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Revisiting the incomplete Mary

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It has taken two millennia to arrive at the Roman Catholic Church's Mary – a figure similar but distinct from the biblical account of Mary. Early Christian Church history attests that Mary was accorded titles which did not reflect in the New Testament. These titles served to buttress the historical and present day claims made among the Roman Catholic Church's faithful. The most influential title for Mary accepted by the Christian Church was that of *Theotokos*. For classical theology, this title affirmed and sharpened the definition of the undivided divinity and humanity of Mary's Son, Jesus. In due time, this title served to support the addition of numerous other Catholic titles for Mary such Mother of the Church, queen of heaven, and more. Consequently, traditional theology began to accommodate the inclusion of Mariology in its taxonomy. This was necessary to address assumptions and claims such as Mary's continual virginity, assumption into heaven and mediating role(s). While Mariology depicts Catholic doctrine, it is not defined by the Magisterium. That means that it cannot be finally accepted as divinely revealed and infallibly defined. For that reason, this article suggests that the Mary of the Catholic Church is still a figure in the making in stark contrast to the Mary of the Bible and classical Protestant theology and Reformed Christian faith.

Keywords: Mary; Theotokos; incomplete Mary; John Paul II; assumption of Mary; immaculate conception; mediatrix; Catholic doctrine.

Introduction

Mary's regard in the Christian Church has been undergoing a gradual change in recent and present church history. Prayers made to her[1] are for intercession and to Jesus, her Son for the forgiveness of sins and for salvation. This image of Mary remains for most Protestants, but for some, there are indications of change that are coming about (cf. Lappin 1998). Perry (2006:9) describes Marian devotion to be divided. On the one hand, one has the Marian church, and on the other, the more masculine Petrine church opposed to Marian devotion (Beattie 2005:426).

One is almost inclined to ask which Mary must be claimed by believers, given the rich tradition that accompanies the Roman Catholic Church's (RCC) art, symbolic prefiguring of Mary in its theology, dogma, liturgy and list of saints. All of which may also evidence of particular socio-religious-cultural influences and trajectories, nourishing Marian piety, consequences of influences such as the dialogue gospels,[2] feminism, Islamic theology, spiritual manifestations, pilgrimages, shrines, images and practices, and hymns. But in the third millennium, one thing is clear: people want Mary as a genuine human woman (Loades 1996:128), a woman of history who continues to connect with people of every historical age (Johnson 2008:17). Another model, which could be applied to the continual historical adjustments to Marian theology, would see Marian sources, tradition, Vatican pronouncements, publications and dialogue gospels to have interconnecting links. In this dialogue model there is no centre of authority allowing for interconnectivity to enrich the subject (Parkhouse 2019).

From the present day high status accorded to Mary in the RCC, the thinking that led to this may be variously discerned. The pathway to the present status may be traced in accordance with various titles to Mary exalting her to a special but identifiable status. In time, this exaltation was also accompanied by RCC theological developments supportive of the accorded titular status. How was this possible when the Bible says little about its Mary, the mother of Jesus?

When the history of Mary is examined from the RCC perspective, it has the appearance of a developing story – one that developed over time in a way such as fables, legends and myths have.

1.Comprising excerpts from Luke 1:28 and 42 developed into what is known as the *Ave Maria* [Hail Mary] around 1050 elevated to devotional level by the Council of Trent.

2.A different approach to the non-canonical gospels (cf. Foster 2008). 'Jesus answers the disciples' questions, which are typically centered on the three following issues: how they are to deal with life in his absence, where he intends to go when he leaves them and how they might follow him there' (Parkhouse 2019:1, 13—68).

But there have also been negative stories such as the one from Celsus (2nd century) who suggested a tainted mother of God, because Mary was in an adulterous relationship with a Roman soldier, Panthera. Consequently, the years of silence are claimed to be due to being ousted from her home by her carpenter husband, Joseph[3] (Abrahamsen 2005:170–171). For reasons such as these, Mary's religious story was subject to historical changes and theological developments, discerned as steps which progressively influenced the Marian narrative bringing it to its present form today. Other possibilities for Mariological approaches are possible (cf. Levine 2005).

While not exhaustive, this article will trace some of the more prominent of such church traditions for the growing regard for Mary. It will also show the accompanying theological adjustments made by the RCC to authenticate its accommodation of the increasing status of Mary and its ever growing influential reach such as the Marian year declared for 1987–1988. However, the question that needs to be addressed, is the following: Has tradition reached its final zenith with regard to Mary's status? Will Marian dogma, not just some parts of it, be announced infallible? Some thoughts will be expressed about this and should be of interest for questioning Bible believing Christians worldwide.

The Mary cult[4]

Trinitarian doctrinal issues developed between AD 325 and AD 787. Inevitably, the Seven Ecumenical Councils also addressed Christological issues which arose within the same context. When Jesus was proclaimed fully divine and fully human, the last vestiges of the Godhead debate were settled. Not all the churches in the West or the East accepted the authority of these councils – an impasse that exists to this day. But it is noteworthy to know that the RCC accepts them as well as 14 other councils including the Second Vatican Council of 1962–1965. While Marian doctrine was not the primary issue at the time, some authoritative statements included references to Mary.

After the Council of Constantinople in AD 381 (Need 2008:63–79), the matter of how divinity and humanity can be met together in Jesus Christ, remained unresolved (cf. Need 2008). Nestorius was particularly opposed to the title *Theotokos* as applied to Mary, as it developed a Marian cult influencing churches in the East and the West[5] (Need 2008:81). Churches, dedicated to her, made much of her virginity, purity, sinlessness, her unique role in the purposes of God, and she increasingly featured more prominently in worship. But more was at stake, 'It was now clear that views about Mary affected views about Christ' (Need 2008:81). For these reasons and being the 'God-bearer', Mary appeared to be elevated above her Son. Careful theological formulations, however, won the day and the Councils of Ephesus (AD 431) and Chalcedon (AD 451) affirmed the title. But the role of Mary in defining Jesus' humanity and divinity cannot be underestimated. The importance of the *Theotokos* debate was Christological, but soon the interconnection of claims of her sinlessness, perpetual virginity and role in salvation arose. Need (2008) says:

> By the time of the Council (Ephesus) it was unthinkable to imply that Mary did not have the status that Christian theology, prayer and worship had begun to give her. (p. 92)

Her theological status was fixed as *Theotoko*s, but became the base from which her cult developed. She was the vessel through which the eternal Word was incarnated in Jesus Christ.

A selection of titles, particular to the Marian cult, will show the development of the *Theotokos* status accorded Mary. A sample of some of the theological developments will show the intended theological inclusions within the cult in efforts to establish their historical authenticity.

Implied salvific titles accorded Mary and their consequent influence

Titles accorded Mary are generally devotional. By their very nature, they also allowed for the application of intended authority and stature which accompanied the title. The present selection of titles[6] is representative of some of the major traditions and scholarly developments predominantly represented in the figure and image of Mary in the present. Some of the titles emerged from theological formulations elaborating the elevated status claimed for Mary. A sample of other titles would be such as from Vatican II suggesting the invoking of Mary, the Blessed Virgin, using the following titles: Advocate, Helper, Benefactress, *Mediatrix* (Flannery 1975:419, fn. 16).

A brief summary of titles that led to dogmatic statements, which developed to imply historical and present salvific influences on Mary's part, includes the following:

4th century development: Hyperdulia veneration, the Theotokos[7] or God-bearer, mother of God title

The emphasis is on Mary's continued virginity in developing the title from Origen onwards due to her being the mother God-bearer. Mounting opposition came from Nestorius.

3.This story was vigorously opposed by Origen in his *Contra Celsum*. On the other hand, Abrahamsen (2005:164—181) similarly suggests a Mary in the tradition of ancient goddesses.

4.The cult of the Blessed Virgin or with some variation. *Cult* is a word that adjusted itself to more recent cultural expressions which might include a person (celebrity or personality cult) or film to claim a cultic following. Traditionally understood, from a religious perspective, it centred on a person or systematised idea(s) which included degrees of veneration and allegiance from adherents not commonly associated with established religion.

5.The 'Church of the East' or the 'Assyrian Church of the East' still adheres to Nestorian teachings today (Need 2008:91).

6.I do not include titles which particularly attempt to redefine Mary as a human or divine Mary such as *Dea Creatrix* with connotations of Mother God, daughters of God allowing for female and male metaphors to describe God, or queen of heaven with its ancient sky goddess connotations and contemporary pagan usage. Constructivists of this nature, deserve a article which deals exclusively with that approach. Other titles that could have been dealt with, include Madonna or 'my lady' such as reflected in religious art; *Notre Dame* or 'our lady'; Blessed Virgin Mary or *Deipara*; *semper Virgo* or 'ever virgin'; *Sancta Maria* or Holy Mary; new Eve; *Stella Mar*is or Star of the Sea; variations of 'Our Lady of ….'; and the Eastern Orthodox Christianity title of *panagia.* Nor do I reflect on medieval images such as *mater dolor*osa and the *pieta*.

7.*Deipara* is the Latin equivalent, but more popular is *Dei Genitrix*. *Theotokos* is the Alexandrian term of devotion (Perry 2006:148).

Nevertheless, the Councils of Ephesus[8] and Chalcedon upheld the title of *Theotokos* or *mater Dei*. They did so for good reason. Mary was more than simply a vessel or womb necessary for the life of her Son. Her Son was not a remote Christ, but one who could be identified with every person born of woman. This is a profound connection. Emmanuel was born of a virgin[9] (Is 7:14; cf. Mt 1:22–23). New Testament Christological theology specifies 'a real incarnation in which the eternal Son of God assumes real human nature in the womb of Mary' (Perry 2006:10). Irenaeus[10] (c. 130–202) associates her salvific work in that Mary is the 'New Eve' (Perry 2006:132), and her Son, the 'New Adam'. Mary obeyed God, whereas 'the virgin', Eve, did not (Irenaeus 2001:759). Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) emphasises the reality of the human birth and childhood of Jesus and Mary's motherhood, and so the propriety of the title 'mother of God'. McKnight (2007:124) suggests that the biblical manner of equating Elizabeth's phrase 'the mother of my Lord' with 'mother of God' was settled at the Council of Ephesus AD 431 where Nestorius's ideas were finally addressed – not to elevate Mary, but to settle that Jesus Christ is truly God and truly man.

4th century: Transitus Maria, mistress of the world

This is the popular literary work entitled, *Transitus Beatae Mariae* in the 5th century that gained momentum in formulating the title, the 'Mistress of the World'. It stemmed from a literary work of the same name that had its origins in the 2nd and 3rd centuries, although it was later classified as apocryphal through the papal decree *Decretum Gelasianum*. It is regarded as popular and romantic, but which, nevertheless, did contain a seed of intuition expressed as faith among church members (John Paul II 1997: para. 2). However, of significance is that an earthly link to the heavenly was found, although exalted Mary is confirmed to be tender and compassionate (Beattie 2005:425).

According to this apocryphal account, Mary was accorded the title by the virgins who attended her after the crucifixion of her Son. Already, it was claimed that she shared in an earthly mediatorial ministry. Prayers were made to her requesting miracles. Even though Gregory of Tours in AD 590 accepted the document, it was later declared to be heretical by Pope Gelasius in AD 495 in his *Decretum de Libris Canonicis Ecclesiastics et Apochryphis*. What is of significance is that this set the boundaries as to what may be considered canonical scriptures and those which were apocryphal and to be rejected. It also condemned the writers of such extra-biblical works and those who assisted in circulating them. Despite this decree, the *Transitus Beatae Mariae* continued to have great influence. That its teaching prevailed, is evident in the establishment of the assumption of Mary as dogma of the RCC.

8.While the Council of Ephesus (AD 431) preserved the correct understanding of the incarnation, the creedal statement included reference to Mary. Early Dormitian apocrypha shows that Marian intercession and cultic following existed well before the Council of Ephesus (Shoemaker 2015:36).

9.*Almah* means 'young woman' which the Septuagint (LXX) translates as *parthenos.* The word *betulah* [virgin] is not used.

10.I do not pursue the emphasis of Justin and Irenaeus on the unbelief and disobedience of Eve as opposed to that of Mary. For Tertullian, the issue centred on content and source in determining what must be believed (Perry 2006:134).

Queen of heaven

The *Regina Caeli*[11] title seems to have developed closely upon the acceptance of the Council of Ephesus of *Theotokos*. The queen of heaven is worshiped by angels and intercedes for saints. Pius XII's (1876–1958) encyclical *Ad Caeli Reginam* (1954) confirmed the queenship of Mary with her heavenly reign spanning the entire world. Paragraph 52 of this encyclical thus expands the title to include Mother of Christendom to whom prayers are directed. A plea that this mother's peace will make 'a happy world'. Mary's queenship on earth and in heaven translated especially in Christian art and statues which feature prominently in most RCCs. She is most often portrayed as a crowned or haloed Madonna holding the baby Jesus.

Some Roman Catholic theological assumptions pertaining to Mary[12]

This section deals with the theological assumptions or statements accompanying some of the titles of Mary. Theological authentication for some of the Marian titles concerns us here.

4th century? Perpetual virginity

Aeiparthenos [ever virgin or perpetual virginity] is the assumption that Mary lived her life as a virgin. This teaching was promulgated by Jerome and Origen in the 4th century. It is also part and parcel of the RCC catechism (para. 499). The matter of Jesus' brothers and sisters are regarded as sons of another Mary according to the same catechism (para. 500). No mention is made of Luke 8:19 (cf. Mt 12:46; Mk 3:31); neither the fact that John Chrysostom's homilies in the 4th century accepted Mary as being in a normal marital relationship.

The Council of Chalcedon does not discuss Mary's virginity[13] within the Alexandrian use of the term *bearer of God*, although it is part of accepted ecclesial tradition (Need 2008:102). In time, it became closely associated with the implication that the virgin must be sinless. Much later the great humanist, Desiderius Erasmus (1466–1536) claimed Mary as the 'New Eve' and perpetual virgin, and links this with emulated piety associated with Mary's humility (Perry 2006:212–213).

1546 Trent and 1854 Mary's immaculate conception

The RCC claims that this teaching that Mary conceived without sin is based on Scriptural evidence and corroborated by tradition. It must be borne in mind that until the Reformation, 'tradition' and 'rule of faith' claimed the content of the gospel faith entrusted to the Church and its bishops

11.A famous prayer in the liturgy of the RCC during Easter.

12.I do not include the Caroline divines of the Anglican Church. This is a study for later.

13.This discussion eventually touched on matters of *virginitas ante partum, virginitas in partu and virginitas post partum* to eventually conclude with perpetual virginity.

(Magisterium) to preserve and ensure its purity. But a change or shift[14] came about in that 'tradition' nuanced 'transmission' in the place of 'content' (McHugh 1975:xxxvii). Hand in hand with this teaching is the claimed perpetual virginity of Mary confirmed by the Lateran Council of AD 649. These are teachings that were not clearly addressed by luminaries such as Aquinas, Bonaventure (Seraphic Doctor) (1221–1274), Bernard of Clairvaux (Doctor of the Church) (1090–1153) – all of whom resisted declaring an immaculate conception. Aquinas, for instance, taught that the birth of Mary was holy and that she enjoyed an immaculate birth, but resisted to include her conception as immaculate (Pohle 1953:70). That Jesus was conceived without sin is generally universally believed by Christians. That Mary was conceived without sin became part of RCC tradition and declared an open question without conclusion by Sixtus IV in 1485. Bernard of Clairvaux exalted virginity far beyond what the Bible teaches, claiming that Mary is included in the passage of Revelation 14:4. Not only did this affect teaching about Mary, but it brought about an unhealthy approach to the institution of marriage. John Duns Scotus (Doctor Subtilis) (1265–1308) was the theologian who dealt with the questions of whether Mary was in need of redemption in light of the matter of original sin applying the principle of individuation[15] (Tavard 2005:108). On the basis of his insights of redemption, eventually at the Council of Trent in 1546, Pius IX (1792–1878) declared on 08 December 1854 that she was ever virgin and free from original sin. But, having dealt with the delicate matter of flesh and spirit, another equally important matter of the same nature remained to be clarified for the acceptance of the assumption of Mary. Augustine (1954:473), resisting a dual spirit and body approach, said: 'The risen body will be flesh and not spirit, yet it will be a flesh so responsive to the spirit that it will be a spiritual body.' How to transcend this high view at the end of The City of God and apply it to Mary?

1935 Mary's reign as mediatrix and redemptrix, co-redemptrix

Mary's mediation is based on the assumption that Jesus, her Son, would not deny any of her requests. Erasmus (1878:1–37), the humanist, denied this assumption making a mockery of superstitions and beliefs such as that St. Bernard drank milk from Mary's breast just as Jesus did, and the kissing of relics of the saints. Mary, it was claimed, wrote a letter to Glaucoplutus[16] (1878:4–6) full of complaints about her poverty and invoking the saints:

> Everything was asked of me, as if my Son was always a Child, because he is painted so, and at my Breast, and therefore take it for they take it for granted I have him still at my beck (breast), and that he dares not deny me anything I ask of him for Fear I should deny him the bubby (breast/milk) when he is thirsty. (p. 5)

This is a questioning of the medieval maxim to better believe too much about Mary than too little.

Nevertheless, Mary's role in heaven retained its prominence in Catholic theology. Upon her assumption, reasoned from within the context of the incarnation (*Theotokos*), it reflected the most exalted title of all because of her association with the Son (Macquarrie 1990:114). This is a title that secures her place in RCC salvific doctrine and so secures the basis for the title Mother of the Church[17] (Macquarrie 1990:114). Mary's historical lineage in light of predestination, according to Vatican II (Abbott 1966:85–96), qualifies her to co-operate in human salvation.

Tradition of centuries finally prevailed as dogma in 1950. A queen of heaven status was accepted with the express tasks of mediation and redemption. It was but the next step from *mediatrix* to imply *co-redemptrix* affirmed in 1935 by Pius IX, 'With her Son, the Only-begotten, she is the most powerful *Mediatrix* and *Conciliatrix* of the whole world.' Mary's role, translated as a continuation from earth to heaven, involves the following: She serves as intercessor and mediator between God and man further developed into a support and even a co-equal role in the salvation of mankind. John Paul II (1987) developed this even further through his encyclical *Redemptoris Mater* [The mother of the Redeemer].

The mediatory and redemptory roles in heaven ascribed to Mary go back to the 2nd century. Antonius (250–350) wrote: 'All graces that have ever been bestowed on men, all came through Mary.' More than 700 years later this is reiterated by Bernard (1090–1153): '[*Mary is called*] the gate of heaven, because no one can enter that blessed kingdom without passing through her.' Still later *The Glories of Mary* by Alphonsus de Liguori (1696–1787) not only reiterates these statements, but elaborates on how Mary fulfils them as a source of salvation and *mediatrix*. To that end, Mary reigns jointly with Christ, shares in service, worship and devotion of mankind. The impact of this teaching was made clear in a statement by Benedict XV: '[*S*]he herself may justly be said to have redeemed together with Christ the human race'. These teachings were incorporated into the *Lumen Gentium* of the Second Vatican Council on 21 November 1964 and so incorporated into the RCC catechism (Catechism of the Catholic Church n.d.) (AD 966, 968, 969). More recently, John Paul II in his 'Holy Thursday' address of 1979 urged:

> You must look to her with exceptional hope and love ... Who will better communicate to you the truth about him [*Christ*] than his mother? … May the Virgin of Pentecost obtain this for us through her intercession. (n.p.)

Pohle (1953:121) tries to authenticate the essence of her mediation in stating the following: 'The mediation of Mary rest entirely upon that of her divine Son and would be utterly ineffective without it.'

14.This must be distinguished from the sixth article of the 39 Articles of faith which suggests that there are truths 'necessary to salvation'. Similar statements are found in the French and Scottish Confessions of Faith (McHugh 1975:xxxxvii, fn. 24).

15.Teilhard de Chardin interpreted Scotus' individuation as 'love differentiates' (Torkington 2014; cf. Bidlack 2015:41).

16.The character, Glaucoplutus (rich in owls), was likely an indirect reference to the Reformer, Huldreich Zwingli, who once served as chaplain of the pilgrimage shrine at Einsiedeln which was dedicated to Mary.

17.Macquarrie (1990:98) significantly uses the feminine form of the Latin word *Corredemptrix* (spelling as in the original).

Incorporated into the *Lumen Gentium* of the Second Vatican Council, these titles with some explanation appear in the RCC catechism (Catechism of the Catholic Church n.d.: para. 969). So much so that the advent calendar of Oriental Catholic Churches is Marian in character in contemplating the mystery of Christmas. More recently, a restrictive has been placed on the redemptive role of Mary. Pope Francis refused to add 'co-*redemptrix*' to Mary's titles on Thursday, 12 December 2019 (San Martin 2019). In other words, salvific mediation of sinners remains the prerogative of her Son (1 Tm 2:5–6). Mary, queen of heaven and mistress of this world, retains the *mediatrix* title by virtue of her motherhood, established through predestination of God's providence, claiming dispensing of Jesus' unfathomable merits. This grace she bestows on the faithful is the continuation of her earthly relationship to her Son, now exercised in fulfilment of a subordinate mediating role in that office (Flannery 1975:418–419).

1950 Mary's assumption into heaven[18]

One of the first references by the Early Church to Mary's death was by Epiphanius in AD 377 in which he states that 'her end no one knows'. Jerome (Doctor of the Church) (c. 347–420) could also not confirm information about Mary's death, and Isidore of Seville (c. 560–636) in the 7th century, confirms the lack of information. By the 14th century, Mary's bodily assumption to heaven became part of the belief system in the West, but not yet dogma. This came about through the positive response to the encyclical *Deiparae Virginis Mariae* of May 1946 issued by Pius XII (John Paul 1997: para. 3). Universal agreement was attained among the Roman Catholic faithful 'demonstrating that the Blessed Virgin Mother's bodily assumption into heaven … is a truth revealed by God' (John Paul II 1997, quoting Apostolic Constitution *Munificentissimus Deus*: AAS 42 [1950], 757 in para. 3). This became dogma on 01 November 1950 when Pius XII confirmed in encyclical *Munificentissimus Deus* 'the Immaculate mother of God, the ever Virgin Mary, having completed the course of her earthly life, was assumed body and soul into heaven'. While this bull affirmed the entrance into the heaven of the body of Mary, it did not deal with the question of her death as a matter of faith (John Paul II 1997: para. 2).

Clearly the dogmas of the Immaculate Conception (1854) and the assumption (1950) are inextricably linked, but they also serve as cause for ecumenical disagreement. Papal authority is seen in tension to the doctrine of original sin held to by RCC, Protestants and Orthodox Christians. Cardinal differences are seen in the Orthodox liturgical feasts of *Dormition* [sleep of death][19] and the RCC Assumption of Mary (body and soul). Both celebrate the end of Mary's sojourn on earth, but from different perspectives (Beattie 2005:425-426).

18.The assumption of Mary and *Dormition* (*dormire* = to sleep/death) of Mary deal with the same events of Mary's life, death and departure from this world to heaven. The former is the RCC terminology and the latter used by Eastern churches of Orthodox persuasion.

19.Death resembling falling asleep

Some background of how Roman Catholic Church theological assumptions define dogma

Doctrine and dogma may be used interchangeably at times (Newman 1989). While doctrine (*doctrina*) may reflect Catholic theology as formulated by a theologian, it does not mean that it necessarily equates to Catholic doctrine. Should controversy arise over the teaching, it may resort to the next step leading to infallible dogma. Roman Catholic Church Canon law allows for the elevation of an essential doctrine to the status of being infallible. 'No doctrine is understood as defined infallibly unless this is manifestly evident' (Code of Canon Law n.d. can. 749, §3). God is known through the study of divine revelation comprising both sources of Scripture and tradition. Historical truth(s), found in one or both of these sources and finally accepted as divinely revealed and infallibly defined by the Magisterium, becomes dogma. On that basis, the Magisterium deals with revelation of truths or dogmatic facts which may arise beyond the closing of the accepted canon. This equates to accepting some point of truth, promulgating it as infallible which authenticates that point as divinely revealed truth.

Now this has clear ramifications for Mariology. While particular teachings claim infallible pronouncements, this does not make Marian dogma as a whole an infallible teaching of the Church. In other words, the doctrine of Mary is still in the making.

In 1993, Mark Miravalle of the Franciscan University in Steubenville petitioned Pope John Paul II (1920–2005) to elevate Marian dogma to a position of infallibility (Russel 2000). That would make it mandatory for all the adherents of the RCC to believe the claims made about Mary. The petition was rejected. It is unlikely that a declaration of infallibility will be made any time soon. The continued dogmatic adjustments to Marian theology suggest that the final say on Mary is not yet been made. Infallibility would not be able to be retracted, added to or taken away from once pronounced. Marian theology is still in dynamic mode for the present and foreseeable future.

This is especially true now that dialogue gospels, for example the Gospel of Mary are accorded a revised status to the former 'gnostic' appellation. A new approach, suggested by Parkhouse (2019) would be the trajectory taken by the dialogue gospel, because there would have been occasions when:

> 'Jesus might speak to Mary or Peter or James alone, or the Twelve or some of the Twelve, or another combination of disciples known to us from the canonical gospels, and he tells them about their salvation. (p. 1, 229)

Tuckett (2008:52, 43–53) has a differing opinion. The Gospel of Mary does not, in fact, give much information about the historical figures of Jesus and Mary. What it does give, is an insight into that early Christian period, but that is precisely

where the practice of infallibility of the Magisterium comes in. Facts of later history after the closing of Christ's revelation as a deposit of faith may, in this view, be dealt with as is evident in the history of the RCC. Opposition to definitive statements by the Magisterium of the RCC is taken to be 'opposed to the doctrine of the Catholic Church' (Code of Canon Law n.d. can. 750, §2).

The incompleteness of divine revelation, suggestive of a continuing revelation, governs the Roman Catholic view. Centuries of continued post biblical pronouncements about Mary pertaining to matters such as the continued virginity of Mary, her royal status, assumption, sinlessness, mediation and more allowed for the development of cultural ecclesial feminism. They have shaped Christian thought about Mary, Jesus, the apostles and the Early Church. More recently, Marian beliefs are 'recognised as the origin of much that is firmly fixed in its traditions' (Foster 2008:11). Overtly they continue to impact art, and influence piety and devotion into the present. Little of this reflects the biblical account of Mary. While non-canonical writings are basically sources reflecting some of the history of Christianity, the Bible stands alone.

Protestant reaction to the Roman Catholic beliefs about the incomplete Mary

Protestant caution

While church history attests to those who questioned Marian doctrine, the major challenges came about during the Reformation and the consequences of its rediscovery of biblical teaching. Generally, for Protestants, there does exist 'a solid biblical basis for reflection on Mary's theological significance'. A more cautious stance will reflect Calvinist Reformed theology in that '… the question is how far we ought to move along these lines?' (Macquarrie 1990:49). In other words, there is little to complete a theology about Mary when considered from Scripture alone.[20]

Protestant Reformation heritage centres theology as a practice within historical context. Contrary to the opinion of theologians such as Richard Bauckham, Crispin Fletcher-Louis, Larry Hurtado and Chris Tilling there is little to substantiate claims for a historical theology supportive of doctrines of divine ecclesiology or divine Christology, or Mariology, for that matter. What secures Reformational theology is that it is founded on the inspired and authoritative sources (*ad fontes*) comprising the books and substance of the Bible. That is on what the Reformers based their convictions, and so Mary was seen in the context of the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Convictions that sometimes reflected strains inherited from medieval theology are discussed below.

20.This is classically expressed by Macquarrie's hesitation in his review of the Assumption of Mary: 'From a vague half-belief, for the most part not understood, I have come to see the dogma of the Assumption as the expression in appropriate theological symbols' (1990:96).

Views of some Reformers

Martin Luther (1483–1546), a former monk, accepted Mary's assumption and perpetual virginity (Perry 2006:214, cf. fn. 24; Cole 1970:100–107). Much is made of the Reformer's high regard for Mary and for the fact that some medieval theological strains did bring to bear some influence on him. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that whatever he believed about Mary was expressed in terms of justification by faith (Perry 2006):

> [*T*]he holy mother of God did not become good, was not saved, by her virginity or her motherhood, but rather by the will and the works of God, and not by her purity, nor her own works. (p. 214; cf. Luther 1974:62)

Martin Bucer (1491–1551) also did not see any reason to doubt the assumption of Mary – her associated virginity – although the text could be read ambivalently. 'Indeed, no Christian doubts that the most worthy Mother of the Lord lives with her beloved Son in heavenly joy' (Bäumer & Scheffczyk 1991:200).

H. Bullinger (1504–1575), the author of the Second Helvetic (Swiss) Confession (1562), in chapter XI, mentions Mary's status in the phrase 'born of the ever Virgin Mary'.[21] His reasoning basically associated the heavenly ascent of Elijah, arguing that the soul is immortal and the body is meant for immortality. For that reason, the bodies of saints are treated with great respect (Bäumer & Scheffczyk 1991):

> Because of this, we believe that the pure immaculate chamber of the God-bearer, the Virgin Mary, is a temple of the Holy Spirit that is her holy body, borne by angels into heaven. (p. 200)

François Turretin (1632–1687) proposed in 1997 the following:

> [*I*]t is probably that the womb in which our Saviour received the auspices of life … was so consecrated and sanctified by so great a guest that she always remained untouched by man; nor did Joseph ever cohabit with her. (pp. 345–346)

Archbishop Thomas Cranmer (1489–1556) accepted that most cathedrals in England at the time of the English Reformation included a Lady Chapel. The archbishop, presiding over a trial of heretic Anabaptists in the Lady Chapel of St. Paul's in 1549, made a point of sitting on the altar. That was a demonstrative gesture that did not fail to make its point to all in attendance (MacCulloch 2004:191). But, as MacCulloch points out, the Reformers evidence ambiguous feelings toward Mariolatry. They sought to 'demolish and demystify the cultic and devotional world of which she was the centrepiece'. But, in England, they also needed her as a bulwark against the more militant forces unleashed by the Reformation on the continent (MacCulloch 2004:191).

General Protestant reaction to the incomplete Mary

Protestant reactions emphasise theological confinement to Scriptural evidence. Perry (2006:271–272), in examining the

21.ex Maria *semper virgine*.

historical circumstances of the Council of Ephesus (AD 431), is of the opinion that true Mariology is grounded when it is accepted that *Theotoko*s is 'a profoundly biblical concept necessary for a fuller understanding of the identity of Jesus'. Christologically, it is accepted that Mary bore a Saviour.[22] That is the overarching purpose attributed to Mary within God's plan of salvation. She was the one who gave birth to the champion warrior God promised who would crush the serpent's head (Gn 3:15). Mary had to be *Theotoko*s (cf. McKnight 2007:124). She carried God-in-the-flesh within her womb.

What possibly became the most important statement about Mary's highest and most exalted title by a Protestant was made by Karl Barth (1956:138), basically echoing the Early Church and Reformers: 'The description of Mary as "mother of God" was and is sensible, permissible and necessary as an auxiliary Christological proposition.' The importance lies in the fact that it puts pay to any speculation to the incarnation of a mythical or primeval metaphysical being. Mary's relation to her Son is clearly established in trinitarian Christology (Macquarrie 1990:25). However, it must also be noted that Vatican II, in a spirit of reconciliation, accepted that God is at work beyond the boundaries of the RCC (Torgerson 2007:31). Implication being that this would imply that the redemptive dogma would have to come into play in proclaiming salvation beyond its own theological sphere. This would be questionable for most Protestants holding to reformation confessions and catechisms. It is also debatable if this will have any significant relevance in attempts to embrace secular ideas in propagating the gospel beyond Christian faith communities. In addition, promoting some idea of Mary present with people, while God is noticeably absent, will question the immanence and transcendence of God.

For Protestants in general, Mary, a fallible and sinful woman, was chosen by God to bear his Son in the flesh. The evidence is that she died in the faith (Lk 1:47) – a sinner saved by grace. The Bible is the story of salvation of human beings fallen into original and present sin; it is God's story about Jesus, his Son. Any other story distracts from the original gospel story of God. Protestant theology, and in particular Reformed theology, hold to the view that it is from and in Scripture, as interpreted for us by God, that Mary should be understood. Scripture finds its final authentication in Jesus – the Word who became flesh (Jn. 1:1 cf. Heb 1:2; 1 Jn 1:1). All else is subordinate to him.

It seems to be a fair assessment to say that the RCC is dealing with an incomplete Mary in the process of historical and present authentication as opposed to the Mary of the Bible.

An incomplete Mary today

Pope Paul VI (1897–1978) seemed to encapsulate the present day popular image of Mary presented by the RCC as 'truly our sister, who as a poor and humble woman fully shared our lot' (Paul VI 1974: para. 56). This statement must be seen in the context of a waning interest in devotion to Mary during the early years of the 20th century and revived during Vatican Council II in the *Lumen Gentium*: 'A move intended to integrate Marian spirituality into the life of the Church as a whole' (Beattie 2005:426). Claims that Marian devotion, with Mary occupying a central place in liturgy, presents no threat to the traditional Christian faith, as claimed by Macquarrie (1990:133–134), is to be questioned. Loades (1996:128) distinguishes Marian anthropology as a tension between an ideal Mary and the Mary who could identify with modern day women. 'The very ideal of Mary, mother and virgin, is an intolerable one' – a move away from and a shift toward symbolic identification and gender inclusivity. The post-conciliar Mariological encyclical, *Redemptoris Mater* delivered by John Paul II in 1987, is also read for implied gender constructions suggestive of influences in the ordination of women to the priesthood (Loades 1996:129).

Ecumenicity

Devotion to Mary also extends beyond the borders of Catholic and Orthodox spirituality. It is also associated with New Age teachings, feminist theology and goddess spiritualties. Mariology generally seeks to maintain a Christian identity due to its indelible association with Jesus Christ. Ecumenical debates between Protestants and RCC[23] have sought to find commonality in Marian devotion (Beattie 2005:426), exploring sacramental spirituality that identifies Mary with Sophia or Wisdom, considering gender inclusive identity and women's spirituality.

While it may take place within the wider context of the Christian faith during the worship of God, this displacement of the centrality of the triune God and of Jesus Christ does not reflect the worship accorded to the incarnate Son of God alone. A reaction in Augustinian theology reduced (Christman 2015):

> [*T*]he role and powers of Mary to what they considered orthodox propositions in a manner that enabled them at the same time to raise the status and self-worth of all women. (p. 432)

This refutes the notion of some Reformation historiography that women were deprived of Mary as a role model (Christman 2015:432, fn. 58). On the other hand, Daniels (2014:277) equates Mary's significance with the Church. Her humility and lack of arrogance are profound positive influences for the RCC to model, because it centres not on organisation, but on people and their God. Alphonso (2012:384) pushes this further in exploring Mary in mystery (centred in Jesus and the Church) so that she: 'is held up as type, figure, model and icon of the Church'.

Supplementary evidence must also be taken into account. There is, for instance the 1858 appearance of Mary at Lourdes who identified herself as 'I am the Immaculate Conception', four years after Pius XII's infallible proclamation of the dogma pertaining Mary's conception. What must also be taken into account is the continued pilgrimages to Marian

22.The Council of Ephesus (AD 431) dealt with Nestorian claims separating the Jesus in the womb from the Word.

23.RCC = Roman Catholic Church; CC = Catholic Church. Used interchangeably.

shrines and other destinations such as the famous Santiago de Compostela. A brief interpretation of various views follows (Murphy & Faraco 2011).

Mary as a feminist tool

The use of Mary by the Magisterium is largely directed to 'the nature and role of women' (Ross 2008:32). Feminists distinguish between Marian piety and Marian ministration. It is claimed that this is history that dates back to the Early Church. The earliest Dormitian manuscripts, probably composed after the Council of Chalcedon about the 5th century, claim a narrative of the death of Jesus's mother Mary, and include various additions to this basic narrative. Mary, it seems, had to be completed through references to her ministry (Kateusz 2013). Additions regarding her ecclesial authority and worthiness of female respectability were made. Kateusz (2013:92) speculates which incidents may have been the work of 1st-century female evangelists and founders of house churches before doctrinal evolution allowing for Marian acceptance. These early ecclesial moves served as an impetus towards expanding the historical heritage of post biblical pronouncements about Mary and her acceptance.

Marian piety reflects in forms of historical feminism. Mary's special power and status, attributed to the special relationship to God, serves to communicate mediation regarding human concerns and identification with suffering, in particular of women in the Christian story of salvation. Her ministration is primarily attributed to her titular status. Nevertheless, for some feminists, this merely sidesteps the denial of the feminine dimension of ministration of the Godhead, which consequently impacts an understanding of the divinity of God. 'Mary's role is perhaps in fact more about God than about women' (Ross 2008:33). Macquarrie (1990:76), writing from a spirit of ecumenicity, suggests that the immaculate conception may make a special contribution to the better appreciation of the place of women and their gifts in the church, but that is not the full story. Loades (1996:128) distinguishes Marian anthropology as a tension between an ideal Mary and the Mary who could identify with modern day women. She claims that 'The very ideal of Mary, mother and virgin, is an intolerable one' – a move away from and a shift toward symbolic identification and gender inclusivity. The post-conciliar Mariological encyclical, *Redemptoris Mater* as delivered by John Paul II in 1987, is also subject to the feminist spotlight. Feminists tend to read documents for implied gender constructions suggestive of influences in the ordination of women to the priesthood (Loades 1996:129).

However, in my opinion, these and many similar statements fail to appreciate the expansion of Marian doctrine and use of particular aspects of her doctrine to promote a more visible and militant presence of women in the church.

Mary a religious link for interfaith discussions

Paul VI in the *Nostra Aetate* (1965: para. 4) emphasises the spiritual bonds that link 'people of the New Covenant to Abraham's stock'. Accordingly, the RCC esteems links with Muslims highly. One that they emphasise is 'They also honor Mary, his virgin mother; at times they even call on her with devotion.' Hagemann (2008:66–75, 74–74) traces the Koranic scriptures to conclude that in Koranic theology, Mary is portrayed from a Christological perspective in her relationship to Jesus, but without its conclusion, 'she is virgin and mother, but not the mother of God, for her son is not the Son of God'.

Failure to appreciate this doctrine, which was formulated historically into RCC dogma, must not be an instrument of ecumenical exclusion. Historically such optimism based on association was not convincing. An example will serve: An exaggerated leading imagery associating Queen Elizabeth I (1533–1603) of England with Marian attributes found little acceptance among Anglicans. In fact, Protestant women of the time of the Reformation found more affinity with the strong and forceful feminine examples of the Old Testament than with the stories of Mary (MacCulloch 2004:216–217).

Extra-biblical appearances of and phenomena associated with Mary

Historically, there are countless claimed appearances of Mary and these continue unabated to the present. These appearances take form in various ways:

Spiritual experiences manifesting in personal ecstasy in the form of visions, conversations, experiences of claimed healing, and miraculous answers to prayer which defy natural explanation by devotees to Mary such as take place, among others, at pilgrimage sites of La Salette (1846), Lourdes (1858) and Fatima (1917). Many socially acceptable claims see the image of Mary in some natural phenomenon, observing some unexplained phenomena such as occasional streams of tears from a Marian statue and so forth.

More dramatically is the following that comes about when such phenomena become public: Three young girls at Fatima in 1917 had a vision of the Virgin Mary. Today the place sustains a cult and is a major destination for pilgrims expecting answers to prayers and miraculous interventions.[24] In Andalusian Catholicism (Murphy & Faraco 2011:516) iconic representations of Saints, Christ and Mary are held dear with supposed attributes of specialist supernatural interventions such as healing and wisdom. For that reason, these figures are 'treated as if they were separate and distinct personalities from whom divine assistance can be sought' (Murphy & Faraco 2011:515–516). Assistance varies from answers to prayers to include claims of healing, guidance, protection and more.

The above should allow for the conclusion that Mariology is still in a state of becoming. The final word on Mary is yet to be spoken.

24.This is reminiscent of ancient temples such as that of Asclepius to which people came from afar in the hope of miraculous healing.

Conclusion

The Early Christian Church did not regard Mary in the same sense as she is venerated or worshiped by her followers today. This is a consequence of centuries of adjustments to the person and status of Mary. Early statements led in due course to the status of Mary to become fixated on exaggerated motherhood and unique attributions of her ministry – suggestive of a continuing special earthly and heavenly relationship between mother and Son – historical ideas which persist to the present. A concluding word may serve: Mary is so far removed from Scripture that it is inevitable to distinguish her from the Mary of the Bible. The Mary of the RCC is in fact, a figure historically and theologically incomplete. Additional statements regarding her status and ministry will remove her even further from the Mary of the Bible and so from Christians who submit to its authority.

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I declare that I am the sole author of this research article.

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