fact that (a) there is something extraordinary, irregular, even scandalous in their sexual activity, (b) which places them in some peril, (c) in view of which they were taking initiative, (d) thereby becoming participants in the divine work of redemption. Brown (1975) is quoted as saying that genealogy presents these women and their actions as vehicles of divine providence, examples of how God moves in and through the obstacle of human scandal to bring about the coming of the Messiah (Johnson 2003: 224).

On the other hand, Wainwright (1994: 634) argues that the naming of the four particular traits suggests that it is not patriarchal affirmation of the motherhood of significant sons which their inclusion encodes. For Wainwright, the association of Mary alone with the birth of the Messiah is a sign of power. This is said to mean the reproductive power of a woman and her role in the birth structure, even if they are affirmed outside the patriarchal realities. However, this position of Wainwright (1994: 635) does not deconstruct the androcentric perspective of the genealogy and birth narrative that symbolized women as a vehicle of reproduction, because a woman honoured for her reproductive power outside the patriarchal structure is still seen as a vehicle of reproduction. As Wainwright (1994: 635) states, an inclusive rereading offers a powerful critique of the androcentric perspective to the narrative and enables the reader to be guided by gender differences that are not only females but males and females. Therefore, male and female contributions to the birth of Jesus are different, but each is significant. As a biblical Christian, Wainwright seeks the relationships between a patriarchal framework and a disruptive or discontinuous story, liberation linked with inclusion. She also insists that the infancy materials need to be read in the context of the Gospels as a whole. Johnson (2003) and Wainwright (1994) agree that there is something seriously wrong with traditional Mariology; thus it needs to be reconstructed, but they are not dismantling it; they are simply building on it.

Schottroff (1991), on the other hand, sees Mary's virginity in the betrothal or engagement period as normal. However, she maintains that, because the word 'virgin' appears twice in Luke 1: 27, it is already clear to both the reader and the listener that the angel is not announcing the birth of a child from the commenced marriage, but the birth of a woman becoming pregnant without the participation of a man. She argues that the text stresses this miracle of the fatherless birth, which shows that the virginity of Mary is not meant to be anti-woman. She concludes by saying that Mary in the infancy narratives, in her view, is seen as representing all powerless, hungry and despised women, whose bodies God does not overlook (Schottroff 1991: 26).

In an attempt to explore the story of Mary's pregnancy, thinkers from the second century onwards have endorsed four different options. First, Joseph was the biological father who conceived Jesus with Mary while they were in the betrothal stage of their marriage. Secondly, an unknown man seduced Mary and committed adultery with her. Thirdly, a Roman soldier, usually given the name Pathera, forcibly violated Mary, rape not being unknown behaviour in the Roman army. Fourthly, it was a physical, biological miracle, the Holy Spirit of God causing the genesis of the child in Mary's womb in the absence of any human biological father. This last position, technically known as the virginal conception of Jesus, became and remains the official teaching of the Catholic Church, giving rise to the ancient appellation of Mary as Virgin Mother (Johnson 2003: 228). Johnson (2003) argues that contemporary persons have vastly differing reactions to this ancient charge of illegitimacy. As an illegitimate child, Jesus would be counted as an outcast. Not only worldly-wise Christians, however, may find something religiously valuable in this interpretation, but women who are victims of sexual assault and all those in solidarity with them. Violence against women is a chief tool in the maintenance of patriarchy, one of whose defining tenets is man's right to woman's body. In traditional societies this right has been codified in law and custom to the extent of allowing honour killings of women pregnant outside of marriage. In contemporary democratic societies, the struggle for women's rights to the integrity of their own bodies, for the right to say no and be taken seriously, challenges patriarchal privileges at its core.

In both situations, physical and psychological violence serves the cause of male domination and the litany of abuse is long and terrible; from witch burning to forcible rape (stranger rape, acquaintance rape, date rape, rape in marriage); from lesbian bashing to sadomasochistic pornography; from domestic abuse to serial murder. That the Spirit of God would be with a woman who suffered such violence, able to bring good from an inestimable painful situation, embodies the gospel in miniature and is a deep source of hope (Johnson 2003: 30).

Furthermore, a devout person unaware of early Christian history, on the other hand, may well find the charge that Jesus was conceived by seduction or rape utterly shocking. On the other hand, the naming of the particular four women suggests to Wainwright (1994) that it is not patriarchal affirmation of the motherhood of significant sons which their inclusion encodes. But the association of Mary alone with the birth of the Messiah is a sign of power. This is said to mean that the productive power of a woman and her role in the birth of the Messiah are affirmed outside the patriarchal structure, even if they are affirmed outside the biological realities. The feminist reading of the genealogy of Jesus Christ gives us an opportunity to explore the story of Mary from women's perspective, which the Gospel of Mathew failed to address. It also gives us an opportunity to see how God uses the marginalized to bring about the fulfilment of the prophecies of old. However, the patriarchal socialization fails to recognize the role of ensuring that the prophecies of old come to reality by marginalizing and excluding women in decision-making bodies and in government roles based on their biological sex rather than looking at their capabilities (Wainwright 1994: 635).

### **5.3 Mary the Mother of God**

In the late-fourth century, after the Christian church had been established as the exclusive religion of the Roman Empire by the Emperor Theodosius, teaching about Mary developed very rapidly. Masses of people who came into the Christian church brought with them their former devotion to the mother goddess. Churches were often dedicated to Mary on or near the site of a former temple of the goddess. One of the most favoured images of Christian art is the seated virgin with the baby Jesus on her lap as taken from the traditional image of the

Egyptian goddess Isis with the baby god-king Hosru enthroned on her knees. According to Reuther (1979: 46) symbolic images of the queen of heaven mirror those of earlier queens such as Cybele the mural clown and the stars and moon of Isis. From Mary being depicted as the patron of agricultural fertility, to the fifth century onwards, the feast of Mary duplicated high points of the traditional cycle of the year: the feast of sowing, harvesting, and vintage in mid-May (the feast of Mary's Queenship); mid-August (the feast of the Assumption); and originally for some, December (the feast of the Annunciation). Christ's birthday, fixed on December 25, was on the feast day of the winter solstice, the birth of the invincible sun (patron of the emperors) (Ruether 1979: 46).

Nonetheless, the dates of these Marian feasts have been changed according to the new calendar of the Catholic Church. For example, the Queenship of Mary is now celebrated on 22 August. This memorial is placed in an octave, that is, eight days after celebrating Mary's Assumption into Heaven. The Queenship of Mary can be considered a prolongation of the celebration of the Assumption. The new date of the feast of the Annunciation is 25 March. The feast of the Annunciation marks the visit of the angel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary during which he told her that she would be the mother of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. It is God's action in entering the human world as Jesus in order to save humanity (Ruether 1979: 46).

Furthermore, Ruether remarks that Marian devotion appears on two levels, "there is the Mary of the official theology and of the monks, which venerate her as the virgin who was docile and obedient to the divine will" (Ruether 1979: 46). Hence, doctrine about her was shaped in an anti-sexual mood. "However, there is also the Mary of the people who is still the earth mother. She is venerated for her helping power in natural crises. She helps the woman through birth pangs; the father's cow through delivery. Like the goddesses of old, she assures the coming of the new grain, the new lamb" (Ruether 1979: 46). She is the maternal image of the Divine who understands the daily needs of ordinary people and who renews the processes of nature upon which they depend for life. This sketch of Mariology emphasizes the first kind of Mariology, but even today the devotion to Mary among Catholic peasants is found more on the second kind (Ruether 1979: 47).

From the feminist point of view, Mary the Mother of God (the *Theotokos*) is also a controversial doctrine that took place around the fifth century (Ruether 1979: 47). The title was probably first used among Egyptian theologians in the fourth century, but the school of scripture in Antioch in the Middle East, represented by Theodore of Mopsuestia and later by Nestorius, was suspicious of the title. Nestorius suggested instead that Mary should be called 'Mother of Christ'. She is the mother of Jesus' humanity; not of the divine Word. The argument revolved around a fine point of Christological doctrine, namely whether the human and divine natures in Jesus had mingled to the point where one could speak of his human mother also as mother of God, since the human son was also God. The openness of the title wanted the unity of Christ defined in such a way as to cause no confusion between human nature and the divine nature. The issue was also heated up by church rivalry between the Egyptians, who supported the 'Mother of God' title, and the church of Antioch, which supported 'Mother of Christ'. At a Church Council in Ephesus in AD 431 the Egyptians took control, threw out Nestorius (who had been elected patriarch of Constantinople), and declared their own views. (Ruether 1979: 48).

This victory of the Egyptians was short-lived. In AD 451, Leo I, the Bishop of Rome, offered a formula that incorporated Nestorius's concern for a clear distinction between the two natures and also accepted the principle that Jesus' divine and human natures mingled. Thus, one could use divine titles to refer to his human nature and vice versa. On this ground, the title 'Mother of God' was accepted. Popular piety took the title 'Mother of God' and developed dramatic ideas about Mary herself. In the apocryphal gospels,<sup>16</sup> from the gospel of Bartholomew, written in the early fifth century, we read the following,

*At one time the apostles begged Mary, Jesus' mother, to describe the divine conception by which God, 'whom the heavens could not contain' descended into her. She says that she cannot describe it, because if she does, fire will come out of her mouth and the whole earth will be consumed. But the apostles continue to beg her. She tells them to hold her on all sides. Otherwise her limbs will fly apart in telling the terrible mystery of how the Creator came down to occupy her mortal frame (Ruether 1979:48).*

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<sup>16</sup> Apocrypha are biblical or related writings not forming part of the accepted canon of Scripture.

Ruether argues that, in this popular story, it is clear that Mary's maternity is not seen as a humble bearing of Jesus' humanity. "It is the birthing of the divine power through the divine power through which the world itself was created." (Ruether 1979: 48) In addition, the enormous emotion gathered by this dispute in the fifth century also suggested that more was at stake than a fine point of Christological definition. Thus, the definition of Mary as mother of God was the opening wedge for her veneration as a substitute mother goddess. However much theology might narrow this view in theory; popular piety would widen it in imagination. Hence, it is not accidental that the declaration of this title at the Council of Ephesus took place amid scenes of the fanatical enthusiasm by the populace of a city that had once given its enthusiasm support to another virgin mother, the great Artemis of Ephesus (Acts 19).

#### **5.4 The Immaculate Conception**

Feminist scholarship notes that in the Middle Ages the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception came into its own. The doctrine arose first as a kind of accessory to the doctrine of the virgin birth of Christ. It was felt that only if Mary herself was cleansed of all sin could she provide the properly untainted womb for the birth of the sinless one. As early as the rule of St Augustine the view arose that she had been preserved from all actual sin. However, opinions remained divided throughout the Middle Ages about her preservation from original sin. In AD 1140, the great medieval saint, Bernard of Clairvaux, himself notable for his Marian devotion, objected to the institution of a feast of the Immaculate Conception at Lyons in France. He argued that, at most, one could say that Mary was sanctified in her mother's womb and so preserved from actual sin. However, to argue that she was preserved from original sin would mean that she was the product of a virgin birth and not from a normal human sexual generation (Ruether 1979: 54).

Here it becomes clear that behind the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception lies the Augustinian idea that the sexual act itself is debasing and that original sin is transmitted to the child through it. In connection with the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, Daly remarks that it is important to note that it took very long for it to become an official doctrine in Catholicism. Thomas Aquinas, also “a fairly consistent patriarch in this matter, rejected the doctrine” (Daly 1973: 86). The great theologian of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, John Bonaventura, also rejected the doctrine. For them, all humanity is included in the sin of Adam. All persons stand in need of redemption by Christ. If Mary was conceived without sin, then she would be an exception to this universal rule. Yet these theologians also believe that she had been sanctified in her mother’s womb. Thus, the fruits of grace to be won by Christ applied to her by God in advance. Here we see the tendency to regard sin as a kind of material ‘pollution’ that is ‘contagious’. The desire to define Mary as free from sin comes from the feeling that to bear the sinless one, one must be free of any contact with this ‘infection’ (Ruether 1979: 54).

In the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the distinction between Mary’s conception in original sin through sexual generation and her subsequent cleansing in the womb was narrowed by defining the cleansing as coinciding with her conception. In practice, therefore, she was never subject to sin. This cleansing was still the work of Christ’s grace. So, it could not be said that by nature, she was removed from human need for Christ’s redemption. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, a further distinction was made by theologians between Mary’s active conception (by her parents’ sexual act) and her passive conception (fertilization and the infusion of her soul). By the nature of the first she was conceived in sin. But the results of original sin were prevented from taking effect because the merits to be won by Christ were applied to her in advance. The purpose of this distinction was to allow it to be said that Mary never was in original sin, even from the moment of her conception. Yet it does not make her an exception to the general rule that all mortal flesh is subject to the penalty of the sin of Adam and must be saved by the grace of Christ (Ruether 1979: 56).

The doctrine of the Immaculate Conception provides us with the theology of the original sin or unfallen state and of natural goodness of humanity. According to Ruether (1979:57) Catholic piety stipulates that “Mary is our untainted nature’s solitary boast”. Therefore, Mary has maintained her created goodness, is a representative of pure nature and bears the innate natural capacity of perfection. “This natural state is the image of God in every person and is the ground of redeeming grace” (Ruether 1979: 57). Hence, the theological importance to Mariology in this theology of Immaculate Conception, therefore, lies in her pure humanity. As the representative of humanity in its original goodness, she becomes the anticipation of its restoration and fulfilment at the end of history. In her will be realized the final glorification and the new heaven and the new earth, in cooperation with the redemptive work of God in Christ (Ruether 1979: 57).

For Daly (1973:86), this doctrine of Immaculate Conception “can convey an entirely different meaning”. For Daly, it can be understood as a negation of the myth of feminine evil, as a prophetic intimation of the *Fall* that is yet on its way. She goes on to say that this is the feared Fall beyond patriarchs ‘good and evil’ in which women no longer bear the burden of the scapegoat role. Seen outside its ‘normal’ context, the sacred symbol, in which women are ‘conceived’ as free from the crippling burden of submission in the role of ‘the Other’, and therefore are able to bring the human psyche beyond the pseudo-sacred of oppressive symbols and values (Daly 1973: 86).

### **5.5 Mary – New Eve and Perpetual Virgin**

The apostolic tradition through the mid-second century ignores Mary as a theological symbol. Beginning with the writings of the Christian apologists Justin Martyr, around 155 AD, and continuing with the works of the church fathers Tertullian and Irenaeus at the end of the century, we find the symbol of the ‘new Eve’ applied to Mary. The new Eve (Mary) embodies the believing Israel, obedient to God’s will. She parallels Christ, the New Adam. The symbol of the church as the new Eve also existed independently of Mariology.

According to Ruether (1979: 41) Mary as the historical mother of Jesus, the church is the daughter-bride of Christ, and the mother of reborn Christians feminist scholarship's identification with Mary in the church creates a confusion of symbolic sexual relations that have been typical to Mariology. Furthermore, Ruether (1979: 41) notes that the church fathers of the second century did not allow themselves to become too fanciful about this analogy of Mary and the church. They remained soberly rooted in Luke's annunciation story. Thus Mary, through her "Let it be done to me according to your word" (Luke 1: 38), became the first member of the new covenant. She is a believer. She represents the believing Israel and the link between the old Israel and the new. She, the daughter of the old Israel, is the first member of the new covenant. She depicts the new believing community of people who accept the Word of God, in contrast to the old Eve and her fallen offspring, who rejected God's commandment. Mary is seen as having reversed the evil work of Eve. Through her obedience, she brings forth Jesus, through whom the sin of fallen humanity is overcome (Ruether 1979:41).

Irenaeus, writing in about AD 185 says,

*That 'each of the elements in the history of the Fall' (Gen. 3) had a parallel in the history of salvation, one that overcame and reversed that element. The virgin Eve was misled by an angelic being and disobeyed God, causing the fall of humanity. So the salvation of humanity must come about by a second virgin (Mary) who received a true word from an angel and obediently accepted God's word (Ruether 1979:42).*

Furthermore, in the second century, there arose a heretical movement called Gnosticism, which rejected the goodness of marriage and creation. Gnosticism exalted the virgin as the true Christian. The Church fathers rejected these views, but by the middle of the fourth century these ideas began to be accepted by bishops and teachers of the church, at least at the level of the popular piety. Asceticism provided two impulses toward the development of Marian doctrine. First there was the desire to safeguard Jesus' birth from any relation to sexual intercourse. Secondly, Mary's virginity itself became exalted as a symbol of the calling to Christian virginity.

Rosemary Reuther asserts that Mary's virginity can be defined in different stages. Firstly, she can be said to have been a virgin in the actual conception of Jesus. Secondly, she can be said to have remained a virgin in the birth of Jesus. Thirdly, she can be said to have remained a virgin for the rest of her life. The second-century church fathers accepted the first view of virginity but not necessarily the other two. Tertullian, for example, denies that Mary's hymen remained unbroken in the birth. He also assumed that the brothers and sisters of Jesus mentioned in the Gospels were children of Mary and Joseph, born after Jesus (Reuther 1979:43).

These further views of Mary's perpetual virginity<sup>17</sup> are first found in the Proto-evangelium<sup>17</sup> of James. In this apocryphal infancy story dated as early as AD 150, Mary is a vowed Temple virgin from her childhood. She is given into the hands of the aged Joseph, who is to be her guardian. He is a widower with grown children (making the siblings of Jesus of the gospels half brothers and sisters, children of Joseph by a former marriage). One of these half-brothers, James, known in the New Testament as the Lords' 'brother', purports to be the writer of the Proto-evangelium. This writing claims to provide an eyewitness account of Mary's virginal delivery of Jesus. The story shows that Jesus was born by passing through Mary's hymen without breaking it. This idea is modelled after the post-resurrection story in which Jesus passed through closed doors without opening them (John 20: 19-29). Salome, the midwife, is the 'doubting Thomas' who refuses to believe that a woman has delivered and remained a virgin. However, Tertullian rejected the doctrine of the unbroken hymen on the basis that it suggested the Gnostic view that Jesus did not have a real physical body, but only a spiritual body that could pass through the doors of the womb without opening it. Nevertheless, two centuries later, another church father, Jerome, accepted this idea of Mary remaining a virgin though giving birth by referring specifically to this analogy with the risen Lord's passing through closed doors (Reuther 1979: 44).

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<sup>17</sup> Proto-evangelium comes from two Greek words, *protos*, meaning 'first' and *evangelion*, meaning 'good news' or 'gospel', thus the proto-evangelium in Genesis 3:15 is commonly referred to as the first mention of the good news of salvation in the Bible.

## 5.6 The Assumption

In the feminist scholastic studies, we learn that from Egypt also came the story of Mary's assumption, meaning that her body was carried to heaven after her death. In the New Testament Apocrypha there are two different versions of Mary's death and afterlife. In *Falling Asleep of Mary*, by Pseudo-John the evangelist, Mary's body is carried away by angels to be preserved intact with the other saints in the terrestrial paradise until the general resurrection. Only her soul is carried up into heaven. Although she was marked by special honour, this story says nothing more about Mary's death than was believed about the other holy persons. Ruether (1979: 50) remarks that in a second version of the story, the *Transitus Mariae*, by Pseudo-Melito, Mary's body is resurrected by Jesus after her death and carried to heaven. Earlier biblical traditions had pointed to the other worthies, such as Enoch (Jude 9) and Moses (Genesis 5: 24), who had been carried bodily to heaven. When these apocryphal texts appeared in the West in the late fifth century, they were sufficiently foreign to known tradition to be condemned by Pope Gelasius I (AD 492-496).

Both versions of the story of the assumption continued to be current in the West in the Middle Ages. In the ninth century, two writings, one ascribed to Jerome and the other to Augustine, took different views of the matter. Pseudo-Jerome took the view that Mary's fate after her death was unknown. Pseudo-Augustine asserted that her virginal state must have meant her body was preserved incorrupt and was taken to heaven. In the latter Middle Ages, the second view came to be favoured. Both options continued to be espoused by various Catholic theologians until the view favouring Mary's bodily assumption into heaven gained the ascendancy and was decided by papal decree in 1950 (Ruether 1979: 50).

The idea of Mary's assumption has considerable religious importance as a parallel to the ascension of Jesus (Daly 1973: 87). Even Jesus Christ in the earlier tradition is said to have been 'taken up' into heaven, not to have risen by his own power (Acts 2: 32 -33). With the belief in the assumption, Mary now becomes available in heaven as an object of prayer and devotion. She is not just a figure of past history.

She is established above space and time in a transcendent realm where she is present at all times and spaces. She is now queen of angels and saints. In her assumption she comes to be seen as enthroned on the right hand of Christ to reign over the heavenly congregation. Mary's assumption also means that she is the first of the saints to participate in the resurrection of the body. She anticipates and prefigures the church of the general resurrection. The Church's teachings about Mary have not only emanated as parallels to doctrines about Christ they have also symbolised Mary as a natural figure to provide redemption to humanity. The above mentioned doctrines about Christ cease to be symbols of redemption of humanity. He is then perceived to be the primary representative of God that does not really represent humanity. Thus, Reuther (1929:50-51) states that Mary ascends into being a symbol of hope for final salvation.

Daly further remarks that some insight on the prophetic aspect of the Assumption can be gained from C.G. Jung who, years before the dogma was proclaimed, wrote:

*But since the woman as well as evil, is excluded from the Deity in the dogma of the Trinity, the element of evil would also form a part of the religious symbol, if the latter should be a quaternity, it needs no particular effort of imagination to guess the far-reaching spiritual consequence of such a development (Daly 1973: 88).*

Indeed, Jung thought that the dogma of the Assumption suggested a kind of "rounding off" of the problematic Trinitarian symbol, so that Mary becomes the "fourth person" of the Trinity. Although this interpretation obviously would be rejected by ecclesiastical proponents of the dogma, Daly remarks that Jung is probably right in his belief that symbols have a kind of life of their own since he thought that the Assumption was a hopeful sign of the collective psyche's effort to overcome a shallow and rigid dichotomizing of good and evil symbolically and socially, women have been identified with matter, sex, and evil. Jung saw the Assumption as saying no to these assumptions, challenging the false innocence of the God and the godly whose identity depends upon non-identification with women (Daly 1973: 89).

## 5.7 Low Mariology/Mariology from Below

Fiorenza (1995:168) argues that a discussion that seeks to articulate a ‘Mariology from below’ focuses on human being Mary of Nazareth by demythologizing her image.

*Protestant criticism of Mariology has insisted through the centuries that Mariology – if it is to exist at all – must be positioned within anthropology or ecclesiology, but not within theology proper or soteriology.*

As mentioned in Chapter four in the debate of Vatican II, some feminists maintain that the historicizing approach of Reformation theology insisting on a return to the sources of Holy Scripture emphasizes the centrality of Christology. This emphasis occasioned a thorough criticism of the church’s Mariological cult in the time of Protestant Reformation. However, criticism of Mariology went hand in hand with the abolition of the ideal of virginity and in monastic institutionalization. Protestant rejection of Mariology tended to further the patriarchization of theology and church and as far as the patriarchal marriage, views on sexuality and the Church’s position on women participating in ministry remain unchallenged by the Reformed. Following Fiorenza’s (1995) argument on how male-dominated Christology posed a threat to Protestantism that lacked a heavenly woman figure. Therefore, feminist proposals that adopt this Reformation approach also turn back to the Bible to develop a liberating Mariology from below (Fiorenza 1995:168). Elizabeth Fiorenza bemoans the elimination of Mary and the saints from the spiritual cosmos of theology and church had as consequence, probably unintended, that women no longer appeared in the religious symbolic cosmos, nor in the public of theology and church at all (Fiorenza 1995: 168).

Nevertheless, women need to name the destructive formulations of the two-thousand-year-old male-stream interpretation of Mary in order to become free from them. Secondly, women must read scripture as women within their own cultural contexts in order to rediscover the liberated and liberating woman, Mary. Thus, Mariology from below pictures Mary as the exemplary disciple, the poor woman of the people, the prophetic proclaimer of justice, the motherly sister, or the sorrowful mother.

Marie-Theresa Wacker (1987: 45) is cited by Fiorenza (1995: 16) as saying that women have no difficulty identifying with Mary as a historical paradigm. Richard Baer (1970: 42) states that women understand a Mary who had problems with her difficult son associating with disrespectful people. Fiorenza (1995: 189) goes on to say that women admire a Mary who stood by her arrested and tortured child and mourned her executed son. In the ecclesiological approach, feminist scholarship points out that an almost unbridgeable chasm exists between the historical figure Mary of Nazareth and the queen of heaven and mother of God celebrated in the cult of Mary. Although scholastic theology has always distinguished between the veneration of Mary and adoration of God, “the impression exists that the Catholic cult of Mary loves and worships Mary like a divine being” (Fiorenza 1995:170).

According to James Robison (1971: 71):

*The cult of Mary with its candles, flowers, hymns, feast days, and pilgrimages has developed a much richer tapestry of devotion and emotional fund of values than the theology of the word or catechetical dogmatics has ever been able to do.*

Regrettably, the observation of Robison is very accurate, particularly in Catholic pilgrimage sites and the grottos; people even touch the statue of Mary saying their prayers; some hold the statue and cry over it; something that they never do in front of the cross or crucifix. This is an exaggeration of the Catholic belief and faith in Mary, but the impression it gives is that Mary is more important than Christ.

Furthermore, Rose-Mary Ruether (1977) laments the exclusion of women from the ordained leadership of the Catholic Church and the emphasis on the patriarchal theology ‘bride – mysticism’<sup>18</sup> in which Mary is the bridal representative of church and world remains subordinate to Christ, her head remains problematic in feminist scholarship.

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<sup>18</sup> Ephesians 5: 21-33

In this case, the hierarchy represents Christ's masculinity and God's father power, all lay Christian men and women are exhorted to imitate Mary, who perfectly represents the feminine qualities of receptivity, subordination, humility, obedience, and passivity. On the one hand, this attempt is good in the sense that it is trying to put Mary, the historical woman of Nazareth, at the centre of attention. On the other hand, this attempt has a negative effect upon women in the sense that it tends to universalize Mary as the ideal type of being woman and paradigmatic model of submission in faith. Ruether (1977: 81) articulates such an ideal-typical understanding of liberation Mariology.

*Mary represents the person of the church from the perspective of the conversion that has to go on in history, and between people, to overcome the dehumanizing power and suppressed personhood ... like Mary, women as the church represent that whole of redeemed human kind which can only then be liberated and reconciled when the victims have been empowered to be persons and when power itself has been transformed.*

In her book *Sexism and God-Talk*, Ruether goes on to say that the figure of the Church, which is portrayed as feminine, is represented in Mary. According to Ruether, an alternative Mariology that does not reinscribe masculine or feminine relations. "Mary, as the female personification of the church, represents liberation of women." (Ruether 1983: 152) Thus, the liberation of women as the poorest of the poor can become the model of faith. Ruether and Fiorenza agree that the liberation of women can become the model of theological 'locus' (Fiorenza 1995:171).

## **5.8 Mariology from Above/High Mariology**

In contrast to Mariological articulations 'from below', hegemonic Mariology favours the approach, 'from above'. Mariology from above positions Mary in the heavenly realm and comes close to divinizing her. Mariology from above owes its existence and propagation to malestream theology and the patriarchal church.

Nevertheless, feminist reconstructions of Mariology assume that a discourse on Mariological dogmas from the perspective of women is not only possible but also necessary since otherwise women would have to relinquish the Mariological heritage of women's devotion to Mary that has been accumulated over centuries. Such feminist reconstruction of Mariological doctrines has been made thinkable and possible through an argument first made by Daly. After a trenchant criticism of the intertwined subordination of mainstream Mariology to Christology, Daly points out that the symbol of Mary communicates a 'double message' that has functioned like a double-edge sword (Fiorenza 1995:173): Fiorenza goes on to say that "because of this 'double-edge character', Mariology can be heard selectively and understood differently in different contexts" (1995: 173). Hence, if Mariological dogmas can be liberated from their Christological entanglement and again be understood as freewheeling symbols, they can be read in a fruitful feminist way.

Sheila Briggs (1989: 141) remarks that such a feminist approach to Mariological discourse, which is often combined with a biblical perspective, places Mary, the woman at the centre of attention. Hence, the dogma of the perpetual virginity of Mary,

*is then understood as a symbol for the autonomy, integrity, independence, and self-determination of a woman whose identity is no longer defined with reference to a man. In the feminist view, Mary the mother of God no longer represents middle-class motherhood oriented towards husband and son, but the creative power of women and their redeeming qualities* (Fiorenza 1995: 173).

Furthermore, the dogma of Immaculate Conception in this interpretation "communicates that women do not need to be redeemed from sin; womanhood has not been corrupted by sin, but remains a source of power and attraction" (Fiorenza 1995: 173).

The bodily assumption of Mary into heaven (Fiorenza 1995: 173),

*Means that sexuality and bodily femaleness have been assumed into the divine realm and that women's struggle against patriarchal oppression as well as the ultimate realization of women's liberation are an important part of eschatological perfection.*

Against such a revisionist interpretation it needs to be pointed out that from a kyriarchal situation where women are either in a cult or not the worshipping of an image of a woman can result in oppression. With Mary being an ideal symbol for women and at the centre of Marian dogmas has consequentially reinforced kyriocentric attitudes and structures (Fiorenza 1995). Therefore, feminist arguments that seek to understand Mariological dogmas as symbols of women's power and as expressions of female salvation have an idealistic-apologetic tinge. As long as the ecclesial structures of oppression and the kyriocentric theologies that have determined the official articulation of dogmatic Mariology continue to exert their power, feminist theological reinterpretation cannot develop transformative power. As a result, having said that, as long as the sexuality of ordinary Catholic women remains feared and controlled; as long as the vocation and true being of women is reduced to corporeal or spiritual motherhood; or as long as Catholic women are divided into two religious classes, nuns and lay women, the symbol of the perpetual virgin and mother Mary can only be oppressive and cannot be a transforming power for women's liberation (Fiorenza 1995: 174).

Fiorenza (1995: 174) remarks further,

*As long as women do not have the theological authority to responsibly determine their own sexuality and decide whether to become pregnant, as long as women are not allowed to stand as priests at the altar, and as long as women remain second-class Christians, the exaltation of a woman into heaven can only serve to reinforce the kyriarchal oppression of women on earth.*

Hence, if Mary is not an exception but a rule for the socio-ecclesial status of women, it becomes questionable as to whether her image can evolve and transform power for solidarity, justice and liberation also make her cult credible. In the distinction to dogmatic, the popular religion approach does not appeal to reason and rationality so much as to emotions, to the desire for security and the direct experience of divine presence.

The songs, pictures, visions, processions, feast days, altars, candles, flowers, and incense of popular piety celebrate Mary as the mother of all graces, as 'our Lady' who is worshipped at countless pilgrimage sites and holy places.(Fiorenza 1995: 174). Fiorenza remarks that just as Isis was praised with numerous titles of ancient divinities, so through the centuries Mary has been pictured in 'a thousand images' and praised in varied rituals and artistic ways. She argues (1995: 174),

*Devotion to Mary celebrates something greater than the human being called Mary. 'Our Lady', the 'Queen of Heaven,' is the revelation of divine goodness and the manifestation of redemptive power. Her cult has attracted a rich heritage of Goddess images and figures celebrated in different times and cultures.*

Although Mariological doctrine has always insisted on the theological subordination of Mary, popular piety and devotion has rendered quasi-divine honours to the mother of God. The more God became the patriarchal Father-Son-God and all-powerful punishing judge in the eyes of many people, the more popular devotion to Mary increased. Thus, Catholics worship the 'gracious goodness' of the 'anonymous Goddess', the Mediatrix of all Grace, and the Mother of Mercy. Just as in the patriarchal family, the mother often mediates between father and sons, so also Mary is said to act as mediatrix between a vengeful father-God and his ecclesiastical sons. Thus, Fiorenza's (1995) Mariological research has repeatedly documented that belief in the kyriarchal God of domination and the Mariological cult of motherhood and femininity go hand in hand and reinforce each other (Fiorenza 1995:175).

Furthermore, Fiorenza maintains that it is widely recognized that wherever it took hold, Catholic Christianity replaced the holy places, temples, shrines, pictures, attributes, and functions of local goddesses and appropriated them for Mary. She goes on to say that in the cult and symbol of Mary the mother of God, the countless names and images of the Goddess have survived through the centuries. Artists and common people have always celebrated Mary, the 'hidden Goddess of Christianity', who transcends all domestics. This has been made possible by the malestream theology by pruning other 'pagan elements', and being 'baptised' in Christ. Nevertheless, people in the medieval and modern times have tended to divinize Mary and to apply to her the functions of God and Christ (Fiorenza 1995: 175).

The feminist theologians who seek to rescue androcentric femininity in order to determine it anew in a feminist way have elaborated this ‘divinizing’ tendency of the Marian cult. However, these attempts remain within the preconstructed dogmatic frame of reference when they seek to show that through Mariological doctrine and devotion the Feminine Divine has remained alive in Christianity. In fact, if these feminist articulations are not integrated with the feminine-divine elements with the androcentric Mariological discourse, they evoke much anxiety and even aggression among Christian women. Furthermore, Fiorenza asserts that since symbolic formations do not derive from logic or rationalist theological arguments, female symbols for God cannot simply be invented from scratch. For that reason, the Marian cult and imagery have a very important function in correcting one-sided masculine theological discourses about God, since the cult of Mary offers images and symbols for the renewal of God-language (Fiorenza 1995: 176).

Fiorenza says that the love of God is not only like that of a father but also like that of a mother. He goes on to say that since Jesus cannot express the motherly side of God, because of his masculinity, he needs Mary as his symbolic picture (Fiorenza 1995: 178),<sup>19</sup>

*Mary is the translation and effective expression of the motherly aspects of God’s mercy, grace, and redemptive love, which has manifested itself in visible and touchable form in the person of Christ, our saviour.*

Despite this, way before the proclamation of the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption, the Reformers reaffirmed the goodness of marriage. However, feminist scholarship maintains that the Reformers failed to elevate the status of women to be representatives of Christ in the preaching and teaching of the church. In contrast, the teachings of Genesis and Paul were piously reaffirmed to maintain the subordinate role of a creaturely person reaching the masculine actors: God, his Son, and his representatives, the clergy. In addition, the headship of the husband over wife is like God’s lordship over Christians. Thus Protestant theology proclaims masculine headship over female obedience.

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<sup>19</sup> Fiorenza cites from Rudolph Schnackenburg, *Der Verte, der mich gesandt hat: Zur Johanneischen Christologie*, in Breytenbach and Paulsen, *Anfänge der Christologie* (275: 92), argues that the

## 5.9 Mary and Problem with Contemporary Culture

Ruether (1979) remarks that reinterpretation of biblical symbols may not be enough. Hence, we have to think about the whole Old and New Testaments and Christian History within the larger development of human consciousness in modern culture. Moreover, feminists ought to consider exploring broadly the different waves of the history of culture concerning the male. In understanding what this dominance does to women can they begin to create a new cultural psychology that will enable women to come into their own as a fully human person (Ruether 1979: 63).

Feminist thinking needs to dismantle the perceived perceptions that have made male cognitions to remain dominant over female bodies for many centuries, the concepts such as male – man over female – nature, male – God over female – creation. Hence, it is not enough just to restore to visibility the ‘female’ side of these relationships and to say that now our religion has given women ‘their place’. So the fundamental question for feminists today is: How can we think about God in new ways that are not sexist? Should we say that God is female rather than male or both male and female? (Ruether 1979: 63). Feminist scholarship questioning of the symbolic relationship between God and the word in relation to domination and subjugation brings forth a social relationship model. God’s transcendence is not merely “father – son” Christology. However, Schnackenburg does not discuss the Wisdom traditions in this context power that reduces creation to a servant status rather it is the ground and power for created beings to exist and to be continually renewed, thus, God is both the ground of being and its continual power for aspiration of being Ruether (1979: 64-65).

Thus Ruether (1979: 65) warns that women studying religion should not think that women have to go back to the goddess figures that preceded the Bible, whose memory Mariology faintly preserves, but the image of the goddess may also be part of the problem rather than part of the solution. The ancient goddess images that influenced some of Marian dogmas such as Immaculate Conception and the assumption, seem stronger and more independent than the image of Mary but the goddess seems to depict an earlier stage of male domination over nature with the women being the symbol of nature.

## **5.10 Conclusion**

Feminist critique of traditional Mariology has taught us that Marian devotion appears on two levels: there is the Mary of the official theology and of the monks, who venerate her as the virgin who was docile and obedient to the divine will. Contemporary women cannot identify with her because she is divinized and made semi-God. In theological terms, this is a theology from above or high Mariology. However, there is also Mary who is active. She is venerated for helping women who are marginalized, excluded by the forces of patriarchy. This is a low Mariology or Mariology from below that rises from human experience and contemporary women identify with this human Mary. Miller (2009: 111) calls her an unsanctioned Mary who operates in the lives of ordinary baptized Christians. When we consider her as fully human rather than semi-divine, she draws us into the broader human condition of all those in dire straits. The next chapter will be looking at the alternative Mariology that comes from feminist scholarship which is aimed at bringing about the community of equals, Mariology from below.

## CHAPTER SIX: THE EMERGING THEMES IN CONTEMPORARY MARIOLOGY

### 6.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I have discussed the feminist critique of traditional Mariology and the loopholes in the formulation of Marian dogmas. In this chapter, I shall look at the emerging themes in contemporary Mariology or feminist scholarship. Christian feminist theologians locate Mary in the community of disciples as a foundation of contemporary Mariology. What is the alternative, Mariology coming from feminist scholarship? Ruether (1979) builds her new approach to Mariology from the infancy narrative of Luke on the *Magnificat*. This chapter will also look at some guiding assumptions for re-reading Marian dogmas and the scriptures coming from the theology of liberation, Latin America.

### 6.2 Mary amongst Women

Rakoczy (2004: 339) remarks that Mary, the Mother of Jesus, named as *Theotokos* – God-bearer by the Council of Ephesus in 431, is a woman of controversy. Roman Catholic and Orthodox teachings name her with exalted titles such as the Immaculate Conception and Virgin Mother. Innumerable shrines around the world and devotions such as the Rosary and litanies mark the importance of her role as intercessor in the Christian community. She goes on to note that Catholics are often accused of ‘worshipping’ Mary and treating her like God. In contrast with the maximalist interpretation of Mary’s person and role in salvation, the churches of the Reformation have evolved a minimalist approach to her. Although the reformers themselves rejected prayer to Mary, they continued to revere biblical Mary. Rakoczy (2004: 339, in Carroll 1997) states,

*Calvin urged his listeners to learn to praise the holy Virgin. Zwingli still kept the feast of the Assumption, Luther continued to preach on such gospel feast days as the Visitation, Presentation and Annunciation.*

Today, for most women Mary appears in the Christmas crib, and then, except for Catholic and some Anglican women, disappears for another year. Johnson (1985: 315) is quoted as saying that Protestant approaches to Mary can be described as “meditative reflections” which have “little or no association with the actual woman Mary” (Rakoczy 2004: 339).

Although formal theological positions continue to divide the churches, feminist interest in Mary help is to evolve contemporary interpretations of her person and place in the Christian community, which unite women in their common discipleship. Foremost in these new understandings is a liberating Mariology based on the *Magnificat* that speaks to the experience of poor women around the world. Contemporary Mariology places Mary within the Christian community; not above it. In the feminist scholarship, Mary is a woman amongst women and thus her faith and life provide hope and inspiration to women who also desire to follow her Son with full commitment (Rakoczy 2004: 340).

As feminist theologians develop ways of speaking about Mary, which remove her from her God-like pedestal of distance and dissimilarity to women, she takes her place in the Christian community with the disciples and with her Son. It is worth pointing out that feminist scholarship locates Mary both in her temporal and social contexts also within positions of being Jewish and a rural village Palestinian in a remote colony of the Roman Empire. We know nothing of her parents and family, though tradition names them as Joachim and Anne. She may or may not have been able to read. She was married in her teens to Joseph the carpenter and thus was responsible for the running of the household – fetching water from the communal well, cooking, washing clothes, and keeping the home clean. On the Sabbath evening she lit the candles for the Sabbath prayers. A devout Jew, she followed the cycle of feasts and celebrations and kept the Torah. Her first child was a boy whom they named Jesus (Rakoczy 2004: 346).

Mary “was in charge of a household comprising at least six other children: James, Judas, Simon, and at least two girls, called the brothers and sisters of Jesus” (Mark 6: 3). Where these brothers and sisters came from is a matter of some debate, but unless one holds to the unlikely proposition that they moved into the household as adults, they were in Mary’s care as children (Johnson 1995a: 460).

It is the goal of most of feminist theologians who engage in Mariology to bring Mary into her rightfully place, the community. I support this campaign by feminist theologians because it is a good cause for many reasons. Mary is neither quasi-God nor God, but a disciple of Christ.

Elizabeth Johnson (2003) calls Mary “Truly our sister”. In other words, this Mary that belongs to the community is the one that other women can identify with. I do believe that this campaign by feminist theologians of bringing Mary to the community of disciples is compatible with the Catholic belief that Mary has a singular privilege, which means that she was conceived without the original stain. God is capable of preparing Mary to be the mother of His Son, Jesus Christ. Even though Jesus existed before creation (John 1:1), Jesus needed flesh and blood that was stainless in order to be fully human and fully divine. Today we talk of the Eucharist that is the Body and Blood of Christ as our Christian heritage because of the incarnation. Therefore, it was necessary for Mary to be prepared by God to bring forth His Son Jesus Christ.

To be sure, the belief in Mary’s perpetual virginity dates from the fourth century. Clifford (2002: 192) notes that in the first century, sources “no historical basis exists for arguing that Mary’s virginity was perpetual”. Nevertheless, the tradition has held that she became a widow some time before the ministry of Jesus began. She struggled to understand the ministry of her first-born son and when he expanded the notion of family to include all those who did the will of God (Mark 3: 32-35), we can imagine that this was yet another thing “she stored up in her heart” (Luke 2:52). She may have wondered why he had not married and raised a family like other men of his age.

But as mothers do, she trusted her son and followed him to the cross where she experienced the supreme anguish of a mother – holding his lifeless body in her arms. One of the faithful band of disciples, she is with them on the day of the Pentecost (Acts 1: 14) and we can use our imagination to see her as a wise woman in the new community during the first generation of Christian life. As the mother of Jesus, it is natural to assume that she was asked to tell stories of his childhood and young adulthood. Eventually she died, and tradition has held that her body was assumed into glory to be with her Son. Thus, as a real woman Mary lived the whole life cycle: birth, youth, marriage, family life, stress and anxiety, losing her spouse to death, the death of her first-born, the experience of aging and then death. She has much in common with all women everywhere, and so is our “sister in faith” (Johnson 1992: 99).

Hence, Mary is a woman who accompanies all women who go through menstrual pains. Mary also suffered from the pangs of giving birth. Tradition suggests that Mary was a widow way before her Son Jesus assumed his public ministry. This means that she is a widow who raised her Son alone. She is a mother who watched her Son being persecuted by the earthly rulers and unjustly condemned to death as she watched her Son die on the cross (John 19:26-27). Many women in our communities go through this experience when their sons are brutally killed by the community in the guise of mob justice. Thus, Mary is a sister to all women that go through such experiences.

### **6.3 Mary within the Christian Community**

When the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) was held, the Catholic Church was still in a high-tide of Marian piety. Some bishops wanted a separate document focused on Mary and her exalted state as mentioned in the Chapter three. Nevertheless, this did not happen and one chapter of the Constitution of the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, is devoted to her. Mary is described as a type of the church “in the order of faith, charity and perfect union with Christ” (LG 63) and the faithful are urged to “turn their eyes to Mary who shines forth to the whole community of the elect as the model of virtues” (LG 65).

This decision to speak of Mary within the church describes an important dimension of contemporary Mariology. It renders Mary as a member of the community of disciples. She participated in the life of the community in its prayers, worship, service and charity. Her context is not ours, but the demands are the same. Hearing the Word is not a passive action of stereotypical feminine obedience, but can involve responding “to a call to critically prophesy”, which will involve the heart in “conflict with the powers which oppress people not only outside the church but also within it” (Johnson 1992: 101).

Furthermore, there is no historical tradition of Mary participating in the evangelization ministries of the new community, of preaching or teaching, or other ministries of leadership. Since all people do not have the same calls to ministry, Mary’s place in the community demonstrates the fullness of the personal commitment of a disciple, one amongst her sisters and brothers. Mary stands in solidarity with all those redeemed by her Son, she is “a woman of history, the mother of Jesus, and an early Christian believer” (Johnson 1985: 335). She is also a sign of hope for Christian community, for her life demonstrates the power of God acting in the life of a woman who animates ours. As believers became aware that Mary stands with them in faith within the Christian community, the tensions between maximalist and minimalist Mariology, disappear in the encounters with Mary the faithful disciple (Rakoczy 2004: 348-349).

## **6.4 Liberating Themes**

Liberation theology provides the context for the most important themes of contemporary Mariology. Based on reflection on the experience of women, a liberating Mariology asks the question (Rakoczy 2003: 349),

*Does this woman speak to the experience of poor women? Are there any indications in her life that she acted from inner strength and as a responsible adult?*

Indeed, a liberating Mariology answers in the affirmative. No longer is Mary a sickly-sweet girl-mother on a pedestal, but she is a “woman of strength, independence, of integrity of autonomous action” (Grey 1989: 337).

Rather than separating Mary from her sisters in faith, bonds of friendship and community emerge. For example, while the Lucan story of the Visitation in which Mary visits her cousin Elizabeth (Luke 1: 39-45) demonstrates her compassionate solidarity with an older woman experiencing her first pregnancy, there are other biblical women who are also friends of Mary. She is a sister to Miriam who led the dance of liberation after the Israelites had crossed the Red Sea (Exodus 15: 20 -21); with Hagar, “rejected and thrown into the wilderness, the first mother of a promised child; with Leah, the rejected sister; and with Ruth, a woman independent of patriarchy in her sense of relating” (Grey 1989: 337-338).

In this liberation perspective, Mary is a friend to all women on the margins, the outcasts, and those who challenge the powers that oppress them. In contrast to traditional Mariology that emphasizes Mary’s passivity in the Annunciation, stressing her docility and obedience, a liberating perspective focuses on her freedom of choice in expressing her faith. She is not married; the child will not be the son of Joseph. She is confronted with an enormous decision and chooses freely to say “yes” to an unknown future for herself and her child. As God enters into human history, Mary’s faith makes liberation possible (Rakoczy 2004: 349).

## **6.5 Luke’s Infancy Narrative**

Luke’s narrative on the infancy where Mary is the central figure has a different emphasis than that of Matthew which focuses on the patriarchs. Luke first takes us through the exclusive angel’s visitation to her and the consultation process where she actively gives consent, therefore, becoming an active participant in the enthralling incarnation of God. The decision to visit her cousin Elizabeth becomes own initiative. From the Gospel of Luke it can be learned that Mary is a liberal being who makes her own decisions without seeking permission from her husband-to-be. On the other hand, Matthew reports that Jesus was born, while the Lukan narrative makes her the central actor in the birth (Luke 2: 7). Mary’s active meditation on the significance of the mission of her new-born son is stressed in Luke. (Ruether 1979: 28). After the revelation to the shepherd, he reports that “Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart” (Luke 2: 34).

When Jesus first manifests his wisdom in the Temple at the age of twelve, it is Mary who speaks out to admonish him (Luke 2: 4). After his reply, it is again said that “Mary kept all these things in her heart” (Luke 2: 51). Luke portrays Mary as an active participant in Jesus’s birth, accepting it through an act of free will, and meditating upon the meaning of his future mission. In this way, Luke begins with tradition that transforms Mary from being merely a historical mother of Jesus into an independent agent cooperating with God in the redemption of humanity. In other words, she begins to be a theologian in her own right. This is expressed in her obedient consent to the divine command, And Mary said, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord, let it be done to me according to your word.” (Luke 1: 38).

In the *Magnificat*, Mary proclaims herself as the embodiment of Israel. She is God’s betrothed, rejoicing over her expected delivery by the Lord. Through her role she becomes a key figure in the history of God’s work. “All generations will call me blessed; for he who is mighty has done great things for me.” (Luke 2: 48-49). Ruether (1979) describes Mary as the first human agent in the emergence of the divine revolution in history (27). She is the one through whom God acted.<sup>20</sup> From a passive instrument of God she is transformed into a symbol of the new Israel, the Church, and the redeemed people of God (Acts 1). As she sits in the upper room with the Apostles during Pentecost, the Lucan narrative in the New Testament provides a firm foundation for Mariology (Ruether 1979: 28).

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<sup>20</sup> He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts, He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of low degree; He has filled the hungry with good things. And the rich he has sent away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, In Remembrance of his mercy (Luke 2: 51-54).

## 6.6 The Church as Humanity Redeemed from Sexism

*Is there any basis for an alternative Mariology, one that is not the expression of the male feminine which scapegoats female sexuality for sin and death? Is there a Mariology – a doctrine of the Church as symbolically female – that would allow us to name sexism itself as sin and point toward the liberation of women and men from the dualism of carnal femaleness and spiritual femininity (Ruther 1983: 152)?*

Ruether (1979) addresses these questions by taking us further to the theology of Luke. Mary's *Magnificat* is key to Luke's positioning of Mary in the Church and the New Israel (Luke 1: 46-55). The *Magnificat* reflects Hannah's hymn who is the mother of Samuel the prophet. Hannah's favour with God, which issues in the 'elect child' is seen as God's redemptive favour upon Israel. Hannah who is redeemed by God from bareness provides an image of a God who is not only powerful but also breaks the power of the mighty and gives strength to the feeble.

*For the Lord is God of Knowledge and by Him actions are weighed. The bows of the mighty are broken, but the feeble grid of strength. Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread, but those who were hungry have ceased to hunger He raised up the poor from the dust, he lifts the needy from the ash heap ... (1 Samuel 2: 2-5, 8).*

Luke reiterates this theme. God's grace upon Mary, the divine favour by which she will bear the messianic child, is seen as an expression of a revolutionary transformation of an unjust social order. In other words God has defeated the oppressors.

*He has shown the strength of His arm, He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts, He has put down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of low degree; He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away,*

*He has helped his servant Israel in the remembrance of His mercy (Luke 1: 51-54).*

Ruether remarks that Luke's analogy between pregnancy and liberation differs in important ways from that found in 1 Samuel. Hannah's liberation resides in her 'redemption' from the shame of barrenness, as an elder woman with no (male) children; she is without respect or dignity as a wife. She is ridiculed by her husband's concubine. She bears the brunt of her pregnancy that is of God exposing her to the risk of being labelled as careless about her body and is not sexually submissive or sexually regards her future husband. She therefore, may be subject to the accusation and labels of prostitute or a 'loose woman' and 'put away'. In Luke, Ruether (1979) maintains, the decision to have the redemptive child is between her and God therefore, Joseph is not consulted (in Matthew, however, the deal is agreed upon in proper patriarchal fashion between Joseph and God, without consulting Mary). Luke maintains that for Mary, motherhood is a liberal choice to express her faith. According to Ruether (1983) the new redemptive community of Jesus is important as it remains distinct from the old kind of family relationships (153-154).

In the text that is found in all three synoptic Gospels, the voluntary community based on mutual choice is seen as a true family of Jesus as contrasted with the old, unbelieving family, and he (Jesus replied),

*'Who are my mother and my brothers?' And looking around at those who stay about him, said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and my sister and my mother ...' (Mark 3: 34-35).*

According to Ruether (1983: 154), Mary's birth-giving can become a symbol of the Church, the new believing community, because it expresses a free act of faith. Another Lucan text dispels the Marian piety that would honour Mary primarily by hymning the miracle of her 'holy womb'. A woman in the crowd voices the conventional wisdom that would praise the mother of such a grace-filled child. "Blessed is the womb that bore you and the paps that gave the suck." But he (Jesus) replied, "Rather blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it." (Luke 11: 27-28).

Ruether (1983) maintains that as the Lucan Mariology stresses the significance of the relationship God has with humanity he enlightens how the act of faith simplifies and becomes possible when the authentic union between responses to God and our own liberation is recognised. Faith ceases to be heteronomous submission to external authorities and becomes a free act. Only through that free human responsiveness to God is God enabled to become the transformer of history. Without such faith, no miracles can happen. When such faith is absent, Christ can do nothing. This is the radical dependence of God on humanity, the other side of our dependence on God, which patriarchal theology has generally denied. Mary's faith makes possible God's entrance into history. What does God enter history to do, through Mary's faith? (Ruether 1983: 154).

According to Luke, it is through the person of Christ that God enters history to effect a liberating revolution in human relationships. Mary is exalted because, through her, God will work this revolution in history. Mary, who represents both women who are oppressed and subjugated, through her humiliation she is lifted up and the hungry are filled with good things. Luke's liberation narrative is also centred around economic and political conditions where "The mighty are put down from their thrones, the rich are sent away empty" (Luke 1: 52). In as much as this theme is unpleasant for the affluent it can be pointed out that Luke who seems to be supporting the poor and oppressed women applies faith for their vindication. Mary, who is a woman belonging to the poor working class in a Roman Empire colony becomes a symbol for those that need to be lifted up and be filled with good things in the messianic revolution which is why the Latin American liberation theology states that Mary in the Church represents God's 'preferential option for the poor,' (Ruether 1983: 155-157).

Johnson (2003) shifts the focus from Mary the Nazarene to the strength of her faith. From Logister's (1995) point of view Mary who is a mother to a special son her social and religious context is exemplary to men and women who regard her as her sister and companion in their walk of faith (173).

Johnson highlights the strength of her faith in order to bring Mary closer to lived experiences of women in particular. This is very important for women in my view, especially in the Catholic Church because it is women who do the work of counselling the bereaved in their communities, it is also women who are mainly catechist in our parishes who hand down the faith to the converts and the young children maturing in faith. The priest cannot do everything in the parish whilst men are very few in numbers in the Catholic Church so for the parish to be effective in its mission of evangelization, it relies mainly on women especially those in sodalities of Saints Anne, Sacred Heart, St Francis, Children of Mary, etc. in the Archdiocese of Durban where I served as a priest from 2010 – 2018. It is the same experience as well in the Diocese of Queenstown where I started to serve from 2019 to date. Thus, bringing Mary into her social and religious context can give inspiration to her sisters in faith, Mary who was always around the twelve apostles and assisting when she could in the mission of evangelization. Susan Rakoczy (2004) focuses on liberating themes in Mariology based on experiences of women.

MacDonnell (2005) complements the feminist Mariologies for their significant contribution to Marian literature which highlights both prophecy and the spirituality embedded in the *Magnificat* (540). Ruether (1983) who offers an alternative mariology based on the *Magnificat* uses the Gospel of Luke that is slightly different from the Gospel of Matthew in their approach to Jesus's infancy narrative. In the Gospel of Matthew, Mary is completely silent in narrating the story of the birth of Jesus. In the Gospel of Luke, Mary is active. She is in conversation with the angel Gabriel; she also goes to help her cousin who got pregnant at a very late stage of her life. Mary does not even consult with her future husband (Joseph) in making all these decisions. This is for me a sign of the inner strength of Mary. However, in the *Magnificat* itself, Mary calls herself "servant" or "slave" (Luke 1:48).

Jacquelyn Grant (1993) recognizes servitude as a component of Christianity, but also belonging to the patriarchal form of heteronomy. Therefore, African women American reject servanthood in favour of the empowering discipleship that is quite a major theme in feminist Mariologies (Grant 1993: 199-218).

Mary Jo Weaver (1985) contends that if Mary's *fiat* is presented as passive humility, then the text is reification of male power over women, and Mary is hopelessly inadequate for feminist needs (Jo Weaver 1985: 201). Johnson (2003) notes that tradition has always required women to be obedient to male religious authority figures, be they God, husband, or priest, make women shudder before this text (Luke 1: 48) and reject it as dangerous to physical and psychological health as well as to liberating spirituality (Johnson 2003: 255). Thus, the handmaid or slave of the Lord is enormously problematic for Johnson (McDonnell 2005: 533). From my point of view, McDonnell (2005) is correct in saying that in Luke slave is a title of glory. When one is ordained to priesthood in the Catholic Church, one is first ordained to diaconate. The vestments of priesthood are put on top of diaconate vestments (only the dalmatic that is completely removed), this continuity of vestments is a sign that even when one becomes a priest, and one continues to exercise the duties of deacons. The Greek word of deacon in Greek is *diakonos*, which means a servant or slave.

McDonnell (2005: 533) also notes that it is the custom of the Old Testament of naming great figures in salvation history as slaves of Yahweh (Moses: 2 Kings 18: 12; Joshua : Judges 2: 8; Abraham: Psalm 105: 42; the prophets: Amos 3:7, and Zachariah 1: 6). In this sense, Luke locates Mary among these towering figures as well as among the *anawin*. In this case, I conclude that Rosemary Ruether's alternative Mariology based on *Magnificat*, in spite of critiques from other feminist is a successful project. Sadly, Killian McDonnell (2005) laments the point that the terms "slave" and "servanthood" are painful for women because they have been used to demand self-sacrifice and servanthood of women without granting dignity and rights (McDonnell 2005: 533).

In addition, feminist theology rejects the subordination to anyone, female or male. Thus, in some expressions of feminist Marian piety both the subordination of Mary to her Son, and the subordination of the petitioner to Mary is rejected (McDonnell 2005: 534). The position of feminist mariologies is very important in this study because it helps us to understand more deeply the question of gender equality in the Catholic Church.

Nevertheless, not all feminist theologians agree that the *Magnificat* Mary can be a liberator of women because the sexuality of this Mary is negated, it is a construct of women as envisioned by the hetero-patriarchal notions of decency that has little relevance to real women (Althaus-Reid 2000: 72). Althaus-Reid (2000) argues that the symbol of Mary, a religious alien virgin, needs to be made indecent. This point makes one wonder how the virginity of Mary liberates women who are survivors of gender based violence in our communities. Has this virginity of Mary challenged the oppression found in sexual marriage contract of pubescent girls? The answer to these questions is most likely to be no in the sense that Mary's virginity has never succeeded in the Church to formulate property laws related to women reproductive rights, menstruation taboos and strict religious codes. According to Agness Rafferty (2015: 311), the Vatican documents defining the role of women reflect the patriarchal system in which the male is dominant and assumes control over female sexuality. As a man, who grew up in the village called Hlokozi – Highflats, KwaZulu Natal (South Africa), I can relate with the position of Marcella Althaus-Reid (2000). A teenage boy can be very protective over his sister whilst he is experimenting with young girls from his neighbourhood. A married man is always overprotective of his wife whilst he is seeking sexual favors from other men's wives. This social phenomenon makes one wonder how the virginity of Mary liberates women and girls in this regard. I, as an individual, don't understand why Mary's virginity is so important in traditional Mariology if it is not something coined by male theologians to control women's sexuality. Hence, this high esteem of perpetual virginity of Mary is a way of controlling women's sexuality in the Catholic Church.

In addition, a virgin-mother is a problem again in a real lived experience for women (Rakoczy 2004). African Catholics refer to Mary as Mama-Maria or Mother Mary. In Africa, a mother is not only the one who has borne a child, but even more the one who has nurtured a child, who has raised a child, up to the point that if a young woman abandons her child, she will not be acknowledged as a mother. On the other hand, barren women are called "mothers" when they have had an active share in raising children of the household and of the village. Hence, in Africa, Mary is the mother first because she raised Jesus, and only second because she has born Him. Therefore, Mary is the most reliable, most powerful, and most influential human ancestor of all brothers and sisters of Jesus in this perspective. (Fr R. Witwicki. n.d.). In this African way of understanding Mary as a mother, both men and women relate to her

equally as their mother. John 19: 25-27, tells also that if a birth is, in Africa as elsewhere,, a source of blessing and hope, becoming a mother is not always without worries, and even sorrow. Every mother is aware that the joy of birth is blended with concerns about the new life. Many are the dangers that threaten this new life. From the very beginning, the mother is involved in fighting against these dangers, and protecting her child. The mother thus becomes the symbol of protection against evil, a role the Catholic tradition has very early ascribed to Mary. (Fr R. Witwicki. n.d.). In this African perspective, Mary becomes a mother of all their children, male and female; she becomes their refuge and protection against every evil. There is no unwarranted pressure put upon women to be like Mary the ever-virgin which is impossible that is warranted by traditional Mariology.

### **6.7 The New Meaning of Marian Dogmas Arising from the Poor and the “Spirit” of Our Age**

We now arrive at the point in our reflection that is both fascinating and sensitive, which Gebara and Bingemer (1989: 88) call the meeting point between scripture and the journey of the church that we call tradition. It is also the point where in the poverty of human words and in the midst of the need to respond to the longings of God’s people the church seeks to formulate its state and make explicit basic aspects of the mystery of Mary. As a matter of fact, Marian dogmas are a very sensitive ecumenical matter. Marian dogmas are morally problematic and theologically challenging. Since this is not an area of theology in which everything is clear. Theologians need to pay extra attention not only to the most arcane meanderings of the word of God, but also to the most contemporary nuances of the circumstantial context in which they live’ (Gebara & Bingemer 1989: 88).

In Chapter four, I have explained the concept of dogma as understood today by the Catholic Church, which was settled relatively recently in Vatican I (1870), as it says that

*all those things are to be believed with divine and Catholic faith which are contained in the word of God, written or handed down, and which the church, either by a solemn judgement, or by her ordinary and spiritual Magisterium, proposes for belief as having been divinely revealed (DS 3011).*

Feminist reading of the Marian dogmas call for a re-reading of Marian dogmas. Before reflecting more extensively about each one of these dogmas, we must lay down some assumptions in order to prepare the way.

### **6.7.1 Some Assumptions for Re-reading Marian Dogmas**

The first principle for re-reading Marian dogmas is *anthropological assumptions*. This anthropology seeks to take into account the recent progress of human and social sciences, which are attempting to overcome the anthropological vices that have most characterized and distorted the West. Namely, male centrism, dualism, and one-dimensionalism. The main purpose for re-reading Marian dogmas, on the basis of an anthropology that is human-centred, unifying, realist, and plural-dimensional, is to reconstruct an inclusive Mariology on the basis of gender. The second principle guiding the re-reading of Marian dogmas based on Latin American theology of liberation is the proper theological assumption.

*Since we began our theological effort by making the idea of the Kingdom of God the unifying factor of Christian theology in its various aspects, and examined our biblical texts from that standpoint, we intend to remain faithful to that central assumption, now with regard to tradition and dogma (Gebara & Bingemer 1989: 91).*

They go on to say that in re-reading the Marian dogmas that the church has proclaimed throughout so many centuries of Christianity, it will be our ongoing challenge to recognize the potential of these dogmas for announcing the coming of the kingdom of God, “we shall also seek to discern the signs contained in those dogmas that can help set the Kingdom in motion” (Gebara & Bingemer 1989: 91-92).

The third guiding principle for re-reading Marian dogmas is the *Feminist assumption*. Talking about Mary means talking about a woman who was born and lived in Palestine two thousand years ago. Christian faith venerates the mystery of this particular woman and theology reflects on the mystery. Devotion to the one whom Christian faith calls ‘Our Lady’ basically resides and is expressed in the theological facts proclaimed by Marian dogmas. Mary was Mother of God, Virgin, immaculate, and was assumed into heaven. The people of God preserve the memory of these facts in its devotion. From Catholic feminist scholarship we learn that Mary is Our Lady because she is virgin, mother, wife, companion, widow, queen, wisdom, tabernacle of God, and so forth. In addition, this theological assumption is trying to recognize in Marian dogmas the traces of the feminine as revealed by God, the theological face of the feminine element of God, God’s face as seen from a feminist perspective (Gebara & Bingemer 1989: 92).

Finally, the *pastoral assumption*. At first glance, Marian dogmas look like statements characterized by theological inflation and doxological enthusiasm. In them the Marian mystery contemplated in the light of God’s plan and paschal glory is exalted. Nevertheless, we cannot forget that this mystery is just as much as a mystery of poverty and anonymity. The exaltation that understandably comes out in dogma cannot slide toward the mythological and bide what is essential in God’s salvation that is, making God’s glory shine on what is regarded as insignificant, degrading, or marginal. Thus, Marian dogmas that exalt her must reflect knowledge that in exalting her, they exalted her poverty, her dispossession, and her simplicity (Gebara & Bingemer 1989: 92) . “This is the only key for understanding the mystery of God’s incarnation in human history, of which Jesus and Mary are the protagonists.” (Gebara & Bingemer 1989: 92-93).

Before proceeding to reflect on each dogma we must recall that there is a history leading up to the formulation and proclamation of every dogma. The historical, political, social, and cultural context of the moment of proclamation is very significant, for when the circumstances in which it was proclaimed are explained, the content of the proclamation itself is also clarified. In this sense, the context to which a dogma was proclaimed needs to be explained in order for a dogma to be understood.

### **6.7.2 The Mystery of Mary, the Mother of God, the *Theotokos***

Unlike the other dogmas, whose biblical roots are questioned and which constitute genuine ecumenical problems, Mary's divine motherhood has deep and solid support in scripture. The Christian scriptures give Mary the title 'Mother' twenty-five times more than anything else. For the gospel narratives, Mary is above all Jesus' mother. "At the centre of the mystery of the incarnation, a mystery which is salvation for the human race, the Christian scriptures set a man and a woman, Jesus and Mary. God takes on man's flesh through the flesh of a woman" (Gebara & Bingemer 1996: 171). Furthermore, Gebara and Bingemer (1996: 171) state that "recognizing Mary as Mother of God means professing that Jesus the carpenter of Nazareth, the crucified, the son of Mary, according to human generation, is the son of God and himself God". They go on to say that the anthropological vision underlying this statement is a single whole meaning all mothers are not mothers of the body of a person who is their child. The mystery of Jesus, the son of God's incarnation in Mary of Nazareth, teaches us that the human person is not split into an imperfect material body and a great transcendent spirit. On the contrary, only in the weakness, poverty, and limitations of human flesh can we experience and worship the Spirit's ineffable greatness. It also means proclaiming the Kingdom's arrival (Gebara & Bingemer 1996: 171).

According to Gebara and Bingemer (1996), as God's Son's flesh was formed through Mary she then becomes a symbol and figure for the believers and those who experienced the arrival of God, who now belongs to the human race. She is also the symbol and prototype of the new community, where men and women love one another and celebrate the mystery of life, which is revealed in its fullness. This projects a great mystery within women, which is of openness, being a source of protection and life (Gebara & Bingemer 1996). Mary is the mother of all the living, the destiny. Thus she reveals a new and unexplored side of the mystery of God, who became incarnate in her womb. He himself is like a woman who gives birth, who suckles the child of his womb, and does not forget it. In the words of Isaiah, "As a mother comforts her son, so will I comfort you, and you will be comforted in Jerusalem." (Isaiah 66:13)

Finally, the *Theotokos* means we must recognize that this same woman, whom we call mother and our lady, is a poor and obscure woman of Nazareth, mother of the subversive carpenter who was condemned to death, Jesus. We must look behind the glorious titles and the luxurious images with which traditional piety represents her to the no less real and theological title of Handmaid of Yahweh. This is an inspiration for the church, whose role is to serve the poor, for whom Jesus's incarnation in Mary carries the Good News of liberation (Gebara & Bingemer 1996: 171).

### **6.7.3 Perpetual Virginity**

Mary is a true daughter of Judaism, and Judaism does not think of virginity as having particular value. It is equivalent to sterility, to non-procreation. It attracts contempt and implies death, because survival is in children. Mary's virginity cannot therefore be regarded as making a moralist or idealizing point. The biblical texts mean that the Son conceived through Mary is a divine being. The chain of human genealogy undergoes a radical break to give way to the Spirit, who invades history with a creative breath and makes life spring where it would be naturally impossible. Jesus, the new Israel who springs from Mary's womb, is the seed of the new people formed by the spirit. Mary is also the figure and symbol of the people.

The church's tradition has taken this indication to proclaim Mary's perpetual virginity throughout the history of the early centuries and finally at the Lateran Council (649). Mary's virginity throws light on the anthropological question of what a human being is. The human creature is like unexpected virgin land, where anything can happen. Everything that happens should lead this human creature to the point Mary reached – forming God in her womb (Gebara & Bingener 1996: 172).

Mary's virginity, fertilized by the Spirit, corresponds to the vocation of every human being to be an open and available temple and dwelling place. The importance of Mary's virgin body lies in being a metaphor for human inability to achieve its own salvation without God's grace. Mary's virginity is a sign of total surrender to the God of life. It totally abandons the death-dealing idols and is a sign to all men and women as bearers of fullness of life, unlimited open space, a latent potential which grows ever greater the deeper it self-surrenders.

The dogma of Mary's virginity declares women to be an affirmative space where the spirit of the Most High can alight and make its home. It also shows God's omnipotent glory, which is manifest in that which is poor, powerless, and despised in the world's eyes. Virginity, despised in Israel, is the place of the *Shekinah*, the dwelling place of Yahweh's glory. God's preference for the poor becomes clear and explicit when God becomes incarnate in the womb of a virgin. Like her motherhood, Mary's virginity belongs to the service of Yahweh's poor (Gebara & Bingemer 1996: 172).

#### **6.7.4 The Immaculate Conception**

By her Immaculate Conception Mary is the personified synthesis of the ancient Zion-Jerusalem. She is the exemplary beginning of the process of renewal and purification of the whole people, so that they can live God's covenant more fully. Belonging wholly to God, Mary is already the prototype of that which the people are called to be.

The Immaculate Conception is thus a utopia that gives strength to the project and sustains the people's hope in their God. It is the pledge that Jesus' utopia – the Kingdom of God – can be realized on this poor earth. But it is not just poor Mary's soul which is preserved from sin. Her whole person is penetrated and animated by grace, by God's life. Her body is the dwelling place of the Holy God. Her Immaculate Conception proclaims to the people, whose figure she is, that the Spirit has been poured upon all flesh and that the lost paradise has been regained. In the book of Genesis, it is from a woman's body where the original sin emerged, a defect and a burden difficult to bear carried by women. However, from the Gospels and the Magisterium of the Church this very same body is rehabilitated. This body, animated by the divine spirit, is proclaimed blessed. In it God worked the fullness of his wonders. Furthermore, we should not forget that the Immaculate Conception venerated on altars, is the poor Mary of Nazareth, handmaid of the Lord, a woman of the people, insignificant in the social structure of her time. The blessed Mary is the confirmation of God's preference for the most humble; the poor. The grace with which Mary is full is the inheritance of the whole people. Mary, the poor one of Israel, upon whom the gaze of the Most High rests with favour, is a model and a stimulus for the church to become increasingly the church of the poor (Gebara & Bingemer 1996: 172-173).

### **6.7.5 Victorious and Our Lady: The Assumption**

The dogma of the Assumption proclaims Mary to have been assumed into heaven 'body and soul'. The subject of the Assumption is Mary's whole person. Mary is not a soul provisionally wrapped in a body, but a person, a body animated by the divine breath, penetrated by God's grace in every nook and cranny. The assumption points to how her natural body was carried into God's glory, this mystery does not assume the reanimation of a corpse or the exaltation of the soul separated from its body, but the total fulfilment in God's absoluteness of the whole woman, Mary of Nazareth. It also tells us something about the final eschatological destiny to which we are called. We are not a soul imprisoned in a body, and our body for its part is not an impediment to our fulfilment as human beings united to God.

What we believe and hope for is already the case with Mary. Mary, glorified in heaven in body and soul, is also the image and the beginning of the church of the future, an eschatological sign of hope and comfort for the people of God marching toward its final home. These people, already redeemed and full of hope, but still in pilgrimage along the road of history, see in Mary the real possibility of the Lord's Day arriving. With the Assumption of Mary as the figure and symbol of the new people of God, the church is already, even in the midst of ambiguity and sin, the community of salvation, the faithful people it is called to be (Gebara & Bingemer 1996: 73).

Gebara and Bingemer (1996) argue that from Mary's assumption, a woman's body is reinstated to God's mystery and absolved from the humiliation it once suffered at the hands of the Jews and Christian patriarchal prejudices. It is through Mary that women have been able to re-establish and acknowledge the dignity they deserve as their creator intended. The masculine and the feminine in Jesus and Mary, respectively, are raised and assumed into heaven, finally to share in the glory of the Trinity. Furthermore, Mary's assumption is closely connected to the resurrection of Jesus. Both events are concerned with the same mystery: the triumph of God's justice over human injustice, the victory of grace over sin. Just as proclaiming Jesus's resurrection means continuing to announce his passion, which goes on happening in the crucified and those who receive no justice in this world, so by analogy, believing in Mary's assumption, according to

Gebara and Bingemer (1996: 174),

*means proclaiming that this woman, who gave birth in a stable among animals, whose heart was pierced by a sword of sorrow, who suffered poverty, humiliation, persecution, and her son's violent death, who stood beside him at the foot of the cross, the mother of the condemned man, was exalted.*

Thus, the assumption is the glorious culmination of the mystery of God's preference for what is poor, small, and unprotected in this world; where God's presence and glory can shine. The Father's same word confirms Jesus in the resurrection and Mary in the Assumption. Mary's assumption is a sign of eschatological hope for the church, the people of God. It confirms its place among the poor, the outcast, all who are the margins of society. (Gebara & Bingemer 1996: 174),

## 6.8 The Political Landscape of Women in the Catholic Church

A study done by Sonia Alvarez (2013: 386), looking into the participation of women in the church among working class and the poor women in Brazil has established that the roles of women in the church are just an extension of their domestic roles involving nurturing and mothering. The findings of the study further reveals that when the consciousness of women grows and begins to challenge tradition and assert themselves, the church discourages such transformation. For example,

*A course of sewing that started out as a skills and development and professional training program ended up providing a forum for women to discuss controversial topics and soon lost the support of the parish priest (Alvarez 2013: 397-398).*

Mary Ryan Ralph and Louis Kretzschmar (2003)<sup>21</sup> state that the Catholic Church has not yet taken up the of ministering to women nor address the challenges they encounter such as domestic violence, gender-based violence, rape and poverty in the liturgy or church structures (Ralph & Kretzschmar 2003: 171). Thus, I conclude that the Church does not perceive these issues are not significant in the life of the church. With Ralph and Kretzschmar (2003) observing that women compensate for their unmet needs through a variety of compensatory mechanisms, which include forming international reflection and support groups that help them to cope with their lives, whilst other women sought support in Parachurch groups where they could share their struggles and work out their faith and life issues in an integrated way. However, the latter option is not so helpful to women themselves because they are very task-driven, or they are places of conflict and power struggles (Ralph & Kretzschmar 2003: 171-173).

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<sup>21</sup> Experience of Exclusion, a study done among women of the Catholic Archdiocese of Johannesburg both on women and the Catholic Church in South Africa; investigating the issues of gender, ministry, and general experience of women in the Catholic Church.

Ralph and Kretzschmar (2003: 179) allude to the reason why there is a power struggle within women's organizations in the Catholic Church is because Catholic women are not empowered or developed to the point where they can know what professional leadership comprises. The only kind of leadership they access is through their parish priests; who at times are hierarchical, authoritative, legalistic, and dictators. Indeed, many Catholic women are significantly participating in different ministries such as education, health, healing, spiritual formation, human development, and home-based care initiatives. Ralph and Kretzschmar (2003: 173), commend these women for their efforts that display a high degree of loyalty, commitment and service to the ministry.

They then argue that women seek qualities of community, caring, flexibility in applying rules, and concern for people in their suffering, in ministry, whereas they often experience the very opposite qualities from male ministers, such as remoteness, inflexibility and coldness. I concur with the argument put across by Ralph and Kretzschmar in a sense that, sometimes men can embark on apathy trying to be as rational as possible whilst neglecting the very important attributes of Jesus, including empathy, compassion, mercy, kindness and so forth, which are very much associated with the feminine school.

Furthermore, Ralph and Kretzschmar (2003) observe that Catholic women tend to develop a biased image of a God who is male and enforces patriarchal system that excludes them from ministry. In effect, it is not only that God is called male, but women are also obliged to approach God through male priests; for example, in sacraments, in the preaching and in the interpretation of the Word, and in decision-making in the matters of faith and morals, which are reserved only for the magisterium. Therefore, the male becomes the *Imago Dei* and, only through the male priest, women gain access to God. Ralph and Kretzschmar go on to say that “the effects of this “masculinizing” of God is to reduce God, and to make God ‘other’ to women so that women begin to see themselves as inferior to men and regard their experiences and reflections as trivial” (Ralph & Kretzschmar 2003: 177).

## **6.9 How Mariology Could Help to Bring about Gender Equality in the Catholic Church?**

Ruether (1979: 66) maintains that through Mariology a male person is able to tap into their femininity. She explains this by describing how a patriarchal theologian can capacitate themselves to understand their passiveness and be a receptive vassal of divine activity and grace since all people in the church are thought of as 'feminine' in relation to the dominant 'masculine' ego of 'God'. For example, Paul compares the union of husband and wife to that of Christ and the Church (Ephesians 5:22-33). Also in the Gospel of Matthew (9: 15), Jesus is the bridegroom announcing His wedding with humanity.

Ruether (1979) concedes that this does not mean that receptivity is a bad thing. It is a capacity that mature people need to develop in order to enter into relationships. However, when only one side, the male is active, and the other side, the female, is receptive, women never learn to be real people, and men never learn to listen to and help others. (Ruether 1979: 66). Real receptivity among people destroyed this sexist model of male activity and female receptivity, according to Ruether (1979). Hence, the new model that feminist scholarship is looking for is the model of human relationships that are reciprocal by nature. "This means that in a healthy relationship each person actualizes himself or herself by the same process through which each also supports the dignity and the self-actualization of the other" (Ruether 1979: 66-67).

## **6.10 The Community of Equals**

Once again, Ruether (1979: 9) remarks that in Jesus' culture it would be hard to imagine that he could have called God anything other than Father, but in the way he is using the name Father in the passage of Matthew, he seems to be trying to establish a different relationship of God to the community. Instead of the concept of God as Father providing a pattern for setting up a group of 'fathers' in the church who lord it over the laity, the way husbands lorded over wives in Jesus' society, the God whom Jesus is speaking about is one who creates a community of equals, a community of brothers and sisters. This suggests a revolution in

human relations and in our symbols of God's relationship to society and creation. If God, as a parent, does not create a 'hierarchy' of leaders, but rather creates a community of equal persons who live in mutual service to one another, then perhaps we also cannot think of God as that sort of 'big leader' who lords it over other people. Hence, our ideas of God have to be changed also into a new understanding of relationship (Ruether 1979: 70-71).

Furthermore, Ruether (1979) asserts that in the New Testament this change of our image of God is suggested by the teaching that, in Jesus, God has emptied himself and became a servant (Philippians 2: 5-11). God too, refuses to be seen as a lordly 'king', but rather is like a servant, who comes down to earth to empower those who have been broken and to create the community of the new creation. Therefore, if Christ represents this 'emptying out' of God into service, then he too cannot be seen as 'lord' in a way that re-establishes the lordship of some people over other people; the lordship of males over females, clergy over laity, princes over subjects, rich over poor, or white over black. Thus, the power of traditional lordship is called to repentance in Christ. In this way, it is called to give up domination and instead to spend itself in service to support and affirm the selfhood, dignity, and goodness of those who have been oppressed and marginalized (Ruether 1979: 71).

Ruether (1979) goes on to say that women, as the church represents those subjugated people, have been lifted up by the emptying out of God's power in Jesus. They have been empowered to become conscious and self-actualizing persons. Women represent the church in the same way that Jesus also makes the 'poor', the nobodies of the earth, represent the head of that new humanity which will lead the way into the redeemed world (Ruether 1979:72). To be sure, Ruether is saying here something quite different from what the Christians understood by the feminine nature of the church. She is not saying that such women only represent what has been called the feminine side of masculine properties. Rather, she means that women, as the church represents that whole of redeemed humankind, can only be liberated and reconciled when the victims have been empowered to be persons and when power itself has been transformed (Ruether 1979: 72).

Ruether (1979) further contends that if Christ represents the emptying out of a divine power that puts itself at the service of others, then Mary, or the church, represents liberated humanity. Mary represents the person of the church from the perspective of conversion that has to go in history, and between people, to overcome dehumanizing power and suppressed personhood. In Galatians (3:28), from the perspective of final salvation, we read that there is neither male nor female, neither slave nor free, neither Jew nor gentile, neither black nor white. However, we can only have this final perspective in hope. Here and now we are going through the process of change. All of us must become full persons by using the power in the ruling classes, races and gender (Ruether 1979: 72).

But who is this Mary who represents Christian tradition, made the mother of Jesus, Mary of Nazareth, into chief representative of the church? She particularly represented the mystery of the incarnation; that is, the mystery of the coming of Christ into the world. However, this identification of the church with Jesus' mother tended to put us back into a framework where the one certified historical accomplishment that women were allowed to have was motherhood (Ruether 1979: 73).

## **6.11 Conclusion**

It is important to note that both Catholics and Protestants read the Marian dogmas, but they read them from different angles. The Catholics read Marian dogmas as statements of historical fact, and Protestants view such statements as meditative reflections on the life of faith (Johnson 1985: 323). One of the reasons why these statements are read differently is because the Catholics have two sources of faith, namely Scripture and Tradition, whereas the Protestants are following the Lutheran approach to faith where he proclaims *Sola Scriptura*, scripture alone is the source of faith. As we have seen, earlier on, some of the Marian dogmas are not scripturally based, i.e. Immaculate Conception and the Assumption. The Catholic emphasis on tradition rather than scripture brings more division between Catholics and Protestants. Protestant emphasis on Scripture alone brings serious challenges to Catholics.

The fact that there are Christian doctrines that both parties agree upon, namely, Incarnation and Trinity can be the basis for both parties to listen to each other with the spirit of ecumenism.

The Catholic Church drew inspiration from the tradition of the church and saw the need to define them. Thus, the basis for the elevated status of Mary is Church Tradition rather than Biblical reading. Therefore, going back to the basis, namely, Scriptures can overcome Christian division in the spirit of ecumenism. Having said that, the feminist scholarship is not calling for them to be discarded, but they offer us an alternative way of reading these theological statements, such as that of Reuther (1979). Others are calling for a new way of reading them, like Gebara and Bingemer (1989), in order to earth that feminine aspect of faith, but not approaching Mary as the female face of God as the Traditional Mariology does. The feminist approach comes from experience and brings Mary closer to the people as one of the members of the church. This inclusive reading of the Bible, as Wainwright calls it, is necessary to bring about gender equality in the Catholic Church. In the next chapter (Chapter seven), I will give the conclusions of the research and what more needs to be done in the study.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

### 7.1 Introduction

The research has taught me that the Catholic Church has beautiful theological statements as I was analysing them in the form of dogmas. The male authors have produced a Mariology of obedience, passive; a gutless and sexless Mary which can be attributed to their male conscience and the experiences of being male. As it is said in Latin, *Quidquid recipitur in modo recipientis recipitur* – whatever is received is received according to the mode of the recipient (McDonnell 2005). Therefore, from a heteronomy and Christology perspective, subordination and submission are embodied in Mariology. The Vatican II council which solidified the theological subordination of Mary to Jesus and Christology has transformed and brought meaning to theology and the place of Mary that can be summarized as from a cosmic Mary to a biblical Mary. Thus, the choice for a more historicizing, biblical and therefore a more ecumenical direction in relation to her Son is strengthened. Hence, the Marian statements on Vatican II are also beautiful, perhaps in the field of ecumenism, as much as they portray Mary as the model of faith. But they cannot help to improve the conditions of Catholic women in which they find themselves because these statements do not resonate with the lived experiences of catholic women. However, that is not the end of the story of Mariology. In Chapter five (Emerging Themes in Contemporary Mariology), I pointed out that the feminist scholarship suggests that the distanced Mary, who is distanced by male-stream Mariology, must be relocated by emphasizing her discipleship. Mary as a disciple renders herself as a friend to all women on the margins, the outcasts, and those who challenge the powers that oppress them. In contrast to traditional Mariology, which emphasizes Mary's passivity, stresses her docility and obedience, a liberating perspective focuses on her free choice as an expression of her faith as found in the Gospel of Luke.

Brown (1975: 105), who is a New Testament scholar, validates both Luke (at the annunciation), and John (at the foot of the cross) as the ideal inception points that present Mary as a perfect disciple. In this chapter, I am looking at the five phases of Mariological thought, Mary as the model of faith, the suppressed voice of women in the Catholic Church, and their contribution in the shaping of Catholicism, followed by the final conclusion.

## **7.2 Five Phases of Mariological Thought**

According to Mary McKenna (2016) Mariology is needed in theology since it illuminates the fullness of Christianity which “rests on the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; the second person of the Trinity took flesh from Mary so that Jesus is both fully, and truly, human and divine” (McKenna 2006: 186). Also, Mariology is the point of integration of Christian faith and theology, just as Mary, in her response to God, was at the commencement of that reality (McKenna 2016: 186). McKenna further proposes five phases of thought and reflection on Mariology as requirements to support a continuing deepening of the church’s comprehension of the God of Jesus Christ. The first phase McKenna (2016) proposes is the Church’s perception of Mary as according to the Gospel narratives and the Church as one figure that is seen in Luke’s infancy narratives and John’s Gospel reference to the mother of Jesus as ‘woman’. In the eyes of the Catholic Church, typology is critical to this endeavour where Mary, like Jesus, is seen to be a type prefigured in Scripture, and herself as prefiguring the Church (McKenna 2016: 186).

The second phase, according to McKenna (2016), is the father’s development of Christology and ecclesiology where Mary played an important elucidating and clarifying role through which Mary is declared the *Theotokos* and describes a type of the Church. The Church Fathers took over 400 years to express in a coherent, logical and consistent manner the meaning of the apostolic witness and the rule of faith, the One God the Father, Son and Spirit, and Son as fully human and fully divine. McKenna (2016) also notes that in the first two phases, the woman and the man who prefigure Mary in the Old Testament can be identified

as a distinct and important element of Christianity's understanding of Mary. Mary, like Jesus, is prepared for through genealogy of faith both of Israelites and Gentiles; Mathew's genealogy of Jesus contains five women and it is completed in Mary. The movement of salvation history, from creation and the Fall – humanity's alienation from God and itself – God's call to Abraham, the father in faith, reaching its apex in Mary's response to God's call to her, means that a consideration of those in faith who prefigure her and, as noted, a consideration of that which she prefigured: the Church, the body of Christ (McKenna 2016: 186).

The third phase, according to McKenna (2016), is St Bernard of Clairvaux's description of Mary a stand-alone person distinct from the church, facilitating the development of Marian piety, culminating in the dogmas of the Immaculate Conception (1854) and the bodily Assumption (1950). This development of a stand-alone Marian piety reflected in the *Hail Mary* (11<sup>th</sup> century) and *Salve Regina* (12<sup>th</sup> century) occurred as Christianity became the settled religion of Europe. Perhaps the assuredness of the church in the Middle Ages allowed for the emphasis in the Western Church following the Reformation, where in the Lutheran tradition Mary's role significantly diminished. This divergence arises, according to Karl Rhaner, from the fact that Protestantism knows a theology of the cross, but not of glory, which would encompass and underline Mary (McKenna 2016: 186).

The enlightenment era constitutes the fourth phase. The dominant role played by the historical critical method within biblical interpretation, and theology in general, created a hostile environment for thought on Mary during this period. The separation of Mary, as with Jesus, of history and faith reflects the dominance of the positivistic science and mathematical formalism of the enlightenment era. The connections and the relationships of Scripture are discarded and, instead, each aspect is atomized and then reconstructed again into a version acceptable to the enlightenment worldview. In its strict manifestation, such a worldview cannot even consider a beyond or before the material world, a transcendence, and never seeks to search for the truth of a thing, it's "in-itself"-content instead with models and process maps as an explanation of the material world.

As this worldview became the 'reasonable' worldview, faith and the idea of God breaking into and acting in history became to be viewed as 'pre-critical', naïve, particularly negatively impacting on Mary – Jesus, in this scenario, can remain a wise man, but Mary no longer makes sense to the narrative (McKenna 2016: 186).

The fifth phase, the modern period, according to McKenna (2016), consists of three aspects. The first relates to the Vatican II's constitution of the church, *Lumen Gentium* (1964). John XXIII's desire for a refined, Scriptural Mariology to renew Catholic Mariology is the basis of Chapter eight of *Lumen Gentium*. McKenna notes that important rediscoveries of Patristic thought on Mary and her role in the development of Christology and ecclesiologies occurred in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

They are reflected in *Lumen Gentium*'s description of Mary with the church and each is understood through the other. This rediscovery rebalanced thought on Mary so that she is not a stand-alone figure floating high above us, but stands with the church. The second aspect is the ecumenical dialogue and movements in relation to Mary over the last 50 years reflecting the desire to seek common ground on Mary among Christian denominations. Thus, the proceedings of the Ecumenical Society for the Blessed Virgin Mary, founded in 1967, provide an invaluable source of ecumenical research and dialogue on Mary. The third aspect is feminist theology, which is ambiguous towards Mary, seeing her as a negative for the concrete situation of women in Christian society. However, McKenna (2016: 188) notes that a comparison with other non-monotheistic cultures such as China and Japan indicate that the negative experience of women in society is not dependent on Judeo-Christian tradition. Certainly, the proceeding high-level overview is Catholic-centric, according to McKenna (2016); it encompasses the Marian themes influencing all denominations as well as issues of ecumenical concerns.

### 7.3 Mary the Model of Faith

Pelikan *et al* (1996) notes that when the Epistle to the Hebrews, in its rollcall of the saints throughout the history of Israel, rings the changes of those “of whom the world was not worthy”, it introduced each name by the formula, “By faith, after introducing the roster with its definition: now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” Also, when the Epistle to the Romans defined that “faith cometh by hearing, and by hearing the word of God”, and opened as well as closed its total message with the identification of ‘faith’ as ‘obedience’, it was summarizing a connection between its declaration between obedience and faith, and between faith and the word of God, which had been especially prominent in the writings of the Hebrew prophets and in the teachings of Jesus. The difference between its declaration of the Epistle of James that, “by works a man is justified, and not be faith only” would frustrate future attempts of harmonization, especially during the Reformation. However, in the view of Pelikan *et al* (1996), those differences did not detract from either the fundamental importance of faith to the entire New Testament messages or the centrality of the doctrine of the Word of God.

Abraham can be identified as the main historical figure with an extensive role in the New Testament periscopes – Hebrew, Romans and James where he is described as ‘the Father of all believers’ as known by the Romans. If there were to be a mother of believers, Mary is assumed to be the main candidate following Eve who in the book of Genesis is the mother of the living. Mary’s response which was “be it done unto me according to thy word” to God, through his messenger the angel Gabriel earned her the title of a “mother of believers”. For without invoking the word ‘father’ explicitly, these words put into action the identification of faith with obedience, and by describing her obedience to the word through the history of Israel, it would be possible to devise a rollcall of female saints – Eve and Sarah, Ester and Ruth, and many more – of whom she was an exemplar, just as it would be possible to begin with Mary and contrast a similar roster of female saints since the New Testament era.

By its emphasis on faith such a roster could commend itself even to those heirs of the Protestant Reformation who have traditionally regarded such elitism among believers with profound suspicion (Pelikan *et al* 1996: 20).

The woman-of-all-seasons roster of this kind would be a part, but only a small part of all those who through the centuries have found in the virgin Mary an object of devotion and a model of godly life, as she was represented as predicting; “For behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed” (Pelikan 1996: 20). This was one of relatively few passages in the New Testament that seemed to envision a long prophecy of Christ that “this Gospel shall be preached in the whole world”. The content with which those successive generations would invest the title ‘blessed’ would vary greatly through the centuries, but the striking quality would be the success with which, in all seasons, Mary’s blessedness would be seen as relevant to men and women in an equal variety of situations. And that has truly made her the woman for all seasons. Throughout history, and especially during the fourth and fifth centuries, the basic category for thinking about Mary was that of a paradox: virgin and mother, human mother of One who is God. *Theotokos* did not simply mean ‘mother of God’, as it was usually rendered in Western languages (*Mater Dei* in Latin and thence in Romance languages, or *Matter Gottes* in German), but more precisely and fully “the One who gave birth to the one who is God”.

The paradox of Mary as virgin mother not only effectively illustrated but decisively shaped the fundamental paradox of the Orthodox and Catholic view of sexuality, which was epitomized by the glorification of virginity over matrimony – and by celebration of matrimony, not of virginity, as a sacrament (Pelikan *et al* 1996: 113).

## 7.4 Where is the voice of Women in the Catholic Church?

In his article, in the *Southern Cross*,<sup>22</sup> Bishop Victor Phalana of the Diocese of Klerksdorp, makes a strong call for women leadership in the church at the Southern African Catholic Bishops Conference [SACBC] (24 August 2020: 1). “We must ensure that women are included in the heart of the Church so that we can enjoy the fullness of reflection, male and female, in the formation of our moral, doctoral and pastoral life.” (Phalana 2020:1). Bishop Phalana (2020: 1) makes a call for the Catholic Church to encourage women to undertake training in theology and other church disciplines, pointing out that other countries in Africa perform better than South Africa when it comes to encouraging lay and religious women to train in Canon Law, Scripture and theology. In the Diocese of Klerksdorp, according to Bishop Phalane (2020), women form part of leadership structures of the diocese. “We have opted for a collaborative type of leadership where the laity, particularly women, play a significant role.” (Phalana 2020: 1) The Diocese of Klerksdorp, according to Bishop Phalana (2020: 1), women lead funeral services. During funeral services, they counsel the bereaved, minister to them, preach the Word of God and lead the burial rites. The women are the ones taking Holy Communion to the sick, especially in cases where the priest is not present.

In the Archdiocese of Durban where I worked two years as an assistant parish priest (Verulam – Our Lady of Good Help and KwaMaphumulo – St Philomena’s), and seven years as a parish priest (Oakford – Sacred Heart), a similar approach as the one of Klerksdorp was practised. At St Philomena’s I worked with Sister Cosmas Nkomo, OP as a pastoral assistant. She goes with the priest to all the outstations of the parish, and in the absence of the priest, she conducts a communion service or a priestless service. She also presided over funerals when the priest was not available. She was efficient in her ministry.

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<sup>22</sup> A weekly Catholic Magazine, in South Africa.

At Oakford, Sacred Heart Parish, I had five outstations. I only visited each community once a month as the parish priest. The rest of the three or four Sundays the service was conducted by extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion. Out of eighteen extraordinary<sup>23</sup> ministers of Holy Communion, eleven of them were women. They would carry out their duties efficiently: ministering to the sick and the dying, conducting funerals, conducting priestless services in cases where I was not available. According to Bishop Phalana (2020: 1), the liturgy of males can no longer be tolerated in the Church. He asserts that liturgy must be for men and women who are equal members of the Body of Christ. Traditionally, in the Catholic Church the role of women has been to pray, to obey, to clean the church, to arrange the flowers, and wash vestments and go home. Today, however, the church has roles open for women, some of the roles that women can participate in are proclaiming the Word of God (lectors), extraordinary ministers of Eucharist, altar servers, Catechists, Parish Finance Chair (PFC), and Parish Council Chair (PPC). However, some bishops would not allow women to exercise these ministries in their own dioceses. Hence, Pope Francis issued an Apostolic letter, *Spiritus Domini*, in the form of a *motu proprio* (Modifying Canon 320 #1) of the code of the Canon Law regarding access of women to the ministries of lector and acolyte, on 15 January 2021.

Bishop Phalana (2020: 1) also highlights the need to use inclusive language in the liturgy and encourages women to study theology. Professor Rakoczy, IHM, from St Joseph's Theological Institute observes that some women do exercise leadership in the Church. She goes on to remark that South Africa is unique, since two women, Sr Hermenegild Makoro, CPS and Sr Tshifhiwa Munzhedzi, OP are secretary-general and associate secretary-general, respectively of the Southern African Catholic Bishops Conference [SACBC].

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<sup>23</sup> The only ordinary ministers of the sacraments in the Catholic Church are ordained ministers, namely, deacons, priests and bishops. The laity who assist with communion or conducting priestless service and funerals are called extraordinary ministers of the Holy Communion/Eucharist.

Professor Rakoczy (2020) further bemoans the fact that women cannot exercise other significant leadership positions, because ordination and jurisdiction are intricately connected. Jurisdiction means a person can make decisions when holding a particular position. For example, “a woman cannot lead the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, even though the huge majority of religious people around the world are women” (Rakoczy 2020: 6). The major problem in the Catholic Church is the understanding that the power of jurisdiction and its distinction from the power of sacred orders, while being associated with sanctification remains the dominant view of governance in the church (Pietrzyk n. d. : 63)The official position of the Catholic Church is that women cannot be ordained because they cannot symbolically represent Christ in the way men do (Veeneman 2018: 154).

Rackoczy (2020) notes that it is impossible, because a woman cannot be ordained a deacon, priest, bishop. As noted earlier on by Ralph and Kretzschmar (2003), she also remarks that the “exclusive male hierarchy insists that women cannot be ordained because it has ‘never been done’ and the chief argument: a priest must look like Jesus who was male” (Rakoczy 2020: 6). The position of the Catholic Church on the ordination of women should raise a question on the character of the sacraments whether the character is printed on the soul or on the testicles. If the character is printed on the soul, then therefore, do women have a different soul from men such that it is impossible for them to be ordained?

Is this a just argument? “It has never been done”? This is a weak argument, according to Rakoczy (2020: 6), because there are already many things that are practised in the church today that were never done in the past. A classic example is the modification of Canon 320 #1 by Pope Francis to allow women to take part in the instituted ministries, namely lector and acolyte. The chief argument, according to Rakoczy (2020: 6), is that a priest should look like Christ who was male, which is also a weak argument. Here, Sr Sue Rakoczy is raising the question of tradition and patriarchy that it is used to benefit men in the sense that there are many things the church is doing that were never done in history of the church.

In her article, Rakoczy (2020: 6) gives another example:

*A woman cannot be the “Dean” of an area in a diocese because it is reserved for priests. Yet a woman can be a very effective leader. Pope Francis can break the link between ordination and jurisdiction. But there is no call from bishops to consider this.*

Nevertheless, Rakoczy (2020) concurs with Bishop Phalana (2020) that fewer catholic women study theology in South Africa than in other African countries. Rackoczy (2020: 6) maintains that at St Joseph’s Theological Institute (SJTI) – Cedara, the doors are wide open for women students and there is financial assistance available, but few women come to study theology. Of course there are several reasons for this. Rakoczy (2020: 6) argues that one of the reasons why few women study theology, for religious sisters, is that the possibilities for parish ministry are limited as a result of the attitude of some priests who do not want to work with a woman who has a solid theological education.

While it is easy to point out the changes brought by Vatican II in the Catholic Church that opened the doors and encouraged lay people to participate actively in the life of the church (Brian & Christensen: 1999: 92), their teaching on sacraments of holy orders follows the tradition therefore held. By doing so, Vatican II kept other doors tightly shut for no valid theological reasons. Thus, much of the sacred character of the sacrament of holy orders as applied to priests, that conforms them to Christ that allow them to act in place of Christ (Pietrzyk n. d.: 29). In the history of the Catholic Church the sacrament of the holy orders has been associated with two distinct powers. Firstly, holy orders related to the sacramental character are imposed and oriented towards the confection of the sacraments, particularly the Eucharist. Secondly, at the church’s understanding of sacramental power developed in the understanding of the power of the holy orders, a different but somehow related notion of governance also developed alongside it (Pietrzyk n.d.: 61). In this regard, jurisdiction is linked to sacramental ordination.

To be sure, women ordination in several Protestant churches is the order of the day. In South Africa, the Church of the Province of Southern Africa ordained the first group of women in 1994 (Brian & Christensen 1999: 292). Furthermore, not all feminists in the Catholic Church are calling for the ordination of women. Brian and Christensen (1999) identify three groups of feminists in the Catholic Church. The first group sees the urgent need to free the church from sexism by liberating its theology, its language and liturgy, and its structures. They hope to do this by making Christian women aware of the evils of sexism, aware of the extent to which men rule and control the church, thus causing the oppression of women. They call for the self-liberation of women and point out the dangers of oppressed Christians hating their oppressors. The second group of feminists who are members of the Catholic Church demand women's rights within the church, which consist mainly of highly educated women, particularly theologians and academics at various universities. "These women feel aggrieved because they are excluded from taking part in aspects of the liturgy which they believe they could do just as well as men." (Brian & Christensen 1999:291).

This group of Catholic feminists believes that Vatican II opened many doors to women, but kept others tightly shut for no valid theological reason. Brian and Christenson (1999: 292) further remark that they probably do not seek ordination, but can see no reason why only men should be ordained deacons and be allowed to read the Gospel and even preach. The third group are feminists who would like those women who believe they have a vocation to the priesthood to enter seminary and eventually be ordained priests. They point out that in the early church both men and women were ordained deacons. A study by Alvarez (2013: 386), looking into the participation of women in the church among the working class and the poor women in Brazil, has established that the roles of women in the church are just an extension of their domestic roles involving nurturing and mothering. The findings of the study reveal that when the consciousness of women grows and begins to challenge tradition and assert themselves, the church discourages such transformation.

For example (Alvarez 2013: 397-398),

*A course of sewing that started out as a skills and development and professional training program ended up providing a forum for women to discuss controversial topics and soon lost the support of the parish priest.*

Furthermore, a survey conducted in Malaysia by *Women's Voice* (2005: 190) to ascertain women's inclusion in the parishes within peninsular Malaysia found that beneath the developments in women's participation in the church since Vatican II, fundamental sexist values and structures persist within the church, "While women's participation in various aspects of the parish were commendable, discrimination against women was nevertheless present and harmful to them." According to the analysis by *Women's Voice* (2005: 203-204), the patriarchy and stereotyped mentality found in both church structures and among the individuals remain the cause of gender inequality and discrimination against women. A workshop conducted in the Philippines with some members of the BEC formation team of the diocese of Novaliches on September 15, 2014, revealed two findings; firstly, that men and women are not treated equally in the church. Secondly, the workshop discovered that Sanchez 2016),<sup>24</sup>

*Many concerns of women are not addressed in the church, such as poverty, gender discrimination, changing sexual mores, competitive leadership, heavy responsibilities, raising children, and converting husbands.*

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<sup>24</sup> Sanchez's interview with Workshop on Women in the church with BEC formators of the diocese of Novaliches, St Peter Shrine, Commonwealth, QC, September 15, 2014.

The workshop further revealed that women who were also poor were even at a greater disadvantage because they were often just regarded as helpers in the church. When asked whether they thought the church was responding to their concerns they replied (Sanchez 2016: 30),

*It depends on the priest. Sometimes and in some parishes, these concerns were being addressed, though the ministries, for example, but at other times, they were not. Some parish priests are preoccupied with fundraising drives. A few said that this is where BEC's should come in ... The communities themselves needed to be strengthened and formed so they could bring their concerns to the parish. I asked the participants what they thought women were contributing to the church. They said women were creative, grassroots in their approach, and integrated communities with forming families. They related often more courageously and were charismatic and organized in their church work, all the while still working at home. When I asked them whether their contributions were being recognized, they laughed and said that women's contributions were not only being noticed but also exploited. The more they show enthusiasm and capabilities, the more assignments they receive. However, they played a minimal role in decision making.*

Sanchez further remarks that all these accounts show that women are present and active in church life, but their contribution and the space in which they may grow and share their wisdom are often still limited. According to her, it is because of this that women's capacity to think for themselves, become leaders, and innovate for a church is curtailed. Almost all studies around the world done on Catholic women reveal that the church has done a lot to emancipate women in her life. However, it remains a fact that no matter what effort they try to show the world that they are concerned about the wellbeing of women and gender equality, it will always fall short if the church is not willing to engage in structural change. In the words of Rakoczy (2020), the church must break the link between jurisdiction and ordination. This project is not only about the calling for women ordination and including women in decision-making positions.

Rather, it is calling for a structural change, because even if these two aspects of the struggle of women in the Church are addressed, women would still not be liberated. How then, can women be fully liberated in the Catholic Church?

## **7.5 Women in the shaping of Catholicism**

Miller (2009) observes that women in their ministry have given themselves in service to others throughout the centuries of Christian communal life and, as such, have participated in God's life, for God is love. While God has offered women full participation in God's life, the people of God and their leadership have not offered women full participation in all aspects of community life. Even though it could be argued that up until the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there were more opportunities within the Christian community for women to assume positions of power and authority than in the wider culture, "the overall cultural atmosphere within the Church did not recognize the full human dignity of women" (Miller 2009: 1).

Miller (2009: 1-2) goes on to say that they shared the same androcentric system of values and symbols as society. In this androcentric system that has dominated Western culture, women have not, with a few exceptions, been given equal access to the public sphere. While women were relatively active in the public sphere roughly during the first hundred years of Christian life, Christianity has been under the shadow of an androcentric culture. For most of Christian history, women were considered inferior to men by nature and temperament. Miller argues that androcentrism was not part of the message of Christ; nevertheless, Christianity would come to reflect the androcentrism of the culture in which it emerged.

## **7.6 Recommendation for Further Research**

Ruether (1979: 63) remarks that the reinterpretation of biblical symbols may not be enough; hence, we have to think about the whole of the Old and the New Testaments and Christian history within the larger development of human consciousness in modern culture.

Feminists have to look back over the broad sweep of the history of culture in which a male ruling class conquered nature and the female. Indeed, only by understanding what this conquest does to women can they begin to create a new cultural psychology that will enable women to come into their own as a fully human person? In addition, feminist scholarship also needs to look at the question of pairing the ordination and Eucharist, ordination and jurisdiction, ordination and ministry since these pairs are an impediment to realization of gender equality in the Catholic Church. Ruther's suggestion of reinterpretation of biblical symbols may be a good point of departure for this subject.

As I have mentioned in Chapter three on my theological framework, feminist theology is not a matter of "add a few women and stir them into history", a new way of thinking and expressing the Christian tradition is on the agenda. Feminist Mariologies, as a contextual theology, are partially a reaction of a justified anger to centuries of discrimination against women enshrined in the very Scriptures, tradition, and in the life of the Church. Mariology allows feminists to reflect on exegesis, patriarchy, equality, autonomy, obedience, sexual life, and social roles. Thus, feminist thinking needs to dismantle the thinking that has made the male mind dominant over female bodies for many centuries; concepts such as male – man over female – nature; male – God over female – creation. Hence, it is not enough just to restore to visibility the 'female' side of these relationships and to say that now our religion has given women 'their place'. Therefore the fundamental question for feminists today is how we can think about God in new ways that are not sexist. Should we say that God is female, rather than male, or both male and female? The feminist scholarship ask the question as to why it is that the symbolic relationship of God to the world has been seen in terms of domination and subjugation and thus provides a model for similar social relationship.

This is not an easy quest for feminist scholarship indeed. To be sure, God's transcendence could be seen not as a power that reduces creation to a servant status; rather, it could be seen as the ground and power for created beings to exist and to be renewed continually. Thus, God is both the ground of being and its continual power for aspiration of being (Ruether 1979: 64-65).

In the Protestant tradition, feminist study reveals that the disappearance of the independent female image is compensated for by the feminization of the image of Christ, especially in the Protestant pietism. This feminized Christ may have something to do with the secularization of public power in modern society. The church then becomes confined to the private, domestic sphere of society. Christ's human nature appears as feminine, but his dominant divine identity is masculine. Thus, the church's leadership is overwhelmingly masculine. The Protestant tradition also needs to reflect on the role of women in positions of leadership and decision-making bodies of the church. Nonetheless, liberal Protestantism, under pressure from secular liberal trends in society, has recently allowed a small number of women into its ordained clergy. Yet the intense tension and discord generated by this new militancy of women in the churches and seminaries and a great reluctance to place ordained women as full pastors of congregations manifest a basic contradiction between a token acceptance of equality and the actual subordination of women that is still a part of Christian theology if the father is still going to be the head of the family and the image of God (Ruether 1979: 62).

Pelletier (2004) maintains that it is certainly important for us today to investigate, with the inspiration of our contemporary questions, the significance of the incarnation, whereby God comes to us in the person of the Messiah whose humanity is masculine (p, 247). Is it not fitting that a woman be saved through the masculinity of Christ, her feminine other, and that she receives from man, also her other, the sign of Christ who saves her? In the same manner, is it not entirely fitting and significant that man, saved by Christ in his masculine humanity, needs to pass through woman in order to be what he is called to be: a child of God, learning the "sentiments" and gestures of Christ known to the church-bride in the intimacy of her love?

## 7.7 Conclusion

This research has given me an opportunity to reflect critically on my sermons and homilies I am exposed to as a Catholic priest. I grew up as a Catholic, now a priest, knowing only the sanctioned Mary. In relation to objectives one, which was centred on the dominant conception of Mary in the Catholic Church, the research concludes that four proclaimed (Theotokos, Virginité, Immaculate Conception and Assumption) Marian dogmas sanction here to be a typical obedient woman in a patriarchal society. These themes give Mary an elevated status that distances her from other women.

The research has taught me the other side of Mary, the unsanctioned Mary. The unsanctioned Mary is the multifaceted Mary who operates in the lives of the ordinary baptised Christians (Zimmer 2009: 111). I have always understood Mary as someone who is always a handmaid of current fashion in official doctrine or practice. The research has also taught me that respect for one's own experience is one way to be attentive to grace, and so is a gift to the church. This respect for one's own experience along the lines of faith applies equally to both men and women. In Marian doctrines, women's experiences are excluded, which makes feminists theologians find them as misplaced. The research has established that it is difficult to reconcile Mariology with feminist theology. Some feminists such as Daly (1985) view Mary as a double-edged sword in the hand of patriarchy used to control women, Althaus-Reid (2000) says that Mary is the 'colonial' spirit of servitude to patriarchy, a patriarchal gender performance going solo. Leonard Boff (1989) says that Mary is the female face of God. Despite these debates, controversies and vilifications, Mary continues to inspire Catholics, Protestants, Jews and Muslims (Pelikan *et al* 1986). Smith and Haddad (1998) ask the question if feminist theological reflection on the phenomenon of Mary can still bring something new.

Catherina Halkes (1981), Dutch scholar and feminist theologian, remarks that many Western Catholic women not only reject traditional images of women but also traditional images of Mary and appropriate another stronger Mary. In that process some women and feminist theologians are protesting against the traditional and influential images of the Virgin Mother and images imposed to women through Mary. Important features of these images are self-sacrifice, obedience, humility and servitude. In the light of research questions: How could an analysis of traditional Mariology contribute to gender equality in the Catholic Church? What are the dominant conceptions of Mary in the Catholic Church? What alternative theological readings of Mary emerged from feminist scholarship? How can feminist readings/revisions of Mariology produce new theological resources for gender equality in the Catholic Church? I would like to bring in one of the most important documents of the Catholic Church post-Vatican II. When the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) was held, the Catholic Church was still in a high-tide of Marian piety. In *Lumen Gentium*, Mary is described as a type of the church in the order of faith, charity and perfect union with Christ and the faithful are urged to turn their eyes to Mary who shines forth to the whole community of the elect as the model faith.

“Unsanctioned Mary often appears to speak to the marginalized.” (Zimmer 2009: 112) This decision to speak of Mary within the church describes an important dimension of contemporary Mariology. It renders Mary as a member of the community of disciples. She participated in the life of the community in its prayers, worship, service and charity. Her context is not ours, but the demands are the same. Hearing the Word is not a passive action of stereotypical feminine obedience, but can involve responding “to a call to critically prophesy”, which will involve the heart in “conflict with the powers which oppress people not only outside the church but also within it” (Johnson 1992: 101).

Furthermore, there is no historical tradition of Mary participating in the evangelization ministries of the new community, of preaching or teaching, or other ministries of leadership. Since all people do not have the same calls to ministry, Mary's place in the community demonstrates the fullness of the personal commitment of a disciple, one amongst her sisters and brothers. Mary stands in solidarity with all those redeemed by her Son, she is "a woman of history, the mother of Jesus, and an early Christian believer" (Johnson 1985: 335). She is also a sign of hope for Christian community, for her life demonstrates the power of God acting in the life of a woman who animates ours. As believers became aware that Mary stood with them in faith within the Christian community, the tensions between maximalist and minimalist Mariology disappears in the encounters with Mary the faithful disciple (Rakoczy 2004: 348-349).

In Chapter three of this research, I have mentioned that feminist theology belongs to the family of liberation theology (Khathi 2018). Liberation theology provides the context for the most important themes of contemporary Mariology. Based on reflection on the experience of women, a liberating Mariology asks the question: Does this woman speak to the experience of poor women? (Rakoczy 2003: 349).

Indeed, a liberating Mariology answers in the affirmative. No longer is Mary a sickly-sweet girl-mother on a pedestal, but she is a "woman of strength, independence, of integrity of autonomous action" (Grey 1989: 337). Rather than separating Mary from her sisters in faith, bonds of friendship and community emerge. For example, while the Lucan story of the Visitation in which Mary visits her cousin Elizabeth (Luke 1: 39-45) demonstrates her compassionate solidarity with an older woman experiencing her first pregnancy: there are other biblical women who are also friends of Mary. She is a sister to Miriam who led the dance of liberation after the Israelites crossed the Red Sea (Exodus 15: 20 -21); with Hagar, "rejected and thrown into the wilderness, the first mother of a promised child"; with Leah, the rejected sister; with Ruth, a woman independent of patriarchy in her sense of relating" (Grey 1989: 337-338).

In this liberation perspective, Mary is a friend to all women on the margins, the outcasts, and those who challenge the powers that oppress them. In contrast to traditional Mariology that emphasizes Mary's passivity in the Annunciation, stressing her docility and obedience, a liberating perspective focuses on her free choice as an expression of her faith. She is not married; the child will not be the son of Joseph. She is confronted with an enormous decision and chooses freely to say "yes" to an unknown future for herself and her child. As God enters into human history, Mary's faith makes liberation possible (Rakoczy 2004: 349).

The feminist approach to Mariology gives us an opportunity to re-read Marian dogmas, whether as historical fact statements (or meditative reflection) can help to bring about gender equality in the Catholic Church. Feminist scholarship also gives us an opportunity to re-read the (Scriptures) genealogy of Jesus whereby we discover in the scriptures how God uses the marginalized women by the patriarchal culture to fulfil his promises. In the feminist reading of the genealogy of Jesus is women are able to see themselves as role players in the spreading of God's king which Jesus Christ came to inaugurate here on each. However, a lot more still needs to be done in this field of study to dismantle the thinking that has made male minds dominant over female bodies for many centuries. The feminists today need to ask themselves the questions such as how we can think about God in new ways that are not sexist. Secondly, whether we read Marian doctrines as historical articulations of the Church's faith or as meditative reflections, we must constantly seek to articulate these truths so that they adequately interpret the Marian symbol in the language of contemporary experience and evoke from the believer the feelings that can orient him/her life to God.

Secondly, an analysis of traditional Mariology can help to bring about gender equality in the Catholic Church because feminist scholarship develops new ways of speaking about Mary, which removes her from her God-like pedestal of distance and dissimilarity to women. A feminist theologian places Mary in the Christian community with the disciples and with her Son by relocating Mary first with her social context as a real woman.

Rakoczy (2004: 340) notes very well that feminist interest in Mary helps to evolve contemporary interpretations of her person and place in the Christian community, which unites women in their common discipleship. For most in these new understandings is a liberating Mariology based on the *Magnificat*, which speaks to the experience of women around the world. Thus, Mary is a woman amongst women in feminist scholarship and her faith and life provide hope and inspiration to both Catholic and Protestant women. Let us all equip ourselves to be champions of gender equality.

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# ANNEXURES

## Annexure 1



Mr Emmanuel Khathi (220107792) School of Rel Phil & Classics

Dear Mr Emmanuel Khathi,

**Protocol reference number:** 00011271

**Project title:** An Analysis of Traditional Mariology and Gender Equality in the Catholic Church

### **Exemption from Ethics Review**

In response to your application received on \_\_\_\_\_, your school has indicated that the protocol has been granted **EXEMPTION FROM ETHICS REVIEW**.

Any alteration/s to the exempted research protocol, e.g., Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through an amendment/modification prior to its implementation. The original exemption number must be cited.

For any changes that could result in potential risk, an ethics application including the proposed amendments must be submitted to the relevant UKZN Research Ethics Committee. The original exemption number must be cited.

In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

### **PLEASE NOTE:**

**Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years. I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.**

Yours sincerely,



Prof **Philippe Marie Berthe Raoul Denis** Academic Leader Research School Of Rel Phil & Classics

**UKZN Research Ethics Office Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building** Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban 4000  
**Website:** <http://research.ukzn.ac.za/Research-Ethics/>

