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Ordination of women: Part of the Dutch Reformed church's Mariological gift¹

ABSTRACT

On 20 March 1994, Gretha Heymans became the first female minister ordained in the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) in Bloemfontein, following the 1990 Synod decision to allow women as elders and ministers. This article explores whether the DRC's experience of ordaining women can help the ecumenical church in South Africa encounter Mary, the mother of God, and through her, God in Christ. It invites critical reflection on the DRC's doctrine (or lack thereof) regarding Mary and questions the appropriateness of linking women's ordination with her. The article examines the nature of ordination, suggesting that embracing Mary and ordained women could renew the DRC's encounter with God, while offering a gift to South Africa's broader church community.

1. INTRODUCTION

Did the woman say,
When she held him for the first
time in the dark of a stable,
After the pain and the
bleeding and the crying,
'This is my body, this is my blood'?
Did the woman say,

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- 1 Dr. De Bruin delivered an early draft of this paper at the conference "Encountering Mary, mother of Jesus, in South Africa. Christian theological reflections on Mary: Past and present", University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, 4-6 June 2024.

When she held him
 for the last time in the dark rain on a hilltop,
 After the pain and the bleeding and the dying,
 'This is my body, this is my blood'?
 Well that she said it to him then,
 For dry old men,
 Brocaded robes belying barrenness,
 Ordain that she not say it for him now (Frances Croake Franke,
 Roman Catholic sister).

We find this Eucharistic poem deeply moving. The poem lays bare the raw anguish and fierce struggle of women yearning to serve in ministry within church bodies which, bound by the cold ideology and rigid ethics of their leaders, deny them ordination.

In the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC), "dry old men", *sans* the brocaded robes, made the decision to ordain women to ministry. The authority and control given to the role of the "dry old men" make them important players in conveying and establishing ideological views.

At least to a degree, we find the poem disanalogous in the DRC's experience of the ordination of women. First, we will attempt to argue in this article that, in the church's imagination and reasoning, it was not an ordination of women to say, "This is my body and blood", but instead primarily to say, "Thus sayeth the Lord". Secondly, it was probably not Mary, the mother of God, that the deciders had in mind, and the vast majority of people within the DRC still have in mind as role models or even icons.

The constructive argument of this article will be contrary to the above statements. First, the gift of the ordination of women in the DRC can more fully be received and more fully given to the ecumenical church and the South African Society, if ordination as such could be understood more sacramentally and, secondly, if the sacrament of especially the Eucharist, which implies the sacrament of baptism and the rite of confirmation, is understood with a Mariological imagination.

The spirit in which our reflections and argument will proceed is in what Hunsinger (2008:10) calls "ecumenical theology". Whereas "enclave" theology

seeks not to learn from other traditions and to enrich them, but instead to topple and defeat them, or at least to withstand them,

ecumenical theology, on the other hand,

though properly grounded in a single tradition, looks for what is best in traditions not its own. It seeks not to defeat them but to respect and learn from them.

Our positioning is firmly rooted in the tradition of the DRC, from which we both draw and critique. Still, we learn from other traditions, especially those with a stronger heritage of reflecting on Mary, to enrich our own. We also seek unexpected convergences and resonances within our Protestant tradition in what we learn, particularly from theologians in the Anglican tradition. In support of the argument, we will briefly revisit the formal motivation that was (and was not) proffered in support of the ordination of women. We will then briefly sketch a more explicitly sacramental theology of ordination, as delineated by T.F. Torrance. Having established a link between ordination and the sacramental celebration, we will explore the sacrament of the Eucharist from a wider ambit than the traditional death and resurrection of Jesus to what O'Donnell (2018) calls the annunciation-incarnation understanding of the non-identical repetition that the Eucharist entails. We will then make the link between Mary and the liturgist, entering a perhaps fraught but enriching theology of gendered ordained ministry.

2. ORDINATION OF WOMEN IN THE DUTCH REFORMED CHURCH

The report that prompted the ordination of women to the office of elder and minister was motivated primarily by the premise that there cannot be a rigid distinction between the office of the faithful (“amp van die gelowige”) and the special offices of deacon, elder, and minister (NGK 1990:128-132). According to the report, there is a fundamental root unity (“worteleenheid”) in the office as such, without foregoing the differentiation between the offices (NGK 1986:117). If all offices were equal in their differentiation, it would follow that, if women were allowed to be deacons, they could also be allowed to become ministers.

The foundation for the work of the offices is to be found in Christ, from whom it derives its essential serving nature. The authority of the office lies in Christ. According to the report, the office is not a continuation of Christ's offering but it shares the fruit of his offering. The authority of the office is derived from the Word, specifically because Christ rules his church through his Word. No specific mention is made of the sacraments.

The bulk of the report's motivation for the ordination of women hinges on the hermeneutical and exegetical choices that are made in respect of some Scripture passages that ostensibly preclude women from bearing office in the church and ostensibly indicating that women have indeed, according to the Scripture, been included in the offices. Among the key passages discussed in the report of 1990, reflecting the previous reports, was 1 Corinthians 14:33-35, where Paul's injunction for women to remain silent in gatherings is read

through a sociocultural lens where this is no blanket disbarment from women speaking. The report also equivocates somewhat on the passage in 1 Timothy 2:11-12. On the one hand, it acknowledges that the passage does not speak to the context of a worship service. On the other, it entertains the theological notion that the passage might talk to a particular “order of creation”, where males are created to be superior to women and, therefore, “naturally suited for leadership”.

Nowhere is the argument that women should be precluded from the office of ministry because Christ was male and the ordained, in some sense, represent the “male” Christ.

The issue of how gender plays into the functioning of the office of minister was not directly addressed in the 1990 report, where the favourable decision was made. Still, it was alluded to in the 1986 report to the Synod. According to the report, females’ unique character and complementing function with regard to males will not be subverted. Instead, they will receive the opportunity to flourish in ministerial work, and the office will also be enriched. At no point in the report is it mentioned that a woman may not be ordained because the minister of the Word acts as a representative of Christ and that Christ was male, *ergo* woman cannot be ordained.

3. ORDINATION ACCORDING TO TORRANCE AND LATHROP

In contradistinction with the DRC’s view concerning ordination, which essentially gears itself towards directing and coordinating ministry within the broad frame of service, a different stance emerges. The DRC does not hold ministry of Word and sacrament as the essence of the role. It even remains ambivalent about the unique nature of the minister’s office compared to that of an elder. Yet, Reformed theologian T.F. Torrance and Lutheran liturgical theologian G. Lathrop offer a sharp contrast. They assert that the office of minister exists to authoritatively preside at the Eucharist of the assembly. This celebration, by its very nature, encompasses the reading and expounding – or preaching – of the Scriptures.

We choose Lathrop and Torrance as interlocutors because they are Protestant thinkers. Lathrop is a Lutheran; Torrance is part of the Reformed aristocracy. In their own words:

Then we are at the central point: the leadership of the liturgy is part of the liturgy. Ordination is intended to include persons in the schedule and pattern whereby the Christian assembly enacts the meaning of the Christian faith. Indeed, the order to which one is ordained is, finally,

simply a list of persons who take their place and turn in the leadership of the structure of the ordo. But the order of leaders is thoroughly subordinated to the ordo of the meeting. Ordination incorporates persons as leaders in the structure of the ordo (Lathrop 1998:Loc. 2819).

According to Torrance (1993:xv), “ordination is in order to the Eucharist”, and even more concrete:

Out of this there arises very properly a theology of ordination in which the climax, so to speak, of the rite of ordination is reached, not in the laying of hands, nor in the devolution of the commission, but in the actual celebration of the Eucharist. It is as *Christ fills the hands* of the presbyter with the bread and wine that his (*sic*) ordination is properly realized and validated. (Torrance 1993:81, emphasis in the original).

The main point, in this instance, is that, for Torrance and Lathrop, ordination as such is geared to recognise people who preside at a unified service of Word and sacrament. Or, even more correctly, one could say that Word and sacrament are not to be viewed as two separate entities but as an organic whole. Giving ordination such a sacramental telos will have profound implications for our understanding of ordained ministry. However, our understanding of the sacraments, in turn, also has significant implications for ordained ministry and potentially for female ordained ministry. We now turn to this understanding (specifically the Eucharist).

4. PRESIDING OVER THE CELEBRATION OF THE EUCHARIST, CELEBRATING WHAT?

Traditionally, when the vast majority of Protestant churches celebrate Holy Communion, it is the death of Jesus that is remembered (O'Donnell 2018:45). This is also the case in the DRC. As the English formulary frames it in the service book of the church: “In the Lord's Supper we commemorate and proclaim *the death of the Lord*.” (Clasen 2012:47).

In her book *Broken bodies*, O'Donnell (2018:45-46) broadens the scope of what is remembered. She refers to Pickstock's (1998; 2013) phrase of “non-identical repetition”, a form of analogous repetition where history and novelty are combined. For her, it is not only nor even primarily the passion of Christ that is celebrated at the Lord's supper, but rather what she calls the “annunciation-incarnation event”. She describes what she means by that description:

When doing so I am not referring to the temporal moment of the Incarnation, whether we consider that to be at the Annunciation – the moment at which Mary becomes pregnant – or the ‘quickening’ of Christ at some later date, or indeed the actual birth of Christ. Rather, the term Annunciation-Incarnation event is used in order to remind us that the Incarnation stretches beyond one moment in time and instead encompasses the whole of Christ’s life from the moment of conception, his birth, his childhood, his adulthood, his ministry, his death, and his resurrection. The Incarnation of Christ is a holistic moment that draws all of these aspects together. Furthermore, it cannot be separated from his mother, Mary. The Incarnation, at its very beginning, is dependent upon, and inseparable from, her (O’Donnell 2018: The Annunciation-Incarnation Event section).

Tracing liturgical history, O’Donnell (2018:46) finds different reference points to simply the passion and death of Christ in the Eucharist.

The 2nd-century apologist and theologian Justin Martyr (O’Donnell 2018:53), for example, uses annunciation-incarnation imagery to reflect on what is happening in the Eucharist:

[F]or not as common bread and common drink do we receive these; but in like manner as Jesus Christ our Saviour, having been made flesh by the Word of God, had both flesh and blood for our salvation, so likewise have we been taught that the food which is blessed by the prayer of His word, and from which our blood and flesh by transmutation are nourished, is the flesh and blood of that Jesus who was made flesh (Martyr 1885:66).

Not only does the incarnation serve as a theological model for the mystery of the “transformation” of the Eucharistic elements, but natal and feeding images are used to understand the function of the Eucharist.

Germanos of Constantinople, in the eighth century, wrote: ‘[H]ail, favoured one, the all-gold jar of manna ... Hail, favoured one, who brings Life and nourishes the Nourisher.’ (Cunningham 2008:75; O’Donnell 2018:50).

In O’Donnell’s (2018:50) interpretation, Germanos clearly draws the analogy between Mary, who nourished Christ with the breastmilk from her body, and Christ feeding humanity with his flesh and blood. This echoes something of Hildegard von Bingen’s reflection of God nursing the children he created (Mazzoni 2005:42).

O'Donnell (2018:59) asks the pointed question:

What happens ... when one considers the Eucharist to be a non-identical repetition of the generative action of the Annunciation-Incarnation event rather than a non-identical repetition of the violence of the sacrificial Cross?

Extending O'Donnell's (2018:59) question, one could ask: What would happen to the (self-)understanding of ministers of Word presiding over the celebration of the Eucharist – if the Eucharist is filled with meaning from the annunciation-incarnation event – the nativity of Christ, and the Eucharist as breast milk? Or, to put it differently, what would happen if we conceptualise the sacraments primarily through the lens of birthing and feeding? This would not be totally strange, as there is evidence that the early Christians used milk in a liturgical and sacramental manner (O'Donnell 2018:60).

Even before asking the abovementioned question in the DRC, one would have to ask: What would happen to the (self-)understanding of ministers of the Word if their ordination is not primarily understood as giving general leadership and guidance, (as conceived in a report on the offices to the general synod of 1994) or even primarily preaching the Word to which the sacraments are incidental supplements? Rather, their ordination is indeed ordered “to the Eucharist” which is not (only) a remembrance of the death of Jesus, but which could also be conceived of as analogous to a natal, breastfeeding event?

To finally come to the theme of this article, what if we could imagine Presbyters presiding at the unity of Word and table as, in some sense, acting *in persona Mariae*? The symbol of the female in the church has traditionally been the figure of Mary and portraying her not as a passive or docile woman, but rather as a strong woman, living, struggling, and reflecting on her situation (Rafferty 2015:310).

5. THE MARIOLOGICAL GIFT

That might not be such a foreign idea to Reformed thinking as one might think. Swiss Reformed theologian and friend of Karl Barth, J.J. von Allmen likened the process that the preacher undergoes to the Mary giving birth:

The mystery of preaching reflects the mystery of the conception and birth of Jesus, and there is no deeper pattern for the spirituality of the preacher than that of the Virgin Mary, who receives, clothes with her substance and gives forth to the world, God's eternal Word, true God and true man (Von Allmen 1965: 143-144).

If one accepts the indissoluble unity of the Scriptures read and preached, and the sacraments celebrated as the ministry of the Word, as Von Allmen no doubt would (although, somewhat ironically, he could not approve of women being ordained), one could extend the metaphor to the liturgist receiving and giving forth to the Word in the form of preaching and celebrating the sacraments.

This natal impulse is borne out in the actual experience of Anglican theologian and priest Alison Milbank (2021:10). We quote this deeply moving passage in full because I can attest that my fatherhood (author 1) and my experience as an allomother (author 2), including feeding and bathing children, has had the same enriching effect on our understanding of being a minister of Word and sacrament.

My own vocation to priesthood began when I became a mother. Lying in hospital, sharing in such a common human experience, I felt a new connection with other parents, and a sense of responsibility towards all children, as being as precious as my own. I would pray for them as I fed my little daughter in the middle of the night. Feeding and washing are natural daily mothering activities, and I do not forget their physical, universal basis in the ritual of the font and the altar, where they are honored and their divine basis established. Anointing the sick and the dying also has something of the tending to a child's grazed knee, or applying soothing cream (Milbank 2021:10).

May it be that Milbank indeed thought of Mary when she says:

As agent of Mother Church, I rely on the prayers and maternal example of the Blessed Mother, Our Lady St Mary.

According to Rafferty (2015:310), the Christian tradition domesticated Mary so much that she is known as the disturbed's comforter.

We are fairly sure that the authors of the report motivating female ordination and perhaps not many female or male ministers of the Word in the DRC nowadays would think along the lines of Milbank when she avers: "all priests, male and female alike, can copy Mary, but woman priests can be her ikon" (Milbank 2021:11). Rafferty (2015:310) quotes Balasuriya (1990), stating that the first and real Eucharist, a unique sacrifice of the New Testament, occurred when Mary and the other women were present at Jesus' death and participating "most closely" in the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. Balasuriya also mentions that the Eucharist is much more than the last supper and that it is important to remember this regarding the restriction of the Christian priesthood to women.

At least three issues are at stake, in this instance, for ministers in the DRC. First, in what sense could ministers in this tradition “copy Mary” in their ministerial task? Secondly, would it not be anathema for ministers, male and female, to think of themselves and to be regarded as “priests”? Thirdly, in what sense would it be possible, or even permissible for woman ministers in the DRC to be icons of Mary?

6. *IMITATIO MARIAE*

With regard to the first question of living and ministering in imitation of Mary, there has been some intimation earlier, although much more needs to be worked out. One could connect Von Allmen and Milbank’s thoughts when one listens to Milbank (2021:11), who mentions “(Mary’s) porosity to the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit is our model as priests”. Being open to the Holy Spirit in the reception of the Word that is brought forth in the register of Mary is a profound way of conceptualising and imagining being a minister of the Word.

In line with the openness to bring forth the Word in preaching and in ministering sacramentally, openness to the deeply alimentary aspects of the sacraments can be (re)discovered. What would happen to sacramental theology and practice in the DRC if one of the metaphors to understand the Eucharist could be breastmilk feeding the children of God? Would it not, for instance, increase the frequency with which we are fed? Is once a quarter enough to suckle on the breast of mercy? Would it not influence at what age and when people receive their first communion? Indeed, directly after they have experienced the new birth in baptism, as they would ideally have done at their natural birth, and not at some future date of “reason” or adequate confession.

Concerning the metaphor of the woman Mary nurturing her child at her breast, one must guard against a sentimental reading of what happens at the Eucharist and in ministry. Coakley (2004:256) cautions us not to fall into the trap of seeing the woman at the Eucharistic table:

... in the stereotypical trope of this problem, note, is in no way improved by substituting a woman priest; indeed, the symbolic evocations may ultimately be the more theologically worrying if the Eucharist is at the same time perceived, or taught to be, merely a ‘family’ meal: here, we might say, is all the danger of a West-facing ‘Julia Child’ posture, with the woman priest and her female assistants deftly whipping up the Sunday lunch.

It would be wise, therefore, not to separate the alimentary and sacrificial aspects of the Eucharist completely. This is especially true in the context of the DRC, where the discourse of the “volksmoeder” (mother of the nation) played such a significant role. The discourse of motherhood of women relegated them to the private sphere of the home to take care of the children and be subservient to the needs of men (Buchner 2008; Landman 2019). The fact, however, that both males and females could be “feeding” the congregation in a public space has the potential to subvert the stereotypical roles.

7. MARY AS PRIEST OR MINISTER OF WORD AND SACRAMENT

What about thinking particularly about woman ministers being icons of Mary, and even icons of Mary as priests, not even to speak of Mary as Priest? It can depend on what one means by “priest”, seeing that the terminology can be interchangeable and commonly used in liturgical texts and references.

The Reformers viewed the liturgy as God’s action and our faithful reception of that action (Wolterstorff 1998:290-291). In this liturgy of God acting, and the gathered assembly’s faithful reception, the presider or minister of Word and sacrament plays a crucial role. It is assumed that the ordained play a pivotal role in embodying the interplay of/between “God’s action and our faithful reception of that action”.

On the one hand, according to VonAllmen (1965, referenced by Wolterstorff 1998:289), the Word of God is spoken to us in the pronouncement of the greeting, absolution, and benediction; the reading of Holy Scripture, and in the sermon. In Reformed polity and liturgical practice, the ordained minister will undertake these actions. On the other hand, the minister will also facilitate the hymns and prayers of response of the congregation. She will often also pray on behalf of the congregation in the pastoral prayer “or prayers of the people”. The point is simply that, in the Reformed liturgy, the presider acts “on behalf of God” and the people in the liturgy. According to Havenga (2020:507-513), liturgy consists of actions that need to be performed in a specific order. The aim is to act together with specific worship functions in mind:

Christians participate in liturgical enactment so as thereby worship God, they do so in the expectation and with the prayer that God will participate along with them in enacting the liturgy.

Wolterstorff views preaching as a representation and extension of God’s discourse to the congregation. The preacher’s (be it a priest or minister, male or female) words sustain the illocutionary act performed in and through biblical text (Havenga 2020:515).

When O'Donnell (2018) avers that "[t]he role of a priest is to mediate between God and the Church", those of Reformed persuasion might balk. What is meant by mediation is crucial. If it denotes something of the description, it might suit the description of the traversing of the minister standing as it were on the side of God and on the side of the congregation. Williams (2008:179) describes priests as

a body of designated interpreters of the tradition and animators of communal ritual; people whose task it is to inhabit the two levels or registers of reality and move between them

and their priesthood has to do

with the service of the space cleared by God; with the holding open of a door into a place where a damaged and confused humanity is able to move slowly into the room made available and understand that it is accompanied and heard in all its variety and unmanageability, and emotional turmoil and spiritual uncertainty.

The theology of ordained ministry and that of the Eucharist are so deeply entwined that they have a profound implication for understanding the nature of God (Rafferty 2015:305).

Will it not be that, by "imaging Mary" (Rancour-Laferriere 2018), we can imagine the ordained opening such a space cleared by God? Especially while many Protestant Christian traditions view Mary as a model of faithfulness and obedience to God.

8. REPRESENTATION

If one could concur that one way of construing the meaning (of what "happens") in terms of the annunciation-incarnation event as more of an alimentary event, as indeed Calvin himself did, when he, for example, stated that the Lord has

given us a Table at which to feast, not an altar upon which to offer a victim; he has not consecrated priests to offer a sacrifice, but ministers to distribute a sacred banquet (*Institutes* 4.1.7, as quoted in Wolterstorff 1998:290),

and even along the lines of a breastfeeding event, as some of the church fathers and early church in thought and practice did, and if one could think of the Eucharist

as a non-identical repetition of the Annunciation-Incarnation event (in the full sense we have proposed here) then we can suggest that in the repeated celebration of this event (both Eucharist and

Annunciation-Incarnation), the Eucharistic self is formed. The sacrament of the Eucharist is, at its core, a generative experience in which one is born and reborn. The critical difference in this repetition is the life of the Logos, first only experienced in one woman, by name Mary, but now available to all who will receive (O'Donnell 2018: The implications of non-identical repetition and the search for somatic memory section).

If being born and being breastfed are the two primary ways whereby one imagines the event of the Eucharist, and even more specifically as a Marian event, where the Eucharist is the non-identical repetition of Mary giving birth to Christ and breastfeeding Christ, it could be viewed as exceedingly fitting that a woman who, at least in principle, could give birth and suckle children, would preside at the Eucharist.

If it were argued that only a male could represent Christ at the Eucharist, which it is not in the DRC, and not accepted in this instance, but if we were to entertain that argument for just a moment, it would ironically give precedence to the ordination of women, and the burden of proof would then lie at the ordination of men.

This does not mean that only women who are able to have children (and breastfeed them) can represent Mary. To the contrary, it could be argued that virgin Mary is typologically foreshadowed by women who naturally would not have been able to give birth but who have suckled children who were not their own. The same question of "How could it be?", as asked by Mary at the annunciation, can also be asked by would-be ministers standing at the communion table. How can it be that, by sharing the bread and the wine, we also share in the body and blood of Christ?

In addition, no woman can aspire to be like Mary, as described and, in some cases, venerated as the "virgin Mother". She is indeed "the stereotypical ideal that is impossible to emulate" (Vuola 2019:64). She is described as a virgin chosen by God to conceive Jesus through the Holy Spirit (Gospels of Matthew and Luke).

To explore how a female minister might represent Mary at the Eucharist, it can be illuminating to envision Mary herself participating in the sacrament. This naturally prompts the question: How might such a representation be accomplished? In his seminal work *Worship as meaning*, Hughes (2003:23-26) offers a compelling framework, by drawing on Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic theory. Hughes posits that meaning in worship does not simply exist as a given; rather, it emerges through the dynamic interplay between those who produce signs and those who interpret them. To unpack this, he determines three types of signs: iconic, indexical, and symbolic. Iconic signs represent their object through resemblance – think of a portrait capturing

a person's likeness. Indexical signs point to their object via a direct, often causal connection, such as smoke signalling fire. In worship, a minister's actions – perhaps nurturing or faithful gestures – could indexically evoke Mary's qualities. Symbolic signs rely on convention and tradition, like a flag symbolising a nation. We will make very tentative and cursory remarks on how, through each of these signs during the Eucharist, a female minister could represent Mary in layered ways.

8.1 Indexical signs

The invitation is for male and female ministers to “mean” more broadly when they preside over worship. Can ministers imagine themselves as facilitating the giving of sustenance and the care, bathing, feeding, yes, even being present at the birthing of the body of Christ. It must be emphasised that not all women have children, not all women can breastfeed, and not all women can take care of children. Of course, men can take care of children, bathe them, and feed them. But giving birth and breastfeeding remain quintessentially female characteristics. The fact that women are ordained and ordaining in the DRC can point to be coming in the sense of the word that, were it not for Mary's *fiat*, Christ would not have been born. Were it not for women, human beings would not have been on this earth. In fact, the gift of female ordination could also be viewed as providing a space for men to imagine the space they occupy at the communion table as indeed Mariological in nature. Men have also been permitted – almost against nature, as Van Allmen (1965) might suggest – to receive, embody, and share God's eternal Word with the world as both true God and true man.

8.2 Iconic signs

At the very least, one must admit that women “at the altar”, behind the pulpit or at the communion table have the potential to cause, in the words of Coakley (2004:79) a “cosmological disturbance”. Reflecting on her own ordination and growth as a priest, Coakley reflects on her choices concerning what to wear, how to comport herself at the altar, whether to wear make-up or not, as choices and bearings can have an evocative effect that goes beyond “straightforward textual analysis, or strict rational logic” (Coakley 2004:79). The fact that women lead worship in their dress, their movements, their voice, their body have the potential to elicit reactions within the realm of “(subliminal) evocation and (intuitive) reception”. Although “tricky”, women behind the pulpit and at the communion table could evoke the “Marian” theology of giving birth and feeding the congregation into and as Christ (Coakley 2004:79).

There is, however, without flattening out the gendered roles of male and female ministers, a fluidity in gender representation, where the minister represents Mary in not only her maternal role in the sacrament, but also Christ's, as he gives birth and feeds the church where he "opened his wounded side on the cross for an outpouring of new life in his water and blood" (Milbank 2021:11). In the words of Dame Julian of Norwich (1998:136, in Milbank 2021:11),

our Lady is our mother in whom we are all enclosed and we are born from her in Christ; for she who is the mother of our Saviour is our true mother in whom we are eternally born and by whom we shall always be enclosed.

8.3 Symbolic signs

Connecting Mary with the feminine, or women who are ordained, will not be obvious or self-evident in the DRC. For that gift to be received, a significant amount of liturgical and theological education must occur. The same has to be said about the expansion of the range of meaning of the Eucharist to incorporate the annunciation-incarnation aspect.

The DRC's male and female ministers are invited to imagine Mary

as type of the Church and as the first Christian, offers the earthly element, her body, as the place in which Christ will be revealed to the world and made particularly present. This fiat is sacramental and, as such, makes visible the invisible Trinitarian self-offering – she makes visible the foundation of Christian sacrifice and thus the somatic memory at the core of Christian faith. (O'Donnell 2018: A new understanding of Christian sacrifice section).

9. CONCLUSION

The DRC and other churches are invited to receive the bodies of women. Women who say to women and men born from women, within the deep mystery of the Trinity, revealed to us, especially by Mary – "this is my body". The invitation to receive and share the alimentary eucharist that births new life.

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