

Mary as the Model Disciple in the Theology of Luke

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Discipleship is one of the basic theological concepts which is dealt with in both theological and spiritual discussions because this concept brings out the essence of biblical religion, especially as it is developed in the Gospels. It is also recognized by many theologians that the concept of discipleship is an adequate one to designate the total reality of radical Christian life as it is to be lived in our times. Among the many designations for Christians found in the New Testament, such as 'brethren', 'believers', 'saints', 'witnesses to the risen Christ', 'those who follow the way', 'christians'¹, 'sect of the Nazarenes'², the title 'disciple' (*mathetes*) appears to be the most common as applied to them. Matthew has this title 73 times, Mark 46 times, Luke 37 times, John 78 times and Acts 28 times, thus making a total of 262 times in the New Testament. The title is of Jewish origin in the context of Master-Disciple (*rabbi-talmidim*) relationship; but it was also current in Hellenistic circles (*didaskalos-mathetes*). In fact, the concept of discipleship brings out the dynamic and personalistic dimension of religion. A disciple is of someone, to whom he/she is personally related. It calls for a lifestyle corresponding to that personal

1 In Acts 11:26 we read that it was in Antioch that the believers were first called 'christians'. It is quite probable that this was more a nickname given to the followers of Christ in those remote areas of Syria.

2 It is in Acts 24:5 that we come across this designation as used by those who criticized the believers as forming a sect by themselves, something like the sect of the Sadducees (Acts 5:17) and the sect of the Pharisees (Acts 15:5). Whereas these two sects were held in honour among the Jews, the so-called sect of the Nazarenes was everywhere spoken against (Acts 28:22).

relationship. 'Being a Christian' as such means being the member of a religion with its organization and structures, its laws and regulations as against the followers of other religions. The concept of discipleship on the other hand emphasizes personal relationship which is dynamic in such a way that it can never be fully realized and so it is to be always in a context of growth, progress and realization.

In the Indian context also the concept of discipleship is very much understood and appreciated as a personal relationship between the *guru* and *shishya*. The *shishya* has to learn from the *guru* (*sradha*) and put what is learned into practice (*kriya*). It is here a question of a gradual interiorization of the word of the *guru* through listening (*sravana*), pondering (*manana*) and realizing (*nididhyasana*) it in one's life and activities. It is through this inner realization that the disciples conform themselves to their master and become authentic persons, able to carry on their mission. This new dimension of articulating religious experience has been attracting hundreds and thousands of young and old people from the West to this country who are trying to rediscover the meaning of being Christians. It is a challenging situation for the whole Church, whether it be in the West or East, and it simply points to a radical question about what it means to be a Christian in our times. In this post-modern culture of religionless Christianity, which is having some positive impact and many adverse consequences all over the world, it is imperative that a personal dimension of religion and its dynamism is restored and thereby a new style of life influenced by religion is cultivated. The best way for effecting such a change in the perception of religion is presented by the four Gospels through the concept of discipleship.

The four Gospels deal with the concept of discipleship of Jesus under its various aspects, the emphasis being always on how those who followed Jesus had to become his disciples in a very personal manner. Whereas the Gospel of Matthew, written mainly for the Jewish Christian community of Palestine, lays emphasis on the radical following of Jesus within the framework of a new and better *dharma*³ (Mt 5:20) to be practised by them on the basis of a poverty of the spirit (Mt 5:3) within the larger framework of the kingdom of God, Mark

3 The translation of the Greek word *dikaiosyne* as 'righteousness' does not seem to bring out what that Greek word with its Hebrew background meant. Indian exegetes have therefore introduced the word *dharma* as a better equivalent of the Greek *dikaiosyne*.

wrote his Gospel for those who were undergoing persecution in various parts of the Roman empire, and hence his emphasis is on how Jesus' disciples have to face challenges and suffer in order to arrive at the glory Jesus has secured for himself and for his followers. It is a teaching the immediate disciples of Jesus were very reluctant to accept. According to Mark the success of discipleship depends not on the degree of robust faith or courage which the disciples can generate within themselves, but on their willingness to accept help from God. The Gospel of Luke was written for the world-wide reality of the Church in the Roman empire, where Luke wanted to see the ministry of Jesus continued through the witnessing ministry of the disciples, starting from Jerusalem and reaching to the very end of the earth (Acts 1:8). To enable the disciples to carry on this mission with the 'power from above', Jesus takes them along with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, during which journey he teaches them the various aspects of discipleship and invites them to enter into the meaning of his ministry. The Travel Narrative in Lk 9:51-19:27 is the specific theological section in which Luke unfolds the characteristics and qualities of this pilgrim discipleship.

This pilgrim discipleship in the theology of Luke receives closer attention through the description of several personalities throughout the Gospel in the form of parables and events. Whereas the parable of the Samaritan brings out the qualities of true disciples who are able to respond to any situation with a radical commitment (Lk 10:30-37), the story of Zacchaeus shows how a wealthy person with no credentials to his social status became a close disciple of Jesus through his courageous act of climbing up a sycamore tree (Lk 19:1-10), the important message of which is given through the parable of the prodigal son (Lk 15:11-24), a counter model of whom is portrayed in the parable of the elder son (Lk 15:25-32). Through the acted parable of Martha and Mary, Luke illustrates the basic qualities of discipleship, namely, the ability to sit at the feet of the Lord and to listen to his teaching (Lk 10:38-42). In this manner Luke has tried to dwell on the various qualities and characteristics of a dynamic discipleship, which alone would qualify the followers of Jesus for their meaningful mission in the world.

The Role and Significance of Mary in the Gospel Tradition

In his efforts to present model personalities to highlight the qualities and characteristics of discipleship Luke has also paid special attention to dwell on the person of Mary, the mother of Jesus, who

reveals in her attitudes and actions the sublime qualities which characterized her personality. The purpose of this study is to show how Luke in a very sober and convincing manner has depicted the role played by Mary in the very beginning of the Christian movement, which should serve as a source of inspiration for all followers of Jesus throughout the world.⁴ Mary, the mother of Jesus, appears in all four Gospels.⁵ At the same time, it is clear that Mary was not in the company of Jesus and his disciples nor was she one of those women who were ministering to Jesus and his disciples during his earthly ministry (Lk 8:1-2).⁶ What we have in the four Gospels about Mary is the final product of a long history of the formation of the Gospels, in which the evangelists had their own theological approach to the person of Mary. Hence, many important qualities which constitute the personality of Mary are presented by Luke in his Infancy Narrative (Lk 1:5-2:52) which is followed by a sublime reference to the real greatness of Mary in Lk 11:27-28, which we shall analyze below.

Written in the late sixties, Mark supplies our earliest New Testament references to Mary by name in Mk 3:20-35 and 6:1-6a. The impression we get reading Mk 3:20-35 is that Mary did not understand the true identity of Jesus and that she, together with his other family members, was suspicious of him (Mk 3:19-21). In narrating the ministry of Jesus, Matthew has parallels to the two scenes in Mark where Mary is mentioned (Mt 12:46-50; 13:53-58), although there are variances in Matthew's accounts, which are related to the fact that Matthew has an Infancy Narrative in which Mary's conception of Jesus is described. All the same, it is to be observed that the main

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- 4 In the context of certain exaggerated attempts among the Catholics to press the authorities of the Church to promulgate new dogmas about Mary, such as 'Mary as the Co-redemptrix' and 'Mary as the Mediatrix of all graces', attempts which get little support from the official circles, it is important that we dwell more on the data which are provided by the New Testament and in this the contributions of Luke are very significant.
- 5 For a detailed study on Mary in the New Testament from an ecumenical perspective see *Mary in the New Testament*, edited by Raymond E. Brown, Karl P. Donfried, Joseph A. Fitzmyer and John Reumann (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 1996).
- 6 According to Mk 3:31 and Lk 8:19 Mary came with the brothers of Jesus to where Jesus was, while Mk 3:21 implies that Mary lived in another place and got news about Jesus that he was out of senses. It is only in Jn 2:1-11 that we hear about Jesus and Mary being together for a wedding feast.

intention of Matthew is not so much to focus on the person of Mary as to highlight the supernatural origin of Jesus, in which Mary also played a definite role (Mt 1:18-25). In association with Jesus the importance of Mary is also emphasized, and it seems it is part of a growing awareness of her importance in the faith experience of the Matthean community. In other words, during the rather long history of the formation of the gospel tradition there grew up certain new trends in the understanding of the person of Jesus which had repercussions also on other personalities in the early Church, such as Peter, Thomas, Judas and other disciples. Among these the focus on the personality of Mary had far-reaching consequences, the clearest proof of which is the Lukan understanding of Mary and her role in the gospel tradition.

Mary in the Theology of Luke

When we look at the Lukan understanding of Mary, it is noteworthy that Luke tries to present Mary from a new perspective, which is a development on the Matthean approach. In narrating the ministry of Jesus, Luke has parallels to the two scenes in Mark and Matthew where Mary appears or is mentioned, but with even greater variances than in Matthew's Gospel. Moreover, Luke has an additional reference to Mary in 11:27-28, which seems to be a theological commentary on Lk 8:19-21. Besides these additional passages the conspicuous section of the Gospel of Luke where Mary receives greater attention is the Infancy Narrative. Like Matthew, Luke also narrates events that surrounded Jesus' conception, birth and early childhood. The Lukan account is much longer than the Matthean account and gives a prominent place to John the Baptist, who is never mentioned in the Matthean Infancy Narrative. For our purpose, however, the most interesting aspect of the Lukan Infancy Narrative is the prominence given to Mary. The annunciation of Jesus' conception, which in Matthew is centred on Joseph, is addressed by the angel to the virgin Mary (Lk 1:26-38); she visits her relative Elizabeth who greets her as the "mother of my Lord" (Lk 1:43). According to many textual witnesses she recites a hymn of praise, the *Magnificat* (Lk 1:46-55); she gives birth to Jesus at Bethlehem (Lk 2:1-10); she presents Jesus in the Temple and is greeted by Simeon (Lk 2:22-40) and she features prominently in the scene of the finding of Jesus in the Temple at the age of twelve (Lk 2:41-52).

With all these details about the person of Mary before us it is worth considering whether Luke had other theological concerns in dwelling on these various aspects of her personality. Here the intention of this writer is not to establish the 'Mary of history' on the ground that Luke had some special sources available to him about Mary. Among his other theological concerns to present a relevant gospel for the believers, represented by Theophilus (Lk 1:3), Luke wanted also to present a historical person of Mary, closely associated with Jesus, as the model disciple who realized in her life the great and noble ideals of discipleship. The purpose of this study is precisely to situate the basic principles of a sound Mariology in the biblical tradition. The purpose of this study is not so much to critically analyze the various stories about Mary in the Gospel of Luke, but rather to dwell on the theological nuances of these narratives in view of focusing on the salient and impressive aspects of the person of Mary in terms of her relationship to Jesus as a model and perfect disciple.

Salient Aspects of Mary's Discipleship in the Theology of Luke

As already indicated, it is in the Infancy Narrative that Luke has brought together many of the beautiful aspects of discipleship as revealed in the person of Mary. But the climactic statement about Mary is in Luke 1:28, where we have the most important statement about her as the one who accepted the Word of God into her life and lived in accordance with it. The first reference to Mary in Luke occurs when the angel is sent to Nazareth to a virgin betrothed to a man of the house of David, whose name was Joseph; and the virgin's name was Mary (Lk 1:26-27). From then onwards the role of Mary is mentioned in several places in the Infancy Narrative. But the focus of these narratives is not so much the person of Mary as Jesus himself, though the tendency in the tradition of the Church had been to reflect more on Mary than on Jesus himself. All the same, it is to be affirmed that Luke had the person of Mary and her specific role also as part of his theological concerns and we shall see some of those concerns in the following pages. Our effort is not so much a purely scientific and exegetical one as a reflective and spiritual one, which will throw light on the various aspects of discipleship as revealed in Mary and also something that is to be lived in our present times.

a) *Responding and Responsible Discipleship*: During the encounter between the angel and Mary in the annunciation (Lk 1:26-38) we see

that Mary behaves like a very responsible person in so far as she raises doubts about how it could happen because she was a virgin. Taking the model of divine-human encounter in which the humans raise objections and doubts about the viability of things which were proposed to happen to them, Mary also raises doubts about how she could become the bearer of God's plans. Once she is assured of the manner in which God's plans would happen, Mary accepts it in all freedom and obedience. This is revealed in her words to the angel: "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word" (Lk 1:38). Though the emphasis of the annunciation narrative is on the divine origin of Jesus, the responsible role played by Mary is equally important. Mary accepted the word of God as the starting-point of her life and it always remained so. Hence Elizabeth is also referring to this responding dimension of Mary's personality: "Blessed is she who believed that there would be fulfilment of what was spoken to her by the Lord" (Lk 1:45).

b) *Discipleship as a Call to Service*: Mary's encounter with the word of God and her commitment to God leads her to a new dimension of discipleship revealed in her going to Elizabeth to serve her in her old age and pregnancy, a time when she was in need of help. Mary's elevation to becoming the mother of Son of God (Lk 1:35) only prompted her to go in haste (*meta spoudes*) (Lk 1:39) to the house of Elizabeth, there to be of service and assistance to her. When the power of the word of God is encountered, all human calculations fall asunder and humans acquire a new way of seeing and evaluating issues. First of all, it is manifested in the form of becoming available to others in their various needs. The inner nature of the word of God is that it takes humans from their self-centredness and egoism to make them available to others through genuine altruism. This is precisely what Mary does in going to the house of Elizabeth and being there for three months (Lk 1:56).

c) *Humble and Grateful Discipleship*: Another important dimension of discipleship is that it makes humans humble and grateful before God and humans. When she is praised and congratulated by Elizabeth for her becoming the mother of the Lord, while expressing her own unworthiness to be visited by such a great person (Lk 1:42-43), Mary raises her voice to utter her song of praise and thanksgiving, a song which has captured the attention of many theologians in our times (Lk

1:46-55). The question is not about whether Mary uttered all these ideas in so many words; rather, what Luke wants is to represent Mary in so far as she was elevated to a status of unique importance in God's plan for human history. Through some profound theological concepts Mary articulates God's ways of doing great things through small persons. The entire history of salvation is characterized by this pattern of God dealing with the humankind, and Mary represents the ideal disciple who is able to recognize God's gifts as unmerited and free. Moreover, Mary also refers to how God deals with the proud and the powerful, bringing them down to their own ignominy and shame. It is of the essence of discipleship that humans remain humble and grateful before God and never become proud and arrogant.

d) *Silent and Reflecting Discipleship*: In the context of the birth narrative Mary once again emerges as a perfect and authentic disciple when the shepherds go to Bethlehem and worship the child and make the news of it known to others (Lk 2:15-18). It was a moment of euphoria and excitement for any mother to see her child becoming a point of attention, the more so because the antecedents of that birth were surrounded by disappointment and insecurity, because "there was no place for them in the inn" (Lk 2:7). But Mary was the least excited by all that happened with the appearance of the angels in the shepherd's field or the arrival of the shepherds to the manger. Rather, it is positively said that "Mary treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart" (Lk 2:19). The true nature of good disciples is that they always have the ability to turn to themselves and see things from a larger perspective. It is in silence and reflection that the disciples discover the significance of things and events and there they can evaluate their meaning for themselves and for others.

e) *Suffering Dimension of Discipleship*: With all its grandeur and excellence, discipleship also involves intense suffering and it is revealed in the story of Jesus being presented in the Temple when Simeon tells Mary about the intense sufferings she will have to undergo on account of her Son because of the role he will have to play in the society (Lk 2:34-35). In so far as Jesus is placed as a sign that will be opposed by the people, his mother also will have to experience the consequences of his controversial role in the society. It would be in the form of a sword that would pierce her inner being. Jesus had a hard time to convince his disciples of the suffering dimension of

discipleship (Lk 9:57-22) because he himself had to undergo suffering and death as related to his mission.⁷ The most significant aspect of this suffering dimension of discipleship is that very often such intense sufferings are to be experienced in the inner core of one's being with nobody to take notice of it. This was precisely the situation in which Mary had to see and hear about her Son engaged in a radically controversial mission.

f) *Disciples Facing Challenges in Their Life*: The last of the stories in the Infancy Narrative is almost like a climax, where both Mary and Jesus are presented as growing in their respective fields. Whereas Jesus is said to have grown in wisdom and in age within the framework of divine and human favour, Mary also grew treasuring all issues in her heart (Lk 2:51-52). In the story of the birth of Jesus, it was all happy moments when the shepherds went to visit the child Jesus and all were in a mood of excitement and joy. But in the last story of the Infancy Narrative the scene is rather enigmatic and confusing. To the anxious mother revealing her inner agony when she and her husband could not trace their Son for three days came the most confusing answer of Jesus that he had to be in his Father's house, an answer that was more disturbing than explaining. On the other hand, Mary did not dare to ask him any further question about that other Father which would indirectly refer also to another mother besides herself. Luke makes a bold statement that they did not understand what he said to them. Mary was humble enough to accept that there could be things beyond her comprehension and hence she treasured all these things in her heart. Since discipleship is a pilgrimage involving uncertain ways and situations, all disciples have to develop this capacity for facing challenges during their pilgrimage of discipleship.

g) *Disciple Hearing the Word of God and Keeping it (Lk 11:27-28)*: Luke alone narrates a story through which he presents the aforesaid qualities and characteristics of Mary through a contrast of her biological motherhood and her ability to hear the word of God and keep it. The story is related as taking place during the Travel Narrative of Luke, a section of Luke's Gospel known for its profound theological

7 The three predictions of the passion in Mark has a pedagogical theme (Mk 8:31-33; 9:30-32; 10:32-45) which is also found in Matthew and Luke. Jesus is gradually guiding his disciples to understand the suffering dimension of discipleship.

insights.⁸ The context of Jesus referring to his mother is the exclamation made by a woman from the crowd who, listening to the profound wisdom of Jesus, naturally thought of the excellence of his mother who bore him in her womb and nursed him in his childhood. The accent of this praise of Mary is on her biological relationship to Jesus, as in the case of every mother. The excellence of children naturally points to the excellence of their mother. Jesus does not deny this dimension of Mary's motherhood. But, as always, Jesus rises above physical and biological aspects and points to those aspects which are more important to the personality of Mary. It lies precisely in the fact that she was able to hear the word of God and obey it totally and completely. It refers to the greater blessedness of Mary far beyond her blessedness based on her biological motherhood. It is through this aphorism that Jesus has established the real greatness of Mary and made her the model of a perfect disciple for all times. Whereas the biological motherhood is restricted to one person, the theological relationship based on listening to the word of God and living accordingly is open to all.

h) *Discipleship as Grace Open to All*: The central message of the story discussed above is linked to another story found in all Synoptics about Mary and the relatives of Jesus going to meet Jesus (Lk 8:19-21; Mk 3:31-35; Mt 12:46-50). But the formulation of the story is not the same in all of them. Whereas in Mark it is related to a critical situation when the family members of Jesus concluded that "he had gone out of his mind" (Mk 3:21) and the visit itself was in view of restraining him (Mk 3:31-35), Matthew has a rather sober narrative about the mother of Jesus and his relatives going to him and wanting to meet him (Mt 12:46-50). In Luke the story is presented in very simple terms as Mary and the brothers of Jesus joining the crowds and hence not being able to see him. Whereas Matthew and Mark refer to the reaction of Jesus in the form of a question: "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?", Luke omits such a question and only makes a theological

8 Lk 9:51-19:27 is known as the Travel Narrative, a theological section carved into the theology of Luke on the basis of a short narrative in Mk 10:1-52. The basic theme of this narrative of Luke is the analysis of the qualities and characteristics of discipleship as following Jesus on his way to Jerusalem, there to face opposition, undergo sufferings and death and rise to a new life. The disciples following Jesus are exhorted to have the same qualities as Jesus had in order to arrive at the goal of their discipleship.

statement: "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it." If we combine the two sayings of Jesus to the woman from the crowd (Lk 11:27-28) and the saying of Jesus to the crowd surrounding him (Lk 8:19-21), we can see the inner logic of Jesus' attitude. For Jesus biological relationship in itself has no meaning until it is transformed into a theological relationship. At the level of that theological relationship of listening to the word of God all humans are the mothers, brothers and sisters of Jesus.⁹

i) *Discipleship and the Parable of Martha and Mary*: The story of Jesus going to the house of Martha and Mary and the details of what happened there seem to be more an acted parable rather than an event in itself. The purpose of this parable is to counterbalance the message of the parable of the Samaritan, through which Jesus had invited his disciples to selfless action: "Go and do likewise" (Lk 10:37) is the lesson of the parable. But Luke wants to correct any misunderstanding that would emerge from this exhortation, and hence the parable of Martha and Mary is placed immediately after the parable of the Samaritan, through which Jesus tells his disciples how they have to give priority to listening to the word of God as the immediate source of vitality and energy. Whereas Martha was distracted and anxious about 'many things', Mary was characterized by her ability to sit at the feet of the Lord¹⁰ and listen to his teaching. It was something that would never be taken away from her. It is also important to note that through the name 'Mary' there is an attempt made by Luke to connect Mary, mother of Jesus, with the Mary of Bethany. For Luke both are characterized by their ability to listen to the word of God. Through the parable of Mary of Bethany, Luke has made it clear that every Mary, and for that reason, all humans can become true disciples of

9 It is to be observed that Jesus never refers to the human 'father' in this context because the title 'father' he always reserved for God, whom he lovingly addressed as *abba*. For Jesus, it is this *abba* who is the basis of all relationship here on earth.

10 The main reason for arguing that the story of Martha and Mary is an acted parable is the presence of the word 'Lord' in the narrative. While the title 'Jesus' refers to the historical person, 'Lord' refers to the glorified Jesus, one who is beyond history and time. Mary is said to be sitting at the feet of the Lord and it means much more than a sitting in its historical sense. The same is true of Lk 10:1-2, where we read about the mission of the 70 sent by Jesus which is more than a historical mission. Luke understands that Jesus in his glorified state as Lord continues to send out disciples to preach the kingdom of God.

Jesus, provided they are ready to sit at the feet of the Lord, listen to the word of God and live according to the demands of that word in their everyday life.

Mary as the Mother of All Disciples in Johannine Theology

As we have observed in the beginning, the meaning and significance of Mary in the gospel tradition has undergone major changes during the first century. We are not in a position to establish any connection between the various traditions regarding their awareness about Mary. We can only say that it was an awareness that was growing from one generation to another. In this the tradition behind Luke plays a very important role, and what we have analyzed above points to the profound theological convictions Luke had about Mary as the ideal and perfect disciple. It is in the same line of thinking that we can now speak about the fourth Gospel where also we find Mary in her excellence not so much as a model disciple *as the mother of all disciples*. Hence the two Mariological teachings of Luke and John provide us with the best theological orientations for a relevant and meaningful Mariology in all Christian traditions, then as well as now. It is a matter of great satisfaction that the official teaching of the Church in our times remain very faithful to this biblical tradition in spite of the fact that exaggerations resulting from over-enthusiasm are gathering momentum in some quarters resulting in theological confusion among the people of God.

a) *Mary as the Mother of All Disciples in the Cana Story (Jn 2:1-11):* Without going into the complex issues in the story of the presence of Jesus and Mary in the marriage ceremony in Cana, we only look at the role Mary played during the celebration and the theological meaning of that intervention as we see it today. As invited guests, it was not at all expected of Mary or Jesus to attend to any problem that would arise in the family of hosts. But Mary as one who always went out of her way to help others, pleaded with her Son to help them in their dire needs. Her words to the servants to do whatever Jesus told them are filled with a sense of confidence and hope that Jesus would help them. In all these what Mary did was her ability to be a mother, not only of Jesus but also of all. In fact, her motherhood is such that it has transcended to embrace all humans in their various needs. Through this first sign Jesus revealed not only his glory (Jn 2:11) but also the

greatness of Mary as the mother of all disciples who could trust in her and take refuge in her.

b) "*Here is Your Mother*" (Jn 19:27): The conclusion of the story of the crucifixion of Jesus in John is marked by a very solemn scene, when Jesus entrusted the disciple whom he loved to Mary as her son, and Mary, his mother, as the mother of that disciple (Jn 19:27). What happened at the foot of the cross was much more than an isolated event. Rather, it was a symbolic event through which all disciples of Jesus were entrusted to Mary to be her children and Mary is given to all of them as their mother who would protect them always and everywhere. The theology behind this event as narrated by John corresponds to a human and psychological need for all humans to have a mother not only for their biological existence but also for their committed life as religious persons. Whereas in many religions this aspiration is taken care of through the assumption that there is a mother Goddess who would look after the needs of the children, biblical religion is very particular to avoid all aspects of sexuality in the realm of the divine. What the Bible does is to present God in terms of fatherhood and motherhood, a theme clearly developed in the Old Testament. Here in John we see another approach through which the mother of Jesus is entrusted to the disciples as their mother through which a continuity is established between the ministry of Jesus and the ministry of his disciples which is taken care of by Mary, the mother of Jesus. Thereby John has given a final and concluding articulation of the role of Mary in the gospel tradition of the Churches. While some would prefer to stop at the biblical data, others would go further and see all new theological formulations about Mary as the legitimate progress of the one Mariological doctrine. The question is as to what are the criteria of this progress of Mariological reflections.

The Wisdom of Vatican II

When Vatican II was held during the early 60s, among the many theological issues to be handled by the Council there were also several issues of Mariology. With the promulgation of the dogma of the assumption of Mary in 1950, there grew up a great enthusiasm in the devotion to Mary, which was further accentuated through the revelations which were said to have taken place in Lourdes and Fatima. While the Church approved of some genuine places, such as Lourdes and Fatima, many other claims were rejected as having no

theological importance. Together with these devotional developments there arose also theological claims among some theologians that Mary is both Co-redemptrix and Mediatrix of all graces to be received by humans. All other Mariological dogmas dealt with the privileges of Mary from the perspective of her relationship to Jesus. At the same time, Mary remained always at the level of her being a created person with the many privileges given to her.¹¹ But through these new doctrines Mary was being elevated to a role beyond her createdness in so far as she was instrumental in the very work of redemption and the transmission of divine grace. These new developments also had ecumenical repercussions in so far as they would have kept many Protestant Churches away from any ecumenical discussion.¹²

What Vatican II did was to become aware of all these aspects of Mariology and to take a wise and healthy approach to the doctrine of Mary in the Roman Catholic Church. In its masterpiece document *Lumen Gentium* in chapter eight Mary is presented as the type of the believing community. Elizabeth proclaimed Mary at her visitation as *he pisteusasa* (Lk 1:45), "the believer" or "the one who believed", who accepted the word of God in her life, and hence she is "blessed". This is how the Second Vatican Council encourages us to look at Mary, as a model for all Christians and also as the mother of all believers. In so far as she is model and mother, she is also the helper of the whole community. As a woman of faith Mary goes out to help others as she did when she went to the house of Elizabeth. Hence *Lumen Gentium* chapter eight has placed Mary in the correct theological perspective. It is not at all necessary to add new titles and prerogatives to honour her. As Josef Neuner said, "The future of the Church and her mission to our world does not depend on new titles of Mary but on the earnestness of Christian life for which Mary is the constant model, inspiration and support".¹³ All kinds of enthusiasm for new titles for Mary are not a sign of authentic Marian devotion. *Lumen Gentium* has

11 The Mariological dogmas are: Mary - Mother of God, Virginal Conception, Immaculate Conception and Assumption.

12 For a detailed study on the various dogmatic and biblical aspects of Mariology, see Josef Neuner, *Mary - Mother of the Saviour* (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 1995).

13 From a note Fr. Neuner sent to a convention self-entitled *Vox Populi* held in Bangalore in 1999.

already given the correct perspective: "Mary is to be invoked by the Church under the titles of Advocate, Auxiliatrix and Mediatrix. These, however, are to be so understood that they neither take away from nor add anything to the dignity and efficacy of Christ the one Mediator. For no creature could ever be classed with the Incarnate Word and Redeemer. . . The Church does not hesitate to profess this subordinate role of Mary. She experiences it continuously and commends it to the hearts of the faithful, so that encouraged by this maternal help they may more closely adhere to the Mediator and Redeemer" (LG 62).

What Luke has contributed to our understanding of Mary and her role in the ministry of Jesus with its accent on her discipleship is one of the richest contributions we have in the theology of the New Testament. From rather vague premises Luke has succeeded in presenting Mary as an ideal and model disciple, the main emphasis of it being her ability and preparedness to accept the word of God into her life and lead a life in accordance with it. The best way of venerating Mary and accepting her unique role in the redemptive work of Christ is to follow her example of being a perfect disciple. All other efforts to give her new titles and honours will not have any lasting value. The spirit in which Vatican II has handled the question of Mariology is something the official Church has always to adhere to. This is perfectly in tune with what Luke the evangelist has formulated in his Gospel and the task of every Christian is to imbibe the spirit and spirituality of this unique contribution of the theology of Luke.