

**Am I My Body?
A Critical Analysis of Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel's
Theological Anthropology.**

By

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DECLARATION

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ABSTRACT

This study's goal of constructing a meaningful theological language that can speak to the experiences of people, especially women, who face reproductive health issues. The point of departure for this study is to situate the research within the broader field of Theological Anthropology with a specific focus on Body Theology. This departure point asks the question of how 'body' was portrayed in classic Theological Anthropology as well as in the work of more contemporary anthropological scholars. Necessary for this departure is also the interrelation between Theological Anthropology and Gender and very importantly how Theological Anthropology relates to Body Theology. Body Theology places the 'body' central and emphasises the importance of embodiment over disembodiment.

This study moreover offers an in-depth discussion on the theological work of Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, how her work fits into the field of Theological Anthropology and how she portrays the body in the anthropological tension of 'having' and 'being' a body. For Moltmann-Wendel the body plays a crucial role in the life and ministry of Jesus. She therefore argues for a Theology of Embodiment in her book, *'I am My Body'*. This book forms an important part of this study. A critical analysis of *'I am My Body'* will be integral in asking the question if the work of Moltmann-Wendel can contribute to life-giving, affirming and liberative theological language that can be utilised in discussions surrounding reproductive health.

OPSOMMING

Hierdie studie het die doel om betekenisvolle teologiese taal na te vors wat op 'n sinvolle manier kan bydra tot mense, en veral vroue se ervarings wanneer dit kom by dilemmas van voortplantingsgesondheid. Die plek waar hierdie studie begin is deur die navorsing te plaas binne die groter konteks van Teologiese Antropologie met 'n spesifieke fokus op Liggaamsteologie. Hierdie beginpunt vra ook egter die vraag oor hoe 'liggaam' in die klassieke Teologiese Antropologie weergegee was asook in huidige meer kontemporêre antropologiese teologiese werk. Wat egter nodig is vir hierdie gedeelte van die studie is hoe Teologiese Antropologie en gender met mekaar verband hou asook hoe Teologiese Antropologie in verhouding is met Liggaamsteologie. Liggaamsteologie beklemtoon die rol van die 'liggaam' asook hoe noodsaaklikheid dit is om liggaamlikheid te kies oor die losmaking van ons liggame wanneer teologie "gedoen" word.

Hierdie studie bied ook 'n diepte bespreking van die teologiese werk van Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel aan, hoe haar werk in die veld van Teologiese Antropologie inpas en hoe sy 'liggaam' en 'liggaamlikheid' uitbeeld in die antropologiese spanning; is ons, ons liggame of het ons, ons liggame? Die liggaam speel 'n baie belangrike rol in die lewe en bediening van Jesus volgens Moltmann-Wendel en dit is daarom dat sy vir teologie van Liggaamlikheid vra in haar boek, *'I am My Body'*. Hierdie boek vorm 'n belangrike deel van hierdie navorsingstudie. 'n Kritiese analise van die boek se doel is om te vas te stel of Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel se teologiese werk 'n bydrae maak in die gee van lewegewende en bevrydende teologiese taal wat gebruik kan word in die besprekings rondom voortplantingsgesondheid

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Introduction	1
1.1 Background and Motivation	1
1.1.1 Reproductive Health	3
1.1.2 Theological Anthropology and Bioethics	5
1.1.3 Theological Anthropology and Body Theology	6
1.2 Research problem	9
1.3 Research focus	12
1.4 Research question	13
1.4.1 Secondary Research Questions	13
1.5 Research Objectives	13
1.6 Methodology	14
1.7 Chapter Outline and Argument Development	15
1.8 Conclusion	18
2. Introduction into Theological Anthropology with specific focus on Body Theology	19
2.1 Introduction	19
2.2 Theological Anthropology: Early scholars	23
2.3 Three themes in Theological Anthropology	30
2.3.1 <i>Imago Dei</i>	31
2.3.2 Sin	34
2.3.3 Free will and Freedom	38
2.4 Gender and Theological Anthropology	39
2.5 Theological Anthropology and Body Theology	44
2.6 Conclusion	47
3. Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel's theological work	49
3.1 Introduction	49
3.2 Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel: A short biography	49
3.3 Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel: Theological Themes	52

3.3.1	Political, Social and Liberation Theology	52
3.3.2	Feminist Theology of Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel	56
	a) A Feminist Theology of the cross	60
	b) Gender-critical Biblical interpretation	68
	c) Friendship	71
3.3.3	Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel and the Body	74
3.3.4	Theological language and imagination of Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel	82
3.4	Conclusion	86
4.	“I am my Body”: A critical analysis	87
4.1	Introduction	87
4.2	“I am my body”: A Theology of Embodiment	87
4.2.1	Thesis	88
4.2.2	Outline	89
4.2.3	Main Ideas	92
	a) Disembodiment in the church	92
	b) Jesus and the body	99
	c) Having a body or being a body	106
	d) A Theology of Embodiment	109
4.2.4	Critique	113
4.2.5	Conclusion	115
5.	Conclusion of the study	118
5.1	Introduction	118
5.2	Review of the Research Problem	118
5.3	Review of Research Question	118
5.3.1	Primary Research Question	119
5.3.2	Secondary Research Questions	120
	a) What is ‘body’ and ‘embodiment’ within the broader context of Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel’s Theological Anthropology?	121
	b) How does ‘body language’ function within Theological Anthropology and the tension of the	122

two-fold claim, “I have a body” and “I am a body”?	
c) How do these questions shape theological language for the use in discussion on reproductive health?	124
5.4 Review Of Research Methodology and Research Goals	125
5.5 A review of the contribution and relevance of this study	127
5.6 Proposed Areas For Further Research	128
5.7 Conclusion	131
Bibliography	134

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Motivation

As a white, female Dutch Reformed minister, in Johannesburg South Africa, I ask myself the following questions with regard to reproductive health and the dilemmas many face today. Is the church a safe space to talk about reproductive dilemmas? Do couples, facing fertility challenges, have the courage to talk to ministers or church leaders about these challenges? If they do, do ministers and leaders feel equipped enough to deal with the modern day reproductive dilemmas people face today? Can we say that Christian Theology has kept up with the changes regarding reproductive health? Has the Christian church generated a voice, guidance or theology that can adequately guide people of Christian faith when they face various reproductive dilemmas? Do we have adequate theology and/or theory that can speak to the experiences of women and men when it comes to reproductive health? Does the Christian community have an adequate theological language that can speak to the lived experiences, lives and questions of people, and especially of women?

It concerns me that I have to answer “no” to most of these questions. These questions and their subsequent answers, or lack thereof, with the lived experiences of numerous congregants, friends and myself are why I became interested in the topic of Body Theology and the overall field of Theological Anthropology and its contribution to the conversation on reproductive health. I believe this proposed topic will contribute to a way forward where questions as mentioned above, can be answered in a more positive, confident and liberating way.

Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel can possibly make a valuable contribution to the development of theology and theological language that speaks meaningfully to the experiences of people mentioned above. Her book *‘I am My Body’: A*

Theology of Embodiment (1995:xii) shows how central the body of God (of Jesus) and the human body (the woman's body) once were in Christianity. With how this can motivate us, with past and present disembodiment, to ask new questions about our bodies. She introduces her investigation with the story of the Gospel of Mark chapter 5:24-34, the woman who suffered from blood flow. After Jesus heals her, her blood remains in her and her strength no longer flows out. Something that she had previously been shedding now belongs to her for the first time in her life. After all this time, she is somebody, a body not suffering anymore and always giving of something of itself (Moltmann-Wendel 1995:x). Moltmann-Wendel (1995:x) writes that this experience is not only about the salvation of her soul, but it is also located solely in her body and it is about bodily well-being. Her liberation took place in her body (Moltmann-Wendel 1995: xi). This will be explored in further chapters.

Moltmann-Wendel (1995: xii) writes that the culture of her time, with the help of Christian Theology repressed the body and excluded and devalued everything that is of the flesh, bodily and material. Our experience is that we have a body, but as Moltmann-Wendel argues that, we are bodies as well. In her book, she aims to investigate the body, its experiences, traditions and its religious and social significance, without bringing sexuality to the centre. This she does by using feminist practice, theory and theology. She works towards a Theology of Embodiment, but especially from a feminist perspective.

This research will aim to contribute to relevant and helpful conversations about reproductive health by using Theological Anthropology with a focus on Body Theology. It will stay in the boundaries of Systematic Theology while in conversation with Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel. The aim is to analyse the key text, Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel's '*I am my Body*', but also the broader context of her Theological Anthropology. Further to learn from this, to translate her language and insights into tools that may be helpful in the conversation on reproductive health and issues that surrounds the topic.

This research is also interested in the language of bodies and bodiliness, this is a deeply theological and ethical question. How do we talk about bodies, bodiliness and body matters in a life-giving way?

For the purpose of this proposal, it is necessary to briefly clarify what is understood with reproductive health.

1.2.1 Reproductive Health

The broader field of study of reproductive health forms a part of Sexual, Reproductive health and Rights (also known as SRHR). Due to limited time and scope, this research will only focus on the reproductive health of this encompassing concept, although it is necessary to understand that reproductive health includes reproductive rights as well as sexual rights¹ and health and vice versa. The following definitions of the concepts of reproductive rights and health are included to present a background to the reader of this thesis.

The definition of reproductive health can be described in the following way:

Good sexual and reproductive health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being in all matters relating to the reproductive system. It implies that people are able to have a satisfying and safe sex life, the capability to reproduce, and the freedom to decide if, when, and how often to do so. To maintain one's sexual and reproductive health, people need access to accurate information and the safe, effective, affordable and acceptable contraception method of their choice... Every individual has the right to make their own choices about their sexual and reproductive health (United Nation Population Fund 2017).

Also:

¹ If interested in more information on Reproductive and Sexual rights visit the following website for further reading on this subject :
https://www.ippf.org/sites/default/files/ippf_charter_on_sexual_and_reproductive_rights_guidelines.pdf

A state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity, in all matters relating to the reproductive system and to its functions and processes. Reproductive health therefore implies that people are able to have a satisfying and safe sex life and that they have the capability to reproduce and the freedom to decide if, when and how often to do so. Implicit in this last condition are the rights of men and women to be informed and to have access to safe, effective, affordable and acceptable methods of family planning of their choice, as well as other methods of their choice for regulation of fertility which are not against the law, and the right of access to appropriate healthcare services that will enable women to go safely through pregnancy and childbirth and provide couples with the best chance of having a healthy infant (Inspire 2019).

Reproductive Rights can be defined by describing it as human rights that are recognised in national laws and international human rights documents. These rights are based on the “basic right of all couples and individuals to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing and timing of their children and to have the information and means to do so, and the right to attain the highest standard of sexual and reproductive health”. It also includes the right to make these decisions free from “discrimination, coercion and violence” (Inspire 2019). Ramikisoon et al. (2010:34) describes it the following way:

Reproductive rights are the rights of individuals to decide whether to reproduce and have reproductive health. This may include an individual's right to plan a family, terminate a pregnancy, use contraceptives, learn about sex education in public schools, and gain access to reproductive health services.

On the subject of reproductive health Regina Kulier and Aldo Campana (2004)² write that reproductive health includes a wide area of topics which are “sexual- and gender-related, social and ethical issues” and are reviewed and researched more than before. Kulier and Campana (2004) show that there are numerous papers that point out the

² This reference was sourced electronically and did not provide any page numbers.

inequality of access to services that provide reproductive health and that this contributes to maternal morbidity and mortality. This asks for “more research into inequities in the access and utilization of reproductive health services and information” (Kulier & Campana 2004).

As this research will not be able to discuss reproductive health in a separate chapter the topic of reproductive health will be engaged throughout chapters 3 and 4. This will be in relation to how the work of Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel can contribute to reproductive health discussions and issues faced by men and women, especially women, in the current context.

1.2.2 Theological Anthropology and Christian Bioethics

Although the main field of research for this study will be Theological Anthropology with a further focus on Body Theology, this research can possibly contribute to ethical discussions, where, for example, it has to do with topics pertaining to bodies or embodiment. The research asks how the perspectives and language from Moltmann-Wendel’s Theological Anthropology can possibly contribute to the discussions on reproductive issues or dilemmas. The question of theological embodiment is a question that cannot leave out ethical thinking or theory in general with regard to reproductive health. So although this research will not focus on bioethical standpoints, ethical theory or debates, this research can possibly form an important part of the ethics and conversations when it comes to reproductive health, especially in Christian communities.

I want to briefly show where this research relates to the field of ethics. I refer to recent literature pertaining specifically to reproductive health as part of the discussions on Bioethics³. Magdalena De Lange (2012:1) explain in her article what the problem is that is facing Christian Bioethics. De Lange (2012:1) says that new and sometimes revolutionary and controversial developments in the

³ This thesis will not engage with Bioethics as a separate topic or with how Bioethics relates further to Theological Anthropology, Body Theology or Feminist Theology but if the topic is of interest consult the work of Farley, M. (1985) who writes about the interrelations between Bioethics and Feminist Theology.

biomedical sciences, reproductive technologies, medical genetics and biotechnology in the Life Sciences have occurred rapidly in recent times. This poses serious ethical problems to the public, creating situations where technology outpaces morality. The impact of bioethical reproductive health issues such as abortion, in vitro fertilisation, surrogate motherhood, reproductive techniques, modern contraceptives, prenatal testing and general sexual health has been that these are no longer only perceived to be 'somewhere-out-there', but have become part of the life and conversation of everyday society (De Lange 2012:1).

There are unresolved conflicts and can be seen in the debates surrounding abortion⁴, contraception⁵ and contraception education (Callahan 1998:858). I position this study in Theological Anthropology as theological language and theological debate on issues pertaining to reproductive health. This can then be used as platforms for ethical reflection. My aim is not to compare different ethical perspectives with each other. Rather asking whether Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel's Theological Anthropology, her insights on bodiliness, approach on the topic and her specific use of language, contributes to the field of theological embodiment. Subsequently also asking whether this can contribute to the discussions on reproductive health.

1.2.3 Theological Anthropology and Body Theology

This thesis will discuss the broader field of Theological Anthropology and how it correlates with Body Theology, this will enable the research to place the work of Moltmann-Wendel into this larger framework. To focus more on the field of Body Theology the work of James Nelson may also contribute to the conversation when he states that in the bigger part of the Christian era we have mistrusted, feared and discounted our bodies (Nelson 1992:9). Gregg Allison (2009:4)

⁴ Schenker (2000:86) presents various religions' and denominations' perspectives on abortion. This short explanation outlines the religious debate on abortion and the various views in this regard.

⁵ Schenker (2000:82-83) discusses various religions' and denominations' perspectives on the use of contraception and birth control. This short explanation can briefly outline the religious debate on contraceptive use and the various views in this regard.

makes an argument with regard to the current day church, writing from a Western Evangelical background, by arguing the following:

It is my contention that evangelicals at best express an ambivalence toward the human body, and at worst manifest a disregard or contempt for it. Many people, often due to tragic experiences with the body (e.g., physical/sexual abuse), abhor their body, and many Christians, due to either poor or non-existent teaching on human embodiment, consider their body to be, at best, a hindrance to spiritual maturity and, at worst, inherently evil or the ultimate source of sin.

Nelson (1992:9) also states that our bodies express a hunger for wholeness, yearning for completion and a craving for certainty. Spirituality is a matter of the total self — the body and its desires included (Meiring 2014:171). African women theologians such as Mercy Oduyoye (1988, 2001) will also be part of the conversation as a female theologian also writing in the field of Theological Anthropology and embodiment.

The questions asked in this research are for example, how do these statements by Nelson on wholeness relate to the reproductive health dilemmas Christian believers face today, and how can we answer some of these questions looking through the lens of Theological Anthropology and Body Theology? Literature and theologians such as mentioned above can assist in expanding the insights and arguments of Moltmann-Wendel, especially the two-fold claim, widely known and debated in modern and contemporary Theological Anthropology. This statement can be described the following way: 'do we have bodies or are we bodies'.

According to the Evangelical Church in Germany, Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel was one of the first feminist theologians in Germany, and she had a significant impact on the language used in contextual theology (EKD 2016). Due to limited scope and time, only the theological work done after Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel's "conversion" to feminist theology will be used and discussed in this research. Moltmann-Wendel and her theological work was changed by the feminist movement in the 1970's as well as other movements fighting oppression

that originated in the United States. With this being said, the research on her Theological Anthropology needs to include the work of other feminist theologians, especially those writing on the broader topics of embodiment and Body Theology. In the book by Serene Jones, *Trauma and Grace*, she especially works on the trauma of reproductive loss and the theology of the Trinity and crucifixion (Jones 2009:146). She asks similar questions as mentioned in the introduction: how can theory and theology help? How might feminist theology speak to traumatic experiences such as reproductive loss? (Jones 2009:128). While Jones's focus is on unwanted reproductive loss, specifically infertility, miscarriage and stillbirth, and not reproductive health in general. Her contribution can be valid and of great importance. She proposes a theology of the Trinity and the cross that can speak to, for example, the loss of reproduction.

Lisa Isherwood and Elizabeth Stuart's focus especially on women's bodies. They refer to women's exclusion from the holy Trinity of man, God and the church, not measuring up to the man who is the norm of creation and the liberation of bodies from the patriarchal hold of the past. They state that they want to reunite the body, mind and emotions and hope to heal the patriarchal thinking in theology (Meiring 2014:191). As the lens of Body Theology will be important to this study, the lens of feminist liberation theology may also contribute to the conversation. This is important especially because it emphasises the place of experience in theology, not of ruling males but of the individual believer (Meiring 2014:192).

Denise Ackerman also emphasises this by saying that a feminist theology of praxis emphasises the embodied nature of our humanity (Ackerman 2006:238). Ackerman (2006:238) also states that our bodies are more than skin, bone and flesh. Our bodies include the totality of our human experience: our thoughts, our emotions, needs, memories, imagination, dreams and experiences of pain, pleasure, power, beliefs and hopes. Ackerman (2006:239) calls for the church to embrace an embodied Theological Anthropology. Feminism offers a great deal to this discussion because it seeks to liberate women and men from all forms of oppression, this is the essence of social justice and human liberation leading to the authentic advancement of all humankind (Farrel 2005:42). This includes reproductive justice, especially for women. Isherwood (2004:40) writes

that feminist theologians have begun to place the bodies of women at the centre within our religious and theological reflections⁶.

I am aware of the possible concern that Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel is a German (Western) feminist theologian, and that this research is being carried out in a South African and African context. The concern may include that this research will lack African feminist theological voices, and how Moltmann-Wendel's argument can be relevant to, help or contribute to South African feminist theology. With this being said, I am convinced that theological thinking on embodiment should include the work of Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel because of her insights into embodiment and the way she approaches topics of the body.

Although Moltmann-Wendel may not have been African or from an African context, she still was a female theologian, who played an important role in developing language that was used in the feminist theology in her context (EKD 2016). I will aim to include African Feminist Theologians in the literature review, to honour the work that has already been done on South African and African soil. Some perspectives of Denise Ackerman, for example, have already been included above. The aim will not be to replace perspectives from African Feminist Theologians with that of Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel but to enrich and deepen an old debate on embodiment with a critical analysis on the work of Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel.

1.3 Research Problem

The main problem inspiring this study is the lack of literature that addresses the current reproductive health issues theologically. Alongside my own experiences in ministry there is perceived lack of research in theology and more specifically Christian Theology focusing attention on reproductive health (De Lange 2012:1,

⁶ For further reading and a better understanding on the interrelations and differences between feminism, feminist theory and theology see Jones, S. 2000. *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology*. Fortress Press, Minneapolis.

Callahan 1998:858)⁷. Literature engaging various topics on reproductive health from a theological perspective⁸, is available. There is however still a shortage on research.

De Lange's (2012:5) empirical research clearly shows how more than half of ministers in the Reformed Churches of South Africa (that formed part of the study) are never confronted with issues surrounding reproductive technologies and pregnancy. These issues according to De Lange (2012:5) include abortion (both unwanted pregnancies or for medical reasons), *In Vitro* fertilisation, contraceptive issues, genetic testing, donor use, gender and surrogacy to name only a few. Laura M. Gaydos, Alexandria Smith, Carol J. R. Hogue and John Blevins (2010:475) give another perspective on the relationship between religion and reproductive health. When issues with health and concerns arise, may people turn to their religious communities for answers. These issues may include reproductive health issues such as HIV/AIDS, unintended pregnancy, domestic violence, genetics and genomics (Gaydos, Smith, Hogue & Blevins 2010:475). These issues however pose challenges for religious and church leaders and institutions who want to assist with these problems but have no "tools" to do so or "find conflicting teachings in the religion they know and the health promotion they may seek" (Gaydos, Smith, Hogue & Blevins 2010:475).

De Lange's (2012:6) research also discovered that more than 70 percent of the ministers that formed part of this study agree that the Reformed Church in South Africa contributes to guidance about bioethical issues, in this case such as

⁷ Since writing this research problem a special forthcoming issue has been collaborated on: with the title *Reconceiving Reproductive Health: Theological and Ethical Christian Reflections*. 2019. Forthcoming. M. Kotzé, N. Marais & N. Müller van Velden (eds.) AOSIS. Cape Town. This publication is conceived out of the notion that Reproductive Health is a theological concern, that more in-depth theological discussion on the theme is necessary and that lifegiving theological language and imaginative theological alternatives needs to be developed.

⁸ Baden, J.S & C.R Moss. 2015. *Reconceiving Infertility: Biblical perspectives on Procreation and Childlessness*. Princeton University Press. Princeton. USA; Peters, R.T. 2018. *Trust Women: A Progressive Christian Argument for Reproductive Justice*. Beacon Press. Boston. USA; Isherwood, L. & von der Host, D. 2018. *Contemporary Theological Approaches to Sexuality*. New York. USA. Vuola, E. 2002. *Limits of Liberation: Feminist Theology and the Ethics of Poverty and Reproduction*. Sheffield Academic Press. London. UK; Phiri, I.A & Nadar, S. 2012. *African Women, Religion and Health*. Wipf & Stock. Oregon. USA.

reproductive health. J.G Schenker (2000:77) also discusses the relationship between religion⁹ and reproductive health:

Religion, being concerned with affairs that are regarded as extraordinary and as having unique importance in life, is an intrinsic aspect of the culture of all societies, religious groups, however, still exert influence on the civil authorities in issues of reproduction such as contraception, procreation, abortion, and infertility therapy. They have been active in pressing their bioethical positions on the public arena in pluralistic societies. Developments in science and technology in reproduction raise new religious questions that do not always have clear answers. The role of theology in bioethics is foremost to clarify for the different religious communities the perceived attitudes toward these developments.

The research of De Lange (2012:7) further found that more than 35 percent of these ministers agree only in part that Christian Theology alone provides the fundamental framework in which ethical discussions, in this case regarding reproductive health, can be made. For Laura M. Gaydos, Alexandria Smith, Carol J. R. Hogue and John Blevins (2010:475) religion has a dual impact on reproductive health and argues that:

...literature suggests that an individual's religious affiliation may influence timing of marriage, beliefs about sex outside of marriage, childbearing outside of marriage, and desired family size. Religious teachings and spirituality may also influence a person's or couple's decision-making about contraceptives, choices about when and how to have a family, and a myriad of other health decisions faced on a daily. Second, at the community level, faith institutions have the potential to influence community norms—whether from the pulpit, or in spoken values shared through adult education classes, or unspoken values shared among a religious community.

⁹ Schenker, J.G. (2000) discusses various religions and denominations in this article not only Christianity and Protestantism. In this article Schenker discusses religions such as Judaism, Christianity (Roman Catholic Church, Eastern Orthodox Church, Protestantism, Anglian Church) and Islam.

Christian Theology lacks adequate theological theory and language that can speak meaningfully to people, especially women, who are faced with issues surrounding reproductive health. It can easily be assumed when speaking about reproductive health that the issues faced are located in a person's, especially a woman's body. For this to be addressed adequately theological work that places the body, its experiences and embodiment central is needed in the discussion (Nelson 1992:9). This is why this thesis is situated within the field of Theological Anthropology with a focus on Body Theology. Theological Anthropology also famously asks the question; do we have bodies or are we bodies? Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel whose work can be situated in Theological Anthropology distinctly engages with this tension in her theological work on the body, especially when the body is met with limitations (Moltmann-Wendel 1995:1). In the case of this research problem limitations pertaining to reproductive health issues can be engaged theologically when the body is taken seriously. Consequently the work of Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel is considered an important conversation partner to this research problem and her work will be discussed and analysed in detail. For Moltmann-Wendel (1995:viii) the body is central to the message of Jesus therefore when doing theology, theologians should contest any resemblance to disembodiment. Other theologians that take the body and embodiment seriously will also be included to address this research problem.

My hope is that the lack of adequate theological research with regard to issues pertaining to reproductive health will become clearer. Also that it will highlight the awareness of the need for Christian Theology that engages with topics and issues surrounding reproductive health. I hope to address this problem by using the body central theological work of Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, the literature study inspiring this research as well as my own context, experiences and framework.

1.4 Research Focus

I want to propose that Body Theology within the context of Theological Anthropology can contribute a great deal to the discussions on reproductive

health, and more specifically that the Theological Anthropology of Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel may have a contribution to make. The focus of this study is a critical analysis of *“I am My Body”: A Theology of Embodiment* by Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, the broader context of her Theological Anthropology and theological work. It will also aim to establish the contribution to conversation guidelines surrounding reproductive health.

1.5 Research Question

How is ‘body’ portrayed within the broader context of Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel’s Theological Anthropology and theological work?

1.5.1 Secondary Research Questions:

- What is ‘body’ and ‘embodiment’ within the broader context Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel’s Theological Anthropology?
- How does ‘body language’ function within Theological Anthropology and the tension of the two-fold claim, “I have a body” and “I am a body”?
- How do these questions shape theological language for the use in discussions on reproductive health?

1.6 Research Objectives

- Introducing, analysing and presenting the Theological Anthropology of Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel in *“I am my body”: A Theology of Embodiment* and her broader Theological Anthropological and Theological work in general.
- Bringing different voices in Theological Anthropology and Body Theology into conversation with the work of Moltmann-Wendel, to show how it is similar, different and possibly contributes.
- Theologically exploring the two-fold claim of Theological Anthropology “I have a body” and “I am a body” and how language functions in this tension.

- Evaluating the worth and contribution of “*I am My Body*”: *A Theology of Embodiment* and the broader theological work of Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel in the current discussions of reproductive health.

1.7 Methodology

This research is non-empirical and uses theological analysis. Chapter 2 presents a discussion of Theological Anthropology. This is presented to introduce the field in which this research is carried out. Critical analysis of the broader theological work of Moltmann-Wendel is the approach taken to address the research problem. In this way, her theological and theological anthropological work is evaluated, tested and revised to understand it better. This approach also shows how her broader work is connected to the field of Theological Anthropology and Body Theology.

The approach to her work is far more than just a summary. It is descriptive, analytical and constructive, and a combination of these three aspects. This is a hermeneutical way of approaching the research which means her work will be interpreted for a specific field (Theological Anthropology) and a specific theme (reproductive health). The sections and different themes of the book, “*I am My Body*”: *A Theology of Embodiment* by Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel is specifically analysed and studied, achieved by critical reading as well as critical writing.

By reading the text in this way it identifies the thesis and purpose of the author’s work as well as the main ideas. If there is something unfamiliar, external and alternative resources are consulted. Secondary sources, for example book reviews, are also discussed. This thesis attempts to evaluate if the theological language used in the broader work of Moltmann-Wendel, especially regarding bodies, embodiment and bodiliness, presents theological language that can be used in the conversations on reproductive health in our faith communities.

This methodology of analysis is used to establish if the Theological Anthropology of Moltmann-Wendel presents a language for the flourishing of women and their bodies. This methodology is used to illustrate what the theological potential

behind the language and rhetoric of Moltmann-Wendel is. The study attempts to establish if the work of Moltmann-Wendel in “*I am My Body*”, as a key text, contributes to the theological language for Theological Anthropology and theological discussion on issues pertaining to reproductive health.

The field of study for this research is Theological Anthropology, but the methodology and theological framework will also be determined by a feminist framework. This thesis also analysis how the work of Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel is of current interest and how it fits into the broader framework of Theological Anthropology and Body Theology. For this to be executed, various scholars are included for their perspectives on Theological Anthropology and Body Theology. This will only be a brief overview of the field of Theological Anthropology since this is only what time and scope allows. Past as well as recent scholars on this field will be included to present background for the reader. It will assist in placing the work and contributions of Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel into this field.

1.8 Chapter Outline and Argument Development

Chapter 1: Introduction and research methodology

This chapter presents the reader with an introduction, overview and background to the research. It is important to give a perspective of how this thesis is attempting to approach the research problem presented, what the objectives are as well as why this thesis is necessary.

Chapter 2: Introduction to Theological Anthropology with a specific focus on Body Theology.

In this chapter, a brief overview of Theological Anthropology is discussed because it offers a necessary starting point for the research. This field of research is too vast and challenging to adequately discuss within the scope of this thesis. Therefore I have selected only three themes to be discussed, *Imago*

Dei, Sin and Freedom to discuss. The first reason for this is that through the preliminary literature study these three themes were repetitively discussed in the Theological Anthropology of various scholars. Secondly these themes were also periodically present in the theological work of Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel. A section of this chapter is also devoted to discussing the interplay between Theological Anthropology and Gender. The chapter also focuses on the field of Body Theology and the interrelations with Theological Anthropology. This research includes classic past contributions to the field of Theological Anthropology and also more current voices in this field. It is evident in this chapter that past scholars in this field influenced the understanding of a person as dualistic which means that the body is seen as separate and more inferior to the mind and soul. This impacted embodiment and bodiliness in a negative way throughout history. Moltmann-Wendel especially emphasises that we should return to our bodies and a theology that takes embodiment more seriously. In her work she actively challenges the dualism separating body and soul. The field of Body Theology, also discussed in this chapter, similarly challenges this notion of the dualistic nature of a person. An argument the field of Body Theology and Feminist Theology share is that Christian Theology should be executed from the perspective of the body taking the experiences of the body seriously. This chapter enables the reader to better place the work of Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel and that of other theologians as discussed, in the broader context of this field.

Chapter 3: An overview of Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel's theological work.

This chapter discusses the theological work of Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel extensively. A brief autobiographical overview of her life and work serves as an introduction to this chapter. This will situate Moltmann-Wendel as a European female theologian in the early 90's. Most of the theological work that is included in this chapter, was written after she was exposed to the feminist movement and feminist theology. Various themes of her theological work were identified through an extensive literature study of her post feminism conversion work. These themes include subsections discussing political, social and liberation theology.

Her main perspective is on feminist theology and she develops a feminist theology of the cross, discusses gender-critical Biblical interpretations and develops a theology of friendship. Her theological work also includes the important theme of embodiment especially the subject on how Jesus approaches the body and His own humanity. This chapter also discusses her contribution to liberative theological language and the reimagining of certain Biblical texts. It is necessary to discuss these themes as it offers a thorough perspective on Moltmann-Wendel's theological work and how she approached and engaged these various themes as a part of the broader field of Theological Anthropology. As the reader will realise, Moltmann-Wendel places the body central in her theological work and argues that Jesus did the same with His ministry on earth. He placed value on the whole body and bodily well-being not only the salvation of the soul. This chapter will also include the implications of Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel's theological work for the discussion surrounding reproductive health. Arguing that the way in which Moltmann-Wendel engages with the body, body language and a Theology of Embodiment may possibly contribute to and shape the language we use in the current discussions surrounding the field and dilemmas of reproductive health.

Chapter 4: Critical analyses of '*I am My Body*': *A Theology of Embodiment* by Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel.

In this chapter, the focus is more on one specific piece of work done by Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel. The book, *I am my Body*, and the thesis along with the chapter outline is clearly discussed. The content and developing argument is thoroughly examined, presenting the main ideas and themes included in this book. This includes Moltmann-Wendel's argument that Christian Theology (in her context, Reformed Protestant Theology) should reject disembodiment, and engage to explore Jesus's approach towards the body. She also discusses a Theological Anthropological notion of "having and being a body". This book ends by briefly encouraging and arguing for a Theology of Embodiment. The importance of this chapter lies in the fact that it clearly marks Moltmann-Wendel's argument. As people of Christian faith we should move away from the

disconnect we have with our bodies and strive towards a Theology of Embodiment because we are our bodies, we do not only have them. A critique of this specific book and areas which could have been developed further is explored. This chapter will also include the implications of Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel's theological work for the discussion surrounding reproductive health. Arguing that the way in which Moltmann-Wendel engages with the body, body language and a Theology of Embodiment in her book, "*I am my Body*" may possibly contribute to the current discussions surrounding the of reproductive health.

Chapter 5: Findings, suggestions and conclusion.

Chapter 5 is the concluding chapter of this research. This chapter is necessary to reflect on the work that has been carried out in this research. To review what the research has found and to evaluate if it answered the questions as proposed in this chapter. This chapter reviews the research problem and research questions, both primary and secondary, and discusses research suggestions for the way forward. In particular, surrounding the discussion on reproductive health. The research methodology and goals are also discussed. This chapter reviews and discusses the relevance and contribution of this study, final ideas on how this research can contribute to the discussions surrounding reproductive health and this chapter concludes by proposing further areas of research. This chapter will include a brief mention of research areas I would have liked to include, were time not limited.

1.9 Conclusion

In the next chapter, the field of Theological Anthropology is discussed. A brief overview of how the field developed over time and what main ideas and arguments of this field entail are explored. This chapter is important because it offers an introduction and background into the field of Theological Anthropology to better understand this field of research and to better understand how the work of Moltmann-Wendel can be placed as a contributor to this specific field.

CHAPTER 2

INTRODUCTION TO THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY WITH SPECIFIC FOCUS ON BODY THEOLOGY

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the aim will be to present an introduction to Theological Anthropology as a field of study within the broader framework of Systematic Theology (Gonzalez 2007)¹⁰. A brief definition of Theological Anthropology will be given, drawing from recent literature. This research will also give an overview of Theological Anthropology from early Christian thinkers and writers¹¹. It is necessary to present past arguments and how these arguments developed into what is current in this field. Subsections of the study in Theological Anthropology will be discussed with a specific focus on the interrelations between gender and Body Theology to Theological Anthropology.

Anthropological scholars have tried to understand humanity from the past to present day. According to Migliore (2014:143) “we human beings are a mystery to ourselves”. The question of understanding humanity has been pursued from different disciplines and traditions and across various time periods (Cortez 2010:1, Gonzalez 2007). In the introductory chapter of David Kelsey’s Theological Anthropology (2009), he writes that in the literature of anthropological reflection there are three types of questions that scholars aim to answer; what are we, how ought we to be and who am I? Kelsey (2009:1008) gives a specific Christian Theological Anthropology explanation by stating that it is committed to understanding God and how God is, in relation to all things in

¹⁰ This reference was sourced electronically and did not include page numbers.

¹¹ Due to the scope and time limits on this thesis I did not engage all the theologians, especially early Christian writers, listed in this chapter directly rather using secondary sources to present their views. Throughout this chapter, I have made references to where these early Christian writers’ work could be read and studied more thoroughly. Although this study is situated in Theological Anthropology, this background to the field is not the main focus, but rather the theology of Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel. The aim of this chapter is only to present an overview and background to this extensive field of study. I have selected past and present scholars (classic and contemporary) to briefly explain what Theological Anthropology entails with the full knowledge that this is could not be done to the full extend that is possible.

ways coherent with Scriptures' account of what and who Jesus is, and how He is oriented to certain contexts. The World Council of Churches (2005) gives the following explanation of Theological Anthropology:

From the very beginning of the Church, Christians have grappled with the issue of what it means to be human in the light of the gospel. Drawing on the rich resources of Scripture and Tradition, they have developed a distinctive understanding of human beings, their relationships and achievements. These understandings constitute what is called, Theological Anthropology, a theologically informed view of humanity.

Schumacher (2015:375) concurs by explaining that since the dawn of Christian intellectual history, great theological minds have devoted their time and attention to central loci of Christian doctrine, Theological Anthropology. Conradie (2004:563) presents the following questions as questions classic anthropology focused on:

What constitutes the human person? What distinguishes human beings from other animals? The lack of specialisation in the human physique? The ability of humans to develop tools for themselves? Human labour? The capacity of the human brain? Human reason? Self-consciousness? Selfhood? Human freedom and self-determination? Imagination? Culture? Human laughter, that is, the willingness of humans to laugh at themselves? Morality? Language? The human soul? Religion? How should the notion of being the image of God be understood? How should the relationship between body, mind and soul be understood? Are human beings created as mortal beings and can any suggestion of human immortality still be entertained?

In short, according to (Cortez 2010:5), Theological Anthropology can be defined as a theological reflection on the human person. The word "anthropology" originates from the Greek word *anthrōpos*, meaning human. The word, "theological" stresses that this study is different from the study of humanity in socio-scientific discipline and that it is rather a study of religious thoughts of what it means to be God's people (Gonzalez

2007). Gonzalez (2007) similarly states that Theological Anthropology studies the nature of humanity, our relationship with one another and our relationship with our Creator. Within Systematic Theology, the study of what it means to be human and created in this image and likeness of God falls under the heading of Theological Anthropology (Gonzalez 2007). Cortez (2010:2) explains that although we are familiar with being human we are continuously asking what it means to be human.

This anthropological inquiry, of what it means to be human, proves to be difficult to answer as past and present scholars have shown. Questions such as “Who am I?” and “What am I?” are associated and interrelated to the question “What ought I to be in this world?” (Cortez 2010:3). Anthropological Theologians have also been concerned with these question and their subsequent answers. Pannenberg (1985:11) argues similarly that the meaning of humanity and the understanding thereof has progressively played a foundational role in the history of modern theology. According to Cortez (2010:3) from the very beginning, Christian Theology and Christian scholars have been grappling with similar anthropological questions of humanity’s nature. For every generation of Christians, the meaning of our humanity is being reinterpreted by our sociocultural, historical and political contexts (Gonzalez 2007). This has resulted in more than one anthropology shaped by different community understandings of our Creator (Gonzalez 2007). Anthropological questions include body-soul relationship, gender, free will, the purpose of human life and the relationship of human persons to the rest of creation among other things. In the twentieth century, there was a growing interest in Theological Anthropology as a theological doctrine in its own right and it mirrored the curiosity in humanity (Cortez 2010:3). This century also witnessed the rise of scientific disciplines showing an interest in the understanding of the human person. This development asks for the attention of theological thought on the information produced by these scientific disciplines, consequently adding to the growth of Theological Anthropology (Cortez 2010:4).

World War I and II, the holocaust, for example, tested assumptions of human nature and the depths thereof challenging the field of Theological Anthropology. Recent changes such as globalisation, economic justice, equality, ecological issues, gender, sexuality, free will and determinism all invite the constant theological thinking of what it means to human (Cortez 2010:4).

Cortez (2010:5) further unpacks Theological Anthropology the following way. First, it is a theological expression of the most rudimentary belief, that the human person can be fully understood from a theological perspective. Without the understanding of theological realities such as the *imago Dei*, sin, redemption and life after death, the meaning of humanity cannot be fully known. The knowledge of what it means to be human can be defined by the relationship to God (Cortez 2010:5). Gonzalez (2007) shows that although the pressing concern for Theological Anthropology is the relationship between God and humanity as described in Genesis, it is concerned with the new creation found in Christ as well. Therefore, Theological Anthropology must also begin with the understanding of the person and work of Jesus Christ, one who was fully human and fully divine and how he manifested true humanity (Cortez 2010:5). Important to note is that Theological Anthropology, although critically engaged with culture, reality and the broader framework of anthropology, should not adopt the results that are produced by other anthropological disciplines (Cortez 2010:5).

At the same time, Christian Theological Anthropology is not concerned only with Christians but is committed to all humanity, with its diversity of culture, race, gender, sexuality and religions. Christians offer an understanding of the human form which we believe are true for everyone and which upholds the equal value of all humans and celebrates diversity (World Council of Churches 2005:2). Cortez (2010:8) further develops this statement by the World Council of Churches, in his own work, and says that anthropologists have to be aware of how our experiences and preconceptions will influence the data we consider. Predispositions and the context from which theological anthropologists work such as gender, race and class should be taken into account. These issues are objects of inquiry but they are also issues that significantly shape our anthropological conclusions. Cortez (2010:3) explains that we as theological anthropologists face the risk of creating “human nature” in our own image. According to Cortez (2010:3) Theological Anthropology is the field of Christian reflection that wants to better understand humanity and its mysteries.

This section presents an introduction to this particular field of study contributing a brief background to better understand Theological Anthropology. The next section will

discuss the work of early scholars in this field to demonstrate how the arguments within Theological Anthropology have developed through different generations of theological scholars. This following section will provide a short overview of the history of the field.

2.2 Theological Anthropology: Early Scholars

It is necessary that this research includes a section on the early scholars and the development of their theological reflection on anthropology. This will not be extensive but only a brief overview of the Theological Anthropology of these theologians and thinkers. Due to limited time and the scope of this thesis this field cannot be discussed in its entirety. With this being said this thesis deemed it necessary to include this section to better understand how Body Theology correlates with it and how the work of Moltmann-Wendel fits into it. According to Cortez (2010:3), early thinkers such as Irenaeus, Gregory of Nyssa, Augustine, and Maximus were interested in anthropological questions and issues and their significance was for life and theology in the early church. Although it is necessary to note that for these thinkers, anthropology was not the primary focus, they more frequently discussed or addressed these questions as a subsection to other studies (Cortez 2010:3).

The early church scholars placed God in the centre of the conversation, this highly influenced their anthropological view. This view could not be separated from Christian Theology because it was mutually influenced by the Christian Doctrine regarding creation, sin, the relationship between body and soul, grace, sexuality, life and death to name a few key aspects. According to Pannenberg (1985:12) in the Augustinian tradition, the focus was on the individual salvation of a person and the themes of sin and grace posed as the most vital religious question for a human person. As later discussed in this section, this notion found its purest expression in the Lutheran tradition (Pannenberg 1985:12).

The Greek philosopher Aristotle focused on the human search for lasting happiness and thought critically about societies ideas on happiness, what it really is and how to achieve it in a long-lasting way (Lovin 2011:25). The Aristotle school of thought focused on how to have a balanced life that avoided extremes (Lovin 2011:36). Aristotle concentrated his anthropology on his own metaphysical system where nature

is both unified and teleological (Bender 2011:6). This natural system is made up of a universe of natural objects with their own will and nature, and Aristotle used the term “soul” to describe these entities or objects which displays life. This did not only pertain to human life or souls but to all living beings, developing according to Aristotle, different types of “souls” (Bender 2011:6). Aristotle writes that the soul, as the form of the body, is what gives a human substance, the soul then becomes the essence of the body and gives content to what it means to be in this case, human. For Aristotle the soul contains the defining features of what it means to be human, it is the cause of movement and the core of the whole living body (Bender 2011:7). Although Aristotle sees the body and soul unified, it is in rational reflection that the two are separate.

Augustine of Hippo¹², an early Christian writer, was one of the first with a clear anthropological vision. His teachings were very different from the religions and the schools of philosophy of the time that he lived in (Lovin 2011:51). Augustine also contemplated what a good life will mean and what is crucial for the human person, but he argues that it is the understanding of God that can satisfy these requirements (Lovin 2011:53). For Augustine this human search for happiness, as Aristotle wrote, will have to be interpreted in light of the Christian experience (Lovin 2011:98). He did not separate religion from anthropology, for Augustine it was related. This was based on the notion that humanity was created in the image of God, that the world was created out of nothing and that this was a free act of God.

According to Augustine the will of humans are free and will always be restless and will therefore search for meaning and ultimately God (Mathewes 1999:204). Humans could not arrive at the correct understanding of human life, according to Augustine humanity needs the light of Christian belief. Augustine believed in a flawed human nature, without hope, and also that freedom could only be achieved if the knowledge and will of an individual are healed by the grace that only God can give (Mathewes 1999:204). He developed the idea of interiority or the integrated self, which means the search of the heart, the self, life and consciousness of a person (Mathewes 1999:204).

¹² For a more complete study of the theological work of Augustine see *Confessions* by St. Augustine. 2015. Penguin Books Ltd. London. UK.

Augustine for example asked the following questions: What kind of beings are we? What is our basic human nature? This understanding according to Augustine can only be acquired through servanthood, for when we make ourselves the centre point of our own identity, the consequence will be an impoverished view of our human selves, overstated and unreliable.

Later in Augustine's life, he developed a moral objection with the human person. For him, the soul is eternal and will join God, but his objection was towards the body, the flesh and its desires. What perplexed Augustine was the constant human need for more, stating that this will cause "restlessness" or spiritual anxiety and the absence of satisfaction will cause unhappiness and disorder. Lovin (2011:56) agrees with this when writing about the work of Augustine saying that Augustine warned the Christians of his time that their happiness must and can only depend on God alone. Justice is a theological reality and can be achieved by moderation and the control of bodily desires such as the control of greed. In the first part of his *Confessions* Augustine wrote; "You have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you." On this he based his anthropology, humans can only define and understand their nature and also find fulfilment and peace in relationship with and "active gratitude" towards God (Mathewes 1999:211).

In the thinking and work of Thomas Aquinas¹³, he combines the Greek philosophical tradition with Christian Theology to attempt a unified anthropology (Bender 2011:12). The Theological Anthropology of Aquinas remains the foundation of contemporary Roman Catholic¹⁴ understanding of the relationship between men and women today (Gonzalez 2007). Aquinas greatly benefitted from the thought of Augustine (Schumacher 2016:377). In his anthropology, Aquinas uses the term person, applying to members of the Trinity and to individual human beings. By following the Aristotelian model, Aquinas refrains from associating a person with the soul and instead debates

¹³ For more on the theological work of Aquinas see the complete text of *Summa Theologica*, Vol 1. 2005. Christian Classics Inc. Allen, Texas. USA.

¹⁴ Rosemary Radford Ruether (2008) discusses the role of Aquinas, Augustine and the modern day Vatican in the opposition to women's Reproductive Rights. In light of the research problem discussed in this thesis Ruether makes a valuable contribution to the discussion in general. She brings these classic anthropological theologians, and the role they play, in conversation with current debates surrounding reproductive rights of women and sexuality.

that a person is to be a combination of a specific type of soul with a specific type of matter. He further follows Aristotle to identify the soul of a human as a principle of different acts which include nourishment, sensation, movement and understanding. As an intellectual creature, a human exceeds the lower animals only in the virtue of the power of understanding which is a determining characteristic (Bender 2011:13).

According to Bender (2011:14), Aquinas further moves closer to the Augustinian tradition by arguing that the soul has the power of intellect only by participation with God, and this higher power is God and only by His light that the human soul has its intellectual powers. Wells and Quash (2017:145) similarly state that Aquinas argued that humans have a higher rational power like intellect and will, but that they also have lower capacities like sense reasoning and bodily desires. Hauerwas (2011:227) touches on a similar subject when writing on Thomas Aquinas stating that he developed Augustine and Aristotle thoughts on happiness, saying that happiness is when human beings participate in God's life through friendship with him. Aquinas also makes comments on the subject of the *imago Dei*, with relation to anthropology. He argues that the image of God in man is a spiritual image, especially the intellectual soul in a human (Bender 2011:17). This will be discussed more in detail in the next section of this chapter.

Bender (2011:39-40) writes about Luther's anthropology and states that Luther seldom discusses isolated features of the person but emphasises the situations and tendencies of the person as a whole, also never a person in the abstract. According to Luther, the abstract person does not exist, the human person will always be under some kind of power and last, Luther's definition of a human person is relational to God as the Creator. Luther agrees with previous scholars and is in line with tradition in the argument that reason separates humans from animals (Bender 2011:40). Luther also emphasises the significance of the doctrine of creation for his anthropology, humans are dependent, created and sustained by God. The only way to understand the human person is to understand humans in relation to their origin. Bender (2011:41) states the following with regard to Luther's anthropology:

What Luther is denying is that any of man's capacities are properly his in this sense. They are not powers that man has in virtue of his own autonomous

existence. They are gifts of God as contingent as the very being of anything created. This view of creation is the essential backdrop for Luther's understanding of the human person. One can only properly define man when he is viewed as a whole in his relation to God; for only in that relation can the powers of the soul, the elements of the ontological definition of man, be seen in their proper context.

According to Bender (2011:42) when Luther discusses God, Luther considers the highest and basic attribute to be His freedom and self-sufficiency or independence. On the other hand, when discussing humanity, Luther highlights qualities such as radical dependence on and relational to God. This aforementioned relation is according to Luther either one of sinful rebellion or repentant submission, which determines the nature of a human and forms the theological basis of Luther's anthropology (Bender 2011:42). Luther further develops these relations as flesh and Spirit, when a person is disobedient towards God that pertains to the flesh, in repentant submissiveness, it is the Spirit.

John Calvin's¹⁵ anthropology suggested that to have full knowledge of God, the human person must have knowledge of itself and that unless there arises within our knowledge of God a real knowledge of humanity, our knowledge of God is not real (Torrance 1957:13, Conradie 2004:565, Migliore 2014:143). This works both ways. Calvin also argues, according to Torrance (1957:14) that the goal of Christian anthropology can be described by two points: showing the believer to its original creation in the image of God, this to produce gratitude, and also to show the human person its miserable condition to initiate humility. Calvin held a very androcentric view stating that humanity is not here because of the world, but the world because of humanity. It is the crown of creation and all of creation is for the purpose of and comfort for the human person (Torrance 1957:23). Thus the human person cannot in this case then be understood by its relation to the world.

¹⁵ For a more in depth reading on the work of John Calvin see: Calvin, J. 1995. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Translated by Henry Beveridge. Eerdmans. Grand Rapids Michigan. USA.

According to Cortez (2010:3) during the twentieth century, some interest developed in Theological Anthropology as a theological doctrine on its own. This was because of a number of different reasons which will not be discussed in this section. Although to a certain extent, this interest mirrored the growing interest of society as a whole, in the human person. These developments benefitted from the Protestant liberal theologians of the nineteenth century that had an increased theological concern for the human person and grasped that a God centred theology, that does not disregard the human person in the process, is possible (Cortez 2010:4). This however often gave way to the human person being the main and focal point in theological reflection:

During the course of the twentieth century, however, a number of other key theologians—including Barth, Rahner, Tillich, von Balthasar and Pannenberg—argued for a theocentric theology that must still recognize the importance that God has placed on the human person in establishing humanity as the objects of his covenantal relationality and eschatological purposes (Cortez 2010:4).

This meant that Theological Anthropology began taking the human person as an important topic for theological reflection, this because God invites the human person into the theological story and made the understanding of the human an important part of the theological assignment (Cortez 2010:5).

One of the aforementioned 19th-century theologians was Karl Barth¹⁶. The Theological Anthropology of Barth proposes an understanding of ourselves that does not accommodate the culture we live in and neither ignores the importance of science. He sought to balance the soul and the body giving common ground between theology and human sciences when discussing the nature of human beings (Price 2002:8). The constitutive element of Karl Barth's Theological Anthropology presents human "neediness" (Dorman 2018:195). Barth detects that the creation of humanity on the sixth day reveals humans to be the "neediest of all creation" because Barth explains

¹⁶ Barth's theological work can be studied more in detail in: Barth, K 1960. *Church Dogmatics III/2*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark.

that everything else has already been created and functions well. He elaborates notion of “neediness” in his discussion on the willingness of humanity for God, saying that we humans need God as the requirement of knowledge and that this knowledge is challenged and denied by sin (Dorman 2018:195). Springs (2012:447) argues that for Barth humanity cannot be a partner to God and that despite this God forms a covenant with humans and sends a “common factor” and “similarity” that is Christ.

Dorman (2018:195) explains that Barth understood humanity as created with a fundamental need of God, other humans and creation itself. This need results in the search of either fulfilment or ruin. For Barth, human existence is considered by the gift of vulnerability and an openness to God. This vulnerability is essential in Barth’s Theological Anthropology (Dorman 2018:195). John Calvin, according to Torrance (1957:44) also touches on this direction of thought saying that the life and integrity of a human being depends on keeping the order that God assigned; that the human being is completely dependent on God. Price (2002:97) states the same notion in a different way by saying that Barth understood being human is to participate in a shared experience. Therefore the human being cannot be understood if we look at the human being in isolation, humans have to be understood in a covenant relationship with God and fellow humans. According to Springs (2012:458) and Price (2002:18) who argue that Barth strongly cautions that Christology is not anthropology. Moltmann-Wendel (1995:42) argues that Barth’s theological thought can be described as hierarchical, placing man above woman and soul or spirit above the body.

Paul Tillich¹⁷, according to Roesler (2006:63), concentrated a lot of attention on the human subject by placing the human self between opposite ontological elements, “individuation and participation.” He argued that the human being is a multi-dimensional unity and by saying this he indicates that a human person cannot be isolated but can be defined by relationships (Roesler 2006:63). Roesler (2006:63) argues that with these Theological Anthropology arguments Tillich risked extreme

¹⁷ For Tillich’s complete work in Systematic Theology see: Tillich, P 1957. *Systematic Theology. Volumes 1-3*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

individualism. Martin (1966:83) quotes Tillich when stating that a person's experience is that of "being a self, having a world to which he belongs" implying a person's experiences, self-relatedness and self-centredness. This concurs with Roelser.

In Tillich's anthropology, he also concentrated on the estrangement of the human being explaining that the human person is not what the person essentially is and ought to be (Martin 1966:112). Martin also interestingly notes that Tillich's anthropological discussion on sin chooses to use the word estrangement rather than the religious term sin. This is done because it better illustrates a person's alienation from God, other beings and a person's true self.

This next section will focus attention on three themes present in the field of Theological Anthropology, *imago Dei*, Sin and Free will/Freedom. These themes are not the only themes important for Theological Anthropology but due to the scope of this thesis, the field of Theological Anthropology cannot be discussed to its full extent. These three themes propose an introduction to the themes important for Theological Anthropology.

2.3 Three themes in Theological Anthropology

In this section of the introductory chapter on Theological Anthropology, three themes will briefly be discussed in order to develop a better understanding of the field of study¹⁸. These themes are included not only to better understand the field of Theological Anthropology but also to more adequately place the theological anthropology of Moltmann-Wendel. This will be further discussed in the following chapters. According to Pannenberg¹⁹ (1985:20), the two main anthropological themes of anthropological theology is the image of God, or *imago Dei*, and sin. For Migliore

¹⁸ These three themes are themes widely discussed throughout the studied Theological Anthropological literature, but they are in no way the only themes that form a part of this field. I made the choice, due to limited time and scope, to only focus on these three themes to briefly present and overview on the type of themes that are engaged in Theological Anthropology.

¹⁹ For further and more in depth reading of the theological work of Pannenberg see: Pannenberg, W 1994. *Systematic Theology. Volume 2*. Grand Rapids: W B Eerdmans.

(2014:143) the Bible and Christian Theology describes the mystery and danger of human beings through three affirmations namely, that we are created in the image of God, we are sinners and enabled by God's grace to begin a new life in faith. These concepts of the image of God and sin shows the anthropological expression of this fundamental opposition in our religious lives (Pannenberg 1985:21). What is further discussed within Theological Anthropology is also the relation between body and soul as well as other questions relating to the above-mentioned categories.

2.3.1 *Imago Dei*

Nadia Marais (2013:1) explains that the doctrine of the *imago Dei* has "long functioned as a core theological affirmation in theological anthropology". Schumacher (2016:383) writes that the first reference to the doctrine of *imago Dei* was in the writings of Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, and that it was not a discussion on human persons but in the context of the Trinity speaking of the Son, the Second Person as "something like the Father's thought of himself and thus as his self-image". Bender (2011:7) also refers to Aquinas teaching on *imago Dei* that states that the image of God in humanity is a spiritual image and more specifically the soul of human beings. Aquinas also very importantly argues that all human beings, even the troublemakers, are inclined to understanding and loving God (Bender 2011:17).

According to Schumacher (2016:383), Aquinas's doctrine of the Trinity not only explains God's power to be God but also to communicate God's self as God. This doctrine then confirms that God is worthy of the 'name' God, being who God is which includes "being, knowing, saying, willing and doing all that is good or consistent with love" (Schumacher 2016:383). Through the life of Jesus, God revealed the Triune nature in a way that human persons could relate and to show that we are made in the image of this Trinity. It is to this end that Schumacher (2016:383) argues that this doctrine of the *imago Dei* shows how human beings are capable of intellect, will, the capacity to have desires and act upon them in the setting of an embodied and simple life. Theological Anthropology is situated around the doctrine of the *imago Dei* up until the middle of the twentieth century and this concept remained dominant in the study

of Christian Theology (Kelsey 2009:896,897).²⁰

In Genesis 1:27 the statement is made that humanity is created in the image of God:

“So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.”²¹

The exegetes of the early church and the Middle Ages searched for the content of the image of God in an association of the human soul with God. The reformed tradition later found the image of God in the unification of humanity and God’s will with each other. According to Migliore²² (2014:44), this phrase ‘image of God’ has been interpreted in various ways throughout the history of Christian Theology. Marais (2013:1) similarly argues that the interpretations of what it means to be human created in this image vary widely which has various implications. For Marais (2013:1) these interpretations have implications for “discourses on human uniqueness, human dignity, human rights and ecological sustainability”. Wentzel Van Huyssteen (2004:126) identifies four normative interpretations of the *imago Dei* in the history of Christian interpretation namely, substantive, functional, existential and eschatological.²³ Pannenberg (1985:74) argues further that the leading exegetical tradition observation was that in the Biblical story of creation, the human likeness to God and the vocation of humanity as the ruler of the earth are interconnected.

²⁰ For a more thorough argument on how Kelsey challenges this notion of organising theological anthropology around the theme of the *Imago Dei* see Kelsey’s 2009 work: *Eccentric Existence: A Theological Anthropology*.

²¹ This translation is from the *Holy Bible, New Living Translation*, 2015. Tyndale House Foundation, Illinois, USA.

²² A more thorough argument on the various ways this phrase has been understood and interpreted see Migliore, D.L. 2014. *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology*. 3rd ed. 144-145.

²³ For a more thorough explanation on these four interpretations see: Van Huyssteen, J. W. 2004. *Alone in the World? Human uniqueness in science and theology*. The Gifford Lectures. The University of Edinburgh. Spring 2004. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company

Over the years Christian theologians have understood this statement as the centre of what it means to be human and consequently was the beginning of Theological Anthropology (Cortez 2010:14). This *imago Dei*, according to Kelsey (2009:895), was understood to be the fundamental structural feature of human beings that make them uniquely human and separates them from animals who do not resemble God's image. Panneberg (1985: 20) states that to speak of the image of God in the human person is to speak of their intimacy to the divine reality, the same closeness or intimacy determines humanity's place to the natural world. The concept of *imago Dei*, Cortez (2010:37) argues, should not be primarily understood as what it means to be human but that it places humanity in a certain theological and narrative context. Gonzalez (2007) also argues that classical anthropologies, from the early nineteenth century, tended to over-emphasise the human person's spiritual relationship to the divine and to ignore the implications this should have in our daily lives. Gonzalez (2007) goes further to note how the focus of Theological Anthropology has been on the supernatural orientation of humankind because of the subject of *imago Dei*.

Gonzalez (2007) also argues that a challenge for Theological Anthropology can be to release the tension between the relationship as described in Genesis, and the new creation in Christ which is found in the letter Paul wrote to the Galatians 3:28: "There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus."²⁴

This relationship between old and new continues to be a central question in Theological Anthropology (Gonzalez 2007). Cortez (2010:18) further explains the debate surrounding the subject of the *imago Dei*, saying that there are a number of ways, the "image" can be understood. First, and the most dominant is the structural image, understanding that humanity reflects the divine in some or other way, such as the human person's capability to have rational thought. Second a functional image, relating more to what a person does rather than what human persons are. The third image is a relational one, that the true *Imago* is found in relationships, to God, to themselves, creation and to others. In the last approach to understanding the *imago*

²⁴ This translation is from the *Holy Bible, New Living Translation*, 2015. Tyndale House Foundation, Illinois, USA.

Dei, various thinkers argue that the image of God is a multi-faceted one, that it cannot be restricted and it includes the different contributions of these images to develop a multi-faceted image of God (Cortez 2010:28).

If Cortez (2010:37) argues that the *imago Dei* places humanity in a theological and narrative context, this will have further anthropological implications. Implications such as Jesus revealing Jesus's true humanity, human persons that are a part and yet separate within creation and that we are mysterious, embodied, broken and responsible. According to Price (2002:117), Barth takes a different turn in the discussion on *imago Dei*, saying that *imago Dei* must be understood as being in relationship with God, therefore it is the Word of God that sets the human being apart because the Word creates the relationship. Torrance (1957:29) also shows similar arguments from John Calvin that a human person has a special relation to the Word of God and that because of this God relates Godself to the human being in a special way. Christian anthropology then asks what kind of being it is that stands in this relationship with God (Price 2002:118).

According to Price (2002:118) Barth sees the *imago Dei* in terms of the humanity of Christ, and that every human is a "fellow man of Jesus", and the image of God can be equated with the humanity of Christ, it is not a repetition or reflection of His divinity but Godself. Conradie (2004:566) describes that Barth uses Christology as the starting point for understanding humanity for his anthropological reflections. Calvin argues similarly saying that the human being must be understood entirely from the Word made flesh (Torrance 1957:36).

The subject of *imago Dei* has various implications for the debates on gender and gender equality in relation to this doctrine. This will be discussed in a further section of this chapter, although not to its full extent. The next section will discuss the second theme important for the field of Theological Anthropology.

2.3.2 Sin

The second main subsection of the study of Theological Anthropology is the discussion on sin and evil and its role in Theological Anthropology (Gonzalez 2007).

This question of sin or original sin has been preoccupying much of traditional Theological Anthropology (Migliore 2014:158). According to Pannenberg (1985:95) for Augustine sin is not only disobedience of a divine commandment as a misrepresentation of the natural order of creation, it is also a failure of a human being in relation to themselves. Augustine describes it as inherited sinfulness (Migliore 2014:159). They reject their own happiness since this only comes from God. The development of the rebellion against God and sexuality and the human body was encouraged by Augustine²⁵. Moltmann-Wendel (2000:77) writes that for Augustine the desires and drives under which he suffered became centred of what it means to be in opposition to God. This resulted in a theology that can dominate the body that is hostile to the body and is deeply embedded in the doctrine of sin (Moltmann-Wendel 2000:77).

According to Bender (2011:23), Aquinas refuses to equate evil with sin and states that it only exists in an action. He further defines sin in a two-fold way. Sin in relation to natural ends determined by reason and in relation to supernatural ends determined by eternal law. Although this dual view of sin is critiqued and contested (Bender 2011:23). To briefly explain natural law according to Aquinas, Samuel Wells, Ben Quash and Rebekah Eklund (2017:145) explains that natural law provides principles with which reason can discern what is right and wrong, but the fall of humankind means that we need more than natural law to help us achieve virtue. Eternal law, on the other hand is the highest form of law, as it is the mind and will of God which is then reflected and practised in all other kinds of law (Wells, Quash & Eklund 2017:145).

For Luther, according to his anthropology, sin is a state of being, and he differentiates between flesh and body or Spirit and he states that the human person is a sinner (Bender 2011:44). The implication of this is that sin cannot only be an explanation of a certain act but is the depiction of the person as a whole. Bender (2011:44,45) gives Luther's account of sin that can be described as "the nature of sin is ultimately unbelief, the lack of trust in God, the absence of love for God", or in other words the desire to place ourselves in the place of God and not allowing God to be God.

²⁵ For a more in detail argument on the interrelation between Augustine, gender and sexuality consult the work of Coakley, S. 2013. *God, Sexuality and the Self: An essay 'On the Trinity'*. (289,293) Cambridge University Press. UK.

Luther also believes that sin reduces the rational powers of a human person, although it is not completely erased, that reason and will of a human are directed by human nature – the flesh (Bender 2011:45,46). When this happens, the powers of the soul, as Luther calls it, are tainted by sin (Bender 2011:45,46). For Luther, this has a direct influence on the *imago Dei* and freedom/free will and the discussion thereof. Bender (2011:45) argues that these discussions develop a multi-faceted anthropology. This enables Luther to say two fundamental things regarding sin's consequences in our lives namely that sin does not destroy a human person's nature but that it can change a person's nature as a creature in relationship with God.

Pannenberg (1985:20) argues that to speak of sin is to speak of the factual separation of human beings from God and that this has implications for the subject of *imago Dei*. It is these human beings who are destined to be in union with God and sin produces a contradiction to who they ought to be and also an interior conflict (Pannenberg 1985:20). Pannenberg himself describes sin as egotistical pride (Schumacher 2016:379) and Niebuhr²⁶ concurs with this. Sin manifests in a way to take the place of God in our own lives and also to submit others to our own will (Schumacher 2016:379). Migliore (2014:158) agrees with this when he argues that the primary Biblical emphasis on sin is “rooted in the misuse or corruption of human freedom”. Human freedom and free will will be briefly discussed in the next section.

As previously discussed Barth emphasises the human need for God, he also then in relation to sin, argues that sin denies this human need for God. Sin is the reason a human person turns away from the acknowledgement of this need (Dorman 2018: 195,199). This “neediness” as argued by Barth is the precondition for knowledge, love and blessing. (Dorman 2018:199).

Pannenberg (1985:271) also writes briefly about alienation and sin, stating that sin involves self-alienation. The implications for human beings are separated from their true selves, estrangement from God and parting with their destiny. This destiny

²⁶ To read more on the theological work of Niebuhr see: Niebuhr, R. 1996. *Nature and Destiny of Man*. Westminster John Knox Press. Kentucky. USA.

according to Pannenberg (1985:271) is communion, fellowship and relationship with God. Paul Tillich, according to Pannenberg (1985:281), concentrated on the idea of alienation as a way to make sense of the notion of sin. His conception of sin is to be estranged from the self and from others (Schumacher 2016:379). The human person is not what they ought to be, they are estranged from this true being and by using this term the implication is that the human person belongs to that from which we are estranged (Pannenberg 1985:282). Tillich also relates the theological doctrine of sin to the human experience of life (Pannenberg 1985:282).

According to Schumacher (2016:380), David Kelsey defines sin by saying that it is a distortion, that this distortion always comes in a form of a person or “personal bodies” and that this happens in a certain context and among other people. Schumacher (2016:380) describes how Kelsey points to a distinction between sin that happens before God, and evil that happens towards others. Sin also manifests itself through evil. Augustine Schutte²⁷ explains evil and discusses the two sources of evil, according to him evil is a part of the natural world (Bongmba 2008:118). Human beings commit evil and by understanding these sources humans become aware of their limitations and contributes to the responses of suffering and evil in a more thoughtful way (Bongmba 2008:118). Bongmba (2008:118) references Conradie’s²⁸ argument which not only focuses on natural causes but proposes that “scholars should explore the doctrine of sin to identify other causes of suffering and evil”.

According to Meiring (2015:3), Kelsey rejects the notion of the fall and the story of Adam and Eve. He challenges the notion of Augustine which suggests that there is an ‘interior psychology of sin’. Instead, according to Meiring (2015:3) Kelsey proposes that humans should be wise in the way they interact with others, the social world and non-human creatures.

²⁷ Essays regarding nature and evil can be read in: Du Toit, and University of South Africa. Institute for Theological Research. *Can Nature Be Evil or Evil Natural? : A Science-and-religion View on Suffering and Evil: Proceedings of the Twelfth Seminar of the South African Science and Religion Forum (SASRF) of the Research Institute for Theology and Religion Held at the University of South Africa, Pretoria, 11 & 12 August 2005*. Pretoria: Research Institute for Theology and Religion, U of South Africa, 2006.

²⁸ See footnote number 27.

The next section will be the last of the three themes identified for discussion to present background and to better understand the field of Theological Anthropology.

2.3.3 Free will and Freedom

Although this section on the last theme of Theological Anthropology will only be brief, it is still necessary for the introduction to Theological Anthropology. Cortez (2010:98) states that the subject of how we understand free will, generates heated debates, reactions and problems. This is because it stands at the centre of any acceptable anthropology and touches on all the subjects of our human existence. It also shapes essential moral concepts “such as responsibility, accountability, personal development, and interpersonal relationality” (Cortez 2010:98). Migliore (2014:163) argues that “Christian freedom is the beginning of a new freedom from the bondage of sin and for a partnership with God and others”.

Pannenberg (1985:101) gives an extensive account of Kierkegaard’s discussion on ‘freedom’ stating that sin is or can be an activity of freedom. Yet it is not freedom itself but the possibility of freedom that precedes sin in which freedom is lost. According to Pannenberg (1985:101) for Kierkegaard the possibility of freedom does not consist in being able to choose the good or evil, therefore it is not an act of free will. Regarding sin, Pannenberg (1985:111) writes that freedom in the New Testament is not thought of as something that we have from the start and thus is a part of our nature, but we receive it because of the redemption of Jesus Christ and the Spirit.

According to Pannenberg (1985:115), freedom has to do with our existence as a whole that manifests in actions and decision. This means the human person realises that they are responsible to shape their own conditions and activity and to turn this into the fulfilment of their destiny in their own lives. This freedom is a call to bring together a person’s behaviour and destiny which is the basis of freedom to do good and not freedom to choose between good and evil (Panneberg 1985:116). Tillich agrees with this according to Martin (1966:15), saying that finite freedom results in the human transition from essence to existence not as an individual or by accident but in the framework of universal destiny.

As in the section on the discussion of *imago Dei*, Cortez (2010: 99,100) offers a few points of consensus surrounding the debate on the free will and freedom of human beings. Human persons have free will and they practice this free will in a morally and responsible way but not all human actions are meaningfully free. Free will can be matched to divine sovereignty and free will is preceded by various factors (Cortez 2010:100).

In the next section, the interrelation between gender and Theological Anthropology is discussed and these discussions include more recent scholars on the subject of Theological Anthropology.

2.4 Gender and Theological Anthropology

This section will give a short account of gender-critical views on Theological Anthropology issues. As this study engages throughout with the theme of gender it is deemed necessary to include a section showing how gender and theological anthropology correlate with each other. According to Conradie (2004:564) in the context of liberation theology, feminist theology, indigenous theologies and ecological theology other anthropological questions are being asked:

How are human beings constituted by the structures of society and how can they transform such societies from within? How should the relationship between different human genders be constructed? How can a sense of community to which all humans belong be retrieved? How should the relationship between humanity and nature be understood? Or, more precisely, what is the specific place of humanity within the earth community? Or more theologically: What is the place of humanity in the household of God?

For Oduyoye (2001:59) feminism is a precondition for Christian anthropology because Christian anthropology should do justice to the whole of humanity especially

the humanity of women. Nico Koopman²⁹ (2004:191) also references Oduyoye as she argues for a more female perspective because the “‘female’ principle and perspective have not been explored sufficiently while the ‘male’ has been over-used to the point of staleness and stagnation thus plunging us all into a status quo that defies analysis”. Gonzalez (2007) offers an extensive feminist perspective on the Theological Anthropology subject of the image of God³⁰. Gonzalez (2007) argues that the first and second creation stories found in Genesis, that show how humanity was created in the image of God distinguishes us from the rest of creation. The meaning of this continues to perplex religious and Christian minds. Gonzalez focuses on the first creation story, which she calls an egalitarian image of humanity. Genesis 1, according to Gonzalez (2007), offers an egalitarian image of the sexes and the way that this image has been misrepresented and rejected is her main focus, because Genesis 1:27 arguably undermines a hierarchical order of the sexes. In her book, *Created in God’s image: An introduction into feminist Theological Anthropology*, Gonzalez (2007) shows how male Christian authors have argued that the *imago Dei* of males and females do not necessarily mean equality of the sexes.

According to Gonzalez (2007) women have been seen as occupying the image defectively, and this and similar views have denied the full image of God in women. Male Christian authors have elevated men as the definitive exemplification of rationality, spirituality and the only ones conveying the image to its full extent. This has led to the subordination of women to men according to Gonzalez (2007). Gonzalez wants to show how these understandings have shaped relationships between men and women and feminist theologians argue that Christian tradition has resulted in damaging and oppressive understandings of women. Theological Anthropology, which

²⁹ To read more on the relationship between Theological Anthropology and Gender see: Nico Koopman’s (2004) article on Theological Anthropology and gender relations. He argues for a “anthropology characterized by vulnerability, relationality and dependence is offered as a pathway towards building male and female relations that are characterised by harmony and joy”. Koopman argues for Theological Anthropology that distance itself from independence and power and move towards dependence and vulnerability.

³⁰ See Gonzalez, M.A. 2007. *Created in God’s Image: An Introduction to Feminist Theological Anthropology*. New York: Orbis.

functions in this Christian tradition, is patriarchal in nature, based on an androcentric world view. This fuels inequality between the sexes and that this is contrary to what Jesus intended for humanity (Gonzalez 2007). Oduyoye (2001:61) agrees when arguing that each human being reflects the divine and is related to God who is the source of humanity.

When writing about African women's theologies Isabella Ras (2017) argues that it strives to deal with the context in which African women live. These theologies are theologies of liberation taking the experiences of women seriously. Phiri (2004:56) writes that "African women's theologies take women's experiences as its starting point, focusing on the oppressive areas of life caused by injustices such as patriarchy, colonialism, neo-colonialism, racism, capitalism, globalisation and sexism." According to Oduyoye (1982:194) the consequences of patriarchy³¹ on women in Africa is because of the predominant view that a African woman's identity is found in whose mother and wife she is. They are the possession of the men who support them and are viewed as inferior (Oduyoye 1982:195). This also features in Migliores (2014:144) argument of the various interpretations of what it means to be created in the image of God regarding dominion and power. Migliore (2014:144) argues that patriarchy, colonialism and racism are forms of "mastery over others" that originated from distorted interpretations from these phrases. On this topic of "mastery over others" Mary Hilbert (1995:191) argues with her co- author Anne Clifford for a conversion to an ecofeminist conceptual framework that opposes all forms of hierarchy and dualism and embraces reality in a holistic manner. She also argues that the patriarchal interpretations of what it means to be created in the image of God (*Imago Dei*) should be disparaged because it legitimizes female subordination and male domination as well as human dominion over the earth. For Oduyoye (2001:17) African women's theologies are also 'theologies of relations' since they seek to replace existing hierarchies with affinity and relationality that see the independence of all humans and also creation. This will require sensitivity to the wants of others, the well-being of the

³¹ Jürgen Moltmann (2000:274) defines patriarchy as "the term for an institutionalized system of sexual hierarchy and a psychological mechanism for its justification, according to which the man is born and made to rule, while the woman is born and made to serve".

whole community and the eradication of injustice. She also writes that a communal ideology guides the humanity of Africa (Oduyoye 2001:63) and forms an integral part of African Anthropology.

Schumacher (2016:377) presents the influential work of Valerie Saibing-Goldstein, on the subject of sin, who argues that women do not necessarily sin in terms of pride, the will to have power, exploitation, assertiveness or the treatment of others as objects. If this is the primary struggle with sin, what lacks is sacrificial love. This does not apply to women (Schumacher 2016:377), but can rather be described the following way:

Rather, Goldstein argues that women's sins are better described in terms of triviality, distractibility, and diffuseness; lack of an organizing centre or focus; dependence on others for one's own self-definition; tolerance at the expense of standards of excellence; inability to respect the boundaries of privacy; sentimentality, gossipy sociability, and mistrust of reason— in short, underdevelopment or negation of the self (Schumacher 2016:377).

Migliore (2014:156) argues similarly that feminist theologians have objected to the traditional doctrine of sin that focusses exclusively success, power, assertiveness and aggressiveness. This according to Migliore (2014:156) is not accurate when it comes to most women. For Migliore (2014:157) it is essential to see that sin has many faces and that gender differences, race and class are important factors to take into account. On the subject of Thomas Aquinas, Schumacher (2016:376) claims that although he affirms the image of God in women, he did not think of creating opportunities for women to reflect this image. Moltmann-Wendel (1986:86) argues that Aquinas saw women as mainly irrational and seductive beings. Schumacher (2016:378) further presents different feminist theologians critique on male theologians such as Niebuhr and Tillich, for not developing the notion of sin according to the feminine experience. This also includes a more general critique on the work of other theologians such as Karl Barth, Wolfhart Pannenberg, and Hans Urs von Balthasar³².

³² Gonzalez (2004) initiates dialogue between Balthasar and contemporary feminist theology by focusing on Christology, Theological Anthropology and theological method. She presents Balthasar's theological standpoint and follow with a feminist response to the themes and questions raised by Balthasar's theology. She presents what is constructive and what can be critiqued.

According to Schumacher (2016:380) Kelsey's account of sin is the distortion towards God and is expressed in a personal body oriented towards other creatures. For Kelsey, faith can be corrupt by a distortion of wonder (Schumacher 2016:380). This distorted wonder results in a perception that is separated from the faithful respect for other beings and that this type of perception creates exploitation. A perception that can create stereotypes like sexism, racism or classism that are not true to reality and that is harmful. Schumacher (2016:38) asks, especially in relation to the subject of the image of God, for an all-inclusive theology, and argues to continue the rehabilitating work of Christ of all persons in God's image, coherent with God's life-giving Spirit.

The next section will discuss the work of Isherwood and Stuart more in detail, but in light of this gender-critical discussion on Theological Anthropology, Isherwood and Stuart (1998:11) claims that the attention the early "church fathers" have given to the body has been mainly negative. Sight, lust, touch, sex and taste of food were only amongst some of the things the early church fathers policed and warned against. This reality imprisoned the body under the systems of Christianity and patriarchy, something which feminist theologians want to offer liberation from. This is also evident in African Anthropology according to Ras (2017) who writes that African Anthropology views personhood and the body in a holistic way. To further enrich the explanation on African Anthropology Maimela (1991:5) explains that "the individual is embedded in an intricate network of relationships to family (living and dead), the community, God and nature".

Oduyoye (2001:64) argues that the dualism of the spiritual and the material in traditional anthropology assigned material to what is worldly and spiritual to salvation. The holistic anthropology of African women is challenging this perspective (Oduyoye 2001:64). According to Ras (2017), Oduyoye maintains that this African understanding of bodies is the opposite of the dualistic split between body and soul as mentioned in the above sections. This categorised soul and reason as good and the body with its undependability and fickleness as something to be perceived as negative. Ras (2017) writes that in contrast to this dualism, the African world view shows that experience is not disembodied but rather "bodily experienced" and that "if you break down the body, the mind or the community, you break down the person and vice versa".

Ras (2017) argues for a positive Theological Anthropology that will include a vision of a restored body “one that is whole in all its various relations and interdependencies.” This can only happen when the distortive, negative and destructive anthropology of colonialism on African bodies is fought and countered. Then it can be replaced with a positive anthropology of healing and restoration envisioned with the help of African concepts such as *ubuntu* (I am a person through other persons) and African women’s theologies (Ras 2017). When arguing for a Theological Anthropology of dependence and vulnerability Koopman (2004:198) also discusses *ubuntu*. He suggest that the notion of *ubuntu* be revisited to “spell out its potential for the re-humanization of males and females and our relationships in African and other societies”. Koopman (2004:198) explains that an “anthropology of dependence and vulnerability will encourage us to discover the liberating implications of ubuntu for the women, and for the men, of Africa”. Meiring (2015:3) agrees with this when writing that the body is in a relationship with its context, biology and its environment.

Jacob Meiring and other body theologians will be discussed more in-depth in the next section when the connection between Theological Anthropology and Body Theology is explored.

2.5 Theological Anthropology and Body Theology

Body theology falls into the broader field of Theological Anthropology, with specific clearings writes Meiring³³ (2015:3). Therefore the next section very importantly discusses the relationship between the two interrelated fields.

Meiring (2015:3) proposes a Theological Anthropology that requires ‘embodied sensing’, a “contemporary Theological Anthropology with a sentiment of the flesh and a sensitivity to the textures of life”. Meiring (2015:4) writes about the challenges for this Theological Anthropology as ‘embodied sensing’ because it needs to capture the ‘felt sense’ of bodily experiences and to listen to what the body has not yet said. Meiring (2015:3) argues that this is a Theological Anthropology that takes the body

³³ To read more on Meiring’s Body Theology especially from a South African perspective and in an African context see: Meiring, J.J. S. 2014 *Theology in the Flesh: Exploring the Corporeal Turn from a Southern African Perspective*.

and the experiences of the body seriously because the body is a site of knowledge and a guiding principle. He agrees with Ras (2017) who refers to the body as “whole” and who gives serious considerations to the various relationships as part thereof.

According to Meiring (2015:3), Kelsey proposes that bodily experiences can be a source of revelation and knowledge. Meiring (2015:3) references the theological work of James Nelson and the influence of Body Theology as an anthropological field. According to Meiring, Nelson’s anthropology takes the body seriously. In Nelson’s Body Theology he begins with the concrete and the fleshly experience of life, hunger, passion, being alive and death and not with doctrines of dogmas. For Nelson, lived experiences are important. According to Meiring (2015:3) for Nelson the most ignored experience is life itself and should come first, then the development of theology as it seeks to reflect upon these experiences.

Nelson (1992:9) writes that Body Theology is not primarily a theological description of the body. Neither is it an ethical prescription of how we ought to express ourselves. He argues that Body Theology is a way of doing theology that takes our bodies and its experiences seriously (Nelson 1992:9). Nelson (1992:9) explains in his book that although the words sin and salvation is not used, it is a reality in and of the body. He argues that the dualism of body and soul continues to be a problem and as reality is manifesting in many ways in our society (Nelson 1992:9). This dualism often results in sexism, homophobia, hyper-masculinity, violence, racism and ecological issues (Nelson 1992:9). Nelson (1992:9) argues that the wholeness of the body is the destiny for which the human person is created and that this happens by the grace of God.

Lisa Isherwood and Elisabeth Stuart (1998:10) discusses Body Theology. Isherwood and Stuart (1998:10) use the woman’s body as normative and argues that at the heart of their feminist liberation theology lies the believe in incarnation. This has the implication that we can see the divine presence in our daily lives, that sin and redemption are a part of the lives of people and that women’s experiences are central to theology. Nelson similarly places incarnation at the centre of his Body Theology (Isherwood, Stuart 1998:43). Cortez (2010:70) also mentions incarnation in his discussion on the human person as an embodied being. Explaining that the incarnation and the resurrection confirm the goodness of creation and the centrality of

physical embodiment of human life.

According to Isherwood and Stuart (1998:15), feminist theologians place the body central. This because the female body was the object of oppression for centuries. It has been weighed under by patriarchal theology, and this focus on the body although present in theology over the years has been seen as something to be despised and overcome, not to be loved and celebrated (Isherwood, Stuart 1998:15). For Isherwood and Stuart the creation story, more specifically with regard to the narrative around Adam and Eve and the loss of Adam's rib is important to discuss. The man in the story becomes the norm of creation, and women from this day forward becomes the outsider or other. Isherwood and Stuart (1998:16) explains that a second narrative of the creation story is the one found in Gen 1:27, where man and women are created in God's image, but they argue that this has not been the dominant story over the course of Christian history.

This order has given way to women, and nature, being at the bottom, where men have claimed supremacy in the rational and spiritual therefore closer to God than the flesh. This narrative in Genesis resulted in women described as reflecting the image of God in a lesser manner, because of her association with bodiliness. The body is described as something that can keep us from a relationship with God (Gonzalez 2007). Gonzalez (2007) similarly argues that with regard to feminist theology egalitarianism, relationship and community, the body and *imago Dei* are in relation to each other. One theme cannot be subordinate to another and each deserves equal attention.

This as previously discussed resulted in the dualism of body and soul, that we still try to overcome in the twenty first century. All that is worthy of attention lies beyond the body, as far away as possible (Isherwood, Stuart 1998:11). Christian Theology, based on the above-mentioned dualism, viewed the body as less important and more prone to sin and evil than the mind (Isherwood, Stuart 1998:33). It is because of this reason that Body Theology attempts to put the mind, emotions and the body back together (Isherwood, Stuart 1998:33). For Cortez (2010:70) there is a consensus that "adequate anthropology must affirm human embodiment in ways that idealism and dualism simply are not able to do."

Isherwood and Stuart (1998:10) explain that the belief of the incarnation of Jesus Christ is a bodily narrative. According to Isherwood and Stuart (1998:10) it was the body of Christ that became flesh, this same body that brought us redemption on the cross and this body that believers consume in a symbolic way during the Eucharist. All of this is, according to Isherwood and Stuart (1998:10) a very earthly, fleshly and physical way to be in relationship with God.

On the subject of alienation and distortion, Isherwood and Stuart (1998:47) draw on the work of Carter Heyward who argues that patriarchal culture has pulled us away from our true natures and that this alienation has led to a distorted view of ourselves and more specifically of our idea of sensuality. Heyward³⁴ also argues that Christian Theology has sustained this process of alienation (Isherwood, Stuart 1998:47).

In Cortez's (2010: 70) discussion on Theological Anthropology, he includes a section on the mind and the body arguing that a part of the consensus on the debate on the dualism of mind and body is that human persons are whole embodied beings. This is what God intended for human life, not the opposite. The word we use for a human-like mind, body, soul and flesh, should not be understood as different or separate parts, but as a whole. The previous discussion on the *imago Dei* also signifies this importance.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter provided a brief introduction and overview into the field of Theological Anthropology, the development in theological thought over time while discussing the anthropology of early scholars such as Augustine, Aquinas, Luther and Calvin. The main themes and terms of the field such as sin, free will and freedom and the *imago Dei*. It looked at how Theological Anthropology correlates with more recent discussions on gender and Body Theology drawing from theologians such as Jacob Meiring, Mercy Oduyoye, Elisabeth Stuart, Lisa Isherwood and Isabella Ras.

³⁴ To read more on Carter Heyward's argument on alienation see: Heyward, C. 1999. *Saving Jesus from those who are right: Rethinking what it means to be Christian*.

This is necessary for the way forward. This can assist in comfortably placing and analysing Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel's Theological Anthropology and more specifically her Theology of Embodiment. In the next chapter, the work and life of Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel will be discussed as well as the themes of her theological work. This will include her theological work with various themes such as political, social and liberation theology, feminist theology, her work on theology and the body as well as her language and imagination. The discussion of her life and the various themes of Moltmann-Wendel's theological work is necessary to get a better understanding of the type of theologies that she engaged with. This chapter will assist in understanding how her context influenced her work and to identify the contribution of her theological thought and language in Theological Anthropology and Body Theology. It will point out how her work ultimately contributes to the discussions surrounding reproductive health.

CHAPTER 3

ELISABETH MOLTMANN-WENDEL'S THEOLOGICAL WORK

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the aim will be to introduce the German feminist theologian Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel and her theological work. The chapter will start off with a brief biography of the theologian since her life, career and theological work are significantly interrelated. As the feminist principle of doing theology places a high value on lived experiences, this research deemed it necessary to look at the complete life of Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel not only her theological work. In the next section, her various theological themes will be discussed. These themes include her political, social and liberation theology and very importantly her feminist approach to theology and how this influenced her work. More in line with the motivation and objectives of this research Moltmann-Wendel's theological work on the body and embodiment will be discussed and with this her contribution to theological language and the use of imagination in her hermeneutics.

3.2 Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel: A Short Biography

In her autobiography, Moltmann-Wendel (1997:1-34) writes that she was born in Herne into a German Nationalist family. She grew up in Postdam in the time of Nazi Germany. She studied Protestant theology in Berlin and Göttingen, where she also received her doctorate in 1951 on the church and theology concepts of Dutch Theologian Hermann Friedrich Kohlbrügge. She married the systematic theologian Jürgen Moltmann in 1952 in Switzerland and they were married until her death in 2016. She recalls how marriage and family life challenged the possibility of theological study and a career in the church (Moltmann-Wendel, 1997:35-43). Her professional work, discussed in more detail in the next section, consisted of numerous lectures, publications, theological books and representation on committees, women's forums and councils.

Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel can be described as a pioneer of German feminist theology, according to McDougall (2012:166), one who left clear indications of where those who follow can pick up where she left off. She ignited the feminist theological movement in Germany in the 1970s, something she was inspired to bring and adapt to her own context and culture by the American Feminist Liberation movement. This she did from the grassroots level in the Protestant Church of Germany and in this way cultivated an academic dialogue that we are still a part of today (McDougall, 2012:166). She dedicates her autobiography (1997) to “the women at the grassroots, with whom I learned.”

She writes in her autobiography that her world was turned upside down in 1972 at age 46, by the American Women’s movement and especially the literature produced by it. She writes that for some years, at the time of discovery for Moltmann-Wendel, there has been a “*Frauenbefreiungsbewegung*” (women’s liberation movement) that consisted of liberal, socialist, Marxist and Christian’s alike (Moltmann-Wendel 1974:9). According to Moltmann-Wendel, the literature produced by this movement put women’s experiences at the centre of their thinking, they called for equality, dignity and equal rights for women. These writers did not only ask for adapting to the culture but the radical change of it (Moltmann-Wendel 1997:16, 17).

There were different events and opportunities that inspired and fascinated Moltmann-Wendel because it began from the experiences of society instead of a theological principle. Moltmann-Wendel especially began to realise what this could mean for women and for herself, and she realised that this feminist movement had the power to break through all the different categories of society, race, gender, age and geographical barriers. She called it revolutionary feminism that did not only promise emancipation but also fighting oppression, calling on both the oppressor and oppressed that they are bound together. The liberation of women was for once in their own hands. In the USA Moltmann-Wendel was introduced to women’s liberation literature and was also confronted with feminist writers and other women calling, for example, farewell to the Christian God and God the Father. She relies on the work from feminist writers across various disciplines and traditions, for example, Valerie Saiving Goldstein, Beverly Jones, Letty Russel, Rosemary Ruether, Peggy Way and others (Moltmann-Wendel 1974:11). Especially the notions of *leiblichkeit* (bodiliness)

of Rosemary Ruether, which according to Moltmann-Wendel has been forgotten. This has since been reclaimed by scholars working on Body Theology and Theological Anthropology as will be discussed later in this particular chapter as well as chapter 4.

Returning to Germany, Moltmann-Wendel began to work on theological articles relevant for her own context as a reformed theologian working and living in Germany, but also focusing on an inclusive, global and holistic approach of feminism. She also discovered that male Christian thinkers like Barth and Bonhoeffer, which she had previously viewed as important, could not relate to the questions women were beginning to ask. A key point in her argument is when she questions Schleiermacher's ethic of an old theological system pertaining to the superiority of men and the subordination of women, emphasising motherhood and the importance of the family (Moltmann-Wendel 1974:21). Her work was regarded as a positive approach to women's questions. Moltmann-Wendel publically stated, after a question on her own discovery of feminist theology, that for a long time she had understood her only destiny and vocation, as a mother and wife, always helping, serving and to be modest while playing this role. She explained that the women's movement, with the theological foundation, made her aware that this was not God's only purpose for her life (Moltmann-Wendel & Moltmann 1991:17).

According to McDougall (2012:167), Moltmann-Wendel followed an extensive theological agenda, exploring new ways of imagining the narratives of the women around Jesus. She focused attention on the body as a whole, an ecologically sensitive Theological Anthropology and also showing the liberating possibilities in the friendships women have. Her approach can be described as life-embracing, and her project claimed bodies, friendship and tenderness as important issues for feminist theologians but also for the Christian faith (Rigby, 2012:181). Rigby (2012:178) states that Moltmann-Wendel's goal, over the 35 years of her professional life, was to help women live, something that includes healing, to be whole, to have courage, agency and to experience rebirth and tenderness. The language of tenderness will be discussed later in this chapter.

Moltmann-Wendel herself writes in a book co-authored by Jürgen Moltmann, that in our different countries and cultures we represent the cause of women but this does

not mean the same for everyone. She states that some are fighting to become pastors or priests and others are fighting for survival. There are different societies and therefore different issues to fight for. Moltmann-Wendel argues that there is a commonality that women need to trust themselves again and with this the redemption that is possible in our experiences of God (Moltmann-Wendel & Moltmann, 1991:16). She also writes that women should trust their powers because we have received this from God, and it is God's power within us (Moltmann-Wendel 1997:121). When reading the work of Moltmann-Wendel it becomes clear that although she blazed new trails in the feminist movement, she did not hesitate to challenge the movement itself (McDougall, 2012:167).

Although Moltmann-Wendel (1997: xviii) writes from the Protestant tradition, she is convinced that women from all denominations can achieve something together "Protestant women, Catholic women, women interested in religion and engaged in politics", showing that female solidarity should not be determined by denominationalism.

The next section of this chapter will discuss the themes of Moltmann-Wendel's theological work to ultimately discover her contribution to a theological language and more specifically her Theological Anthropology.

3.3 Themes In the Theological Work of Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel

To take into account the whole spectrum of the theological work done by Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel would take a considerable amount of time and space, something this research does not allow scope for. Therefore the objective of this section will be to identify main themes and their content in her theological work, relevant to the research objectives explained in chapter one. In this section her book, *I am my Body* (1995), will not be included as it will be critically analysed in the next chapter.

3.3.1 Political, Social And Liberation Theology

Isherwood (2008:1) explains that Liberation Theologies have been around for a long time just as Feminist Liberation Theologies³⁵. During their history they have questioned much of the Christian faith, from Christology, ethics, church history and hermeneutics (Isherwood 2008:1). Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel was interested in liberation theology (Moltmann-Wendel & Moltmann 1991:17). She (1986:63) writes that in the 1960's minority groups "became aware of how little their social and personal situation was affected by the traditional theology and praxis of the church".

For Moltmann-Wendel there are countless unheard voices of the cultures which are not dominant and that we can find in liberation theology (Moltmann-Wendel 2000:81). At the beginning of her autobiography, Moltmann-Wendel (1997: xi, 33) writes that her views were more of a political nature. In her book *Menschenrechte für die Frau*, Moltmann-Wendel (1974:10) demonstrates how she spent a considerable amount of time to plot the various Christian traditions in and out of 150 years of German history which partly led to the liberation and to the oppression of women.

Although it is necessary to say that her liberation theology is not to be understood as coming from the same context as that of Latin American liberation theology, this was indeed where her inspiration originated, but when Moltmann-Wendel draws on liberation theology it is mostly personal and rather resembles that of feminist liberation theology. Feminist and liberation theology shares commonalities (Jarl 2002:93):

Liberation theology and feminist theology developed in the same time period and have common sources of inspiration. The commonality among feminist ethicists and liberation theologians is their opposition to oppressive economic, social, cultural, and political structures. Whereas theology used to have its starting point in scripture, tradition, philosophical reasoning, and experience, liberation theology has developed a different method, in which praxis and experience are given a central position on a par with scripture.

Moltmann-Wendel (1997:x) was drawn into the revolutions affecting black people, Latin American Christians, students, minorities and many other without necessary

³⁵ For a better understanding of liberation theologies and the possibilities of such work consult *Liberation Theology and Sexuality* (2009), edited by Marcella Althaus-Reid.

rights across the globe. These upheavals originated from the lived and daily experiences of these groups. One of her first confrontations with the new possibilities of liberation and political theologies was during her stay in North Carolina (Moltmann-Wendel 1997:42). She especially writes about a friend introducing her to black theology that arose out of the experiences of the black people in the USA, and how their situations called for liberation (Moltmann-Wendel, 1997:43). According to Moltmann-Wendel (1986:66-67), black theology can be distinguished from traditional theology, something which is true of feminist theology as well. The starting point of this theological thought and action originated from the experience of social oppression, the goal of this theology was to underscore human worth and that theology is praxis. For Moltmann-Wendel these were revolutionary ideas from the ecumenical world that pleaded for a theology with a social conscience.

In a public forum discussion in 1984, Moltmann-Wendel explained what liberation theologies meant for her by stating, that for her it is something quite concrete, not global (Moltmann-Wendel & Moltmann 1991:17). On the subject of women's liberation, she argues that it is liberation for the woman herself, her personality and her specific situation or context. Liberation for Moltmann-Wendel means that women can discover themselves in new ways, this can happen by, social action, discovering the inner self, anything that changes in this way can be called liberation (Moltmann-Wendel & Moltmann 1991:17).

Focusing on the story of the bent woman who was made straight (Luke 13:10-17), Moltmann-Wendel interprets this story from a liberation theology perspective. She explains that God does not want women to be unobtrusive or shy, God also does not want women to be or remain invisible, be humiliated and oppressed (Moltmann-Wendel & Moltmann 1991:58). She writes further on the liberation possibilities of this story, saying that Jesus places this woman in the centre of this story and consequently the crowd and He draws all the attention to her. The implications of this story urge focus and attention on women, liberating them from the unobtrusiveness they have been subjected to. Jesus freed her from the oppression of her body and soul (Moltmann-Wendel & Moltmann 1991:58).

Moltmann-Wendel (1982:57) considers another narrative of a woman in the Bible, Mary of Bethany, and her liberative experience in Luke 10. She comes to her own right and is liberated from the inborn and indoctrinated patterns of behaviour that have defined her all her life. Through Jesus and his liberating presence she has learned to be independent, free from her sister, Martha's shadow, confident and intentional in her action and with agency in patriarchal situation and culture (Moltmann-Wendel 1982:57). The same approach of liberation theology and interpretation is followed by Moltmann-Wendel (1982:57) with the story of the woman suffering from blood flow in Mark 5³⁶, where we can see how the liberation of a human being can extend to the forbidden and taboo areas of the body.

An aspect of Moltmann-Wendel's theological work on friendship correlates with these ideas of liberation and redemption found in Jesus and his dealings with the women as noted above. Moltmann-Wendel shows that the term "friend" is very important in early Christianity, something that is not dependent on blood or family ties. This term suggests a community which embodies a new society and a fellowship that includes outsiders and makes them the "centre of the new society" (Moltmann-Wendel 2001:12). Her work on friendship will be discussed more in-depth later in this chapter.

Gonzalez (2012:190) uses Moltmann-Wendel's work on the theological implications of friendship to draw liberative interpretation for her community as a Latin American theologian. She argues that the theological work on friendships of Moltmann-Wendel has implication for the minority theologies as a whole in the USA. These minority groups of theologians support and critique each other's work on the complexity of oppression in America (Gonzalez 2012:194). Gonzalez (2012:194) reflects on the following:

Moltmann-Wendel's book challenges me to ask the question, are those scholars with whom I sit on panels, publish articles within books, and cite in my own research, my friends? If I do not consider them personal friends, am I, as a scholar, called to treat them in a friendly manner? What does it mean to describe your academic colleague, whom you do not know very well, as a

³⁶ See also 'I am my Body': A theology of embodiment by Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel p. viii.

friend?

Gonzalez (2012:196) shows how Moltmann-Wendel reminded us that the life and work of Jesus included outsiders and sinners, and how this can be applied to minority theologies in the United States. This because these minorities do not meet together under family ties or blood relations, but because of the solidarity amongst each other defined by race, ethnic groups and culture. These gatherings of, in this case, theologians are often the result of the ties constructed by different kinds of oppression and oppressive structures (Gonzalez 2012:196).

This brief depiction of various examples shows how the theological work of liberation, in some cases politics and social theology, of Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel can in many cases be used to address and approach the oppressive structures that affect various kinds and groups of minorities in our societies and culture today. With this being discussed only briefly it is also necessary to note Elisabeth's statement on this subject shows that women's liberation is not only academic or political but comes from the need for wholeness and fulfilment³⁷.

For Moltmann-Wendel (2000:61), liberation and feminist theology are interrelated, stating that the passion for feminist theology corresponds to the notions from social spheres. Therefore Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel's feminist theology and the different themes that developed from that will be discussed in the next section.

3.3.2 Feminist Theology of Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel

In this next section, I would like to show how feminism influenced the theological work of Moltmann-Wendel, how she contributed to the field of feminist theology and what the implications were. In the section on feminist theology Halkes explains that theology is, as the word implies, thinking about God even if each of us has a different belief or vision of the gospel, we may agree that when we say the word God we are talking about an ultimate full reality, the fullness of God's being and the reason for our existence (Moltmann-Wendel 1978:181). Furthermore, with relation to the previous

³⁷ Translated from *Menschenrechte für die Frau*, pp 12.

section, Halkes writes how feminist theology can be liberating especially when it comes to the damning images given to the women of the Bible like Eve, Mary and Martha (Moltmann-Wendel 1978:181).

Feminist^{38 39} theology is foundational for most of the theological work carried out by Moltmann-Wendel, and as previously discussed she was one of the most influential feminist theologians in Protestant feminist theology in Germany. For Moltmann-Wendel (1986:68) feminist theology is not Dogmatics, it is, first of all, a movement, with one goal, derived from various groups and experiences. Feminist theology is interested in the process of liberation, developing wholeness of the woman in a social and patriarchal hostility and overcoming this (Moltmann-Wendel 1986:71). Similarly Isherwood & McEwan (2001:9) describe feminism as “arising out of the experiences of multi-layered oppressions” and that it is about women refusing to be “controlled by definitions” of what and who they ought to be. In relation to liberation theologies, Moltmann-Wendel (1986:74-75) argues that new elements arise for feminist theology, an awakening of neglected dimensions like the sense, psyche, body and the imagination, something which has not had any status in theology. Feminist theology aims to humanise theology and the substance of theology can now be investigated in the light of the masculine images, vehicles and structures, something which feminist theology aims to renew.

From early on Moltmann-Wendel engaged with the concerns she had with the sexism she observed in society and church and took part in the discussions and movements that addressed this issue (Moltmann-Wendel 1997:44,46). In her autobiography (1997:108) she formulated a feminist doctrine of justification for her theological work:

“I am good –
I am whole –
I am beautiful.”

³⁸ See a full definition of feminism as understood by Moltmann-Wendel in her autobiography, p.68-69. Also to read further on feminist theories and different feminist approaches from a non-theological source, Richardson and Robinson’s (2015) *Gender and Women’s studies* can be consulted.

³⁹ See further definition of feminism presented by Moltmann-Wendel in *A land flowing with Milk and Honey*, p.65.

She continues to write about her observation of women not claiming their acceptance by God and that they have become accustomed to viewing themselves only with regard to their errors, faults and negative characteristics. In addition the message of feminism including oppression and patriarchy only further sustained this train of thought. Moltmann-Wendel asked how this newly discovered doctrine of justification can be of help in this regard. When speaking about the theology of hope Moltmann-Wendel (Moltmanniac 2015) argues that until a person truly loves themselves and finds themselves worthy, they cannot have hope, and she expands this argument when writing about the women in the church socio-historically. At the beginning of Christianity and in the early church, women were fully accepted and played an important part in the early days. Jesus, for example, had close relations with all kinds of women, and this liberating gospel was working, but as Christianity merged with patriarchal society the value and worth of women diminished and never truly recovered. This resulted in the low self-worth and self-love many Christian women experienced and in many cases still do today.

Moltmann-Wendel accurately makes the statement that feminist experience and theology stands alongside patriarchal experience and theology (Moltmann-Wendel 1982:75). Moltmann-Wendel's (Moltmann-Wendel & Moltmann 1991:3) feminist voice is very clear when she writes about the question; what do women want? She offers the vision of a new society where the powerless are heard by the powerful, where the power is shared, where the focus is on the needs of people and not on wealth and growth of only a few. Women can ask this because they have experienced first-hand what it means to be taken control of and robbed of their rights. Women want a life that embraces the holistic human being. For Moltmann-Wendel (1986:58) it is not about re-establishing the matriarchy or a sad look at the past, but to secure methods of access to the life that has been previously kept from women. Moltmann-Wendel (1991:3, 1974:155) recognises how the Bible can be implemented to achieve this and give as an example, Paul's recognition of the above-mentioned possibility of a new society:

“There is no longer Jew, Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.”

Moltmann-Wendel (Moltmann-Wendel & Moltmann 1991:54) writes about a world where women are freeing themselves from death, disrespect and non-being. A world where they are discovering their power and demanding the right to make this world a better and more humane place. There are certain differences between men and women and Moltmann-Wendel and Moltmann (1991: xiii) argue that we need to take it seriously and include it in the dialogue and that in the approach to feminist theology this is necessary. They describe the differences between men and women not as oppositions. With this being said, the power of patriarchal structures that women have been and still in many cases are experiencing in the church will not be removed by this notion alone (Moltmann-Wendel & Moltmann 1991: xiii).

Swidler (Moltmann-Wendel 1974:131) similarly discusses how women are almost naturally considered subservient subordinate, not as slaves in the usual sense, but something more unworthy of humanity, “voluntary slaves”. They are trained or programmed so that they are eager to be “half-human”, the passive half. Swidler goes further to note that men are also trained and programmed to be “half-human”, only the aggressive half. Swidler notes that it cannot be the solution to say that gender equality is to complement each other so that human wholeness arises when these two human halves are united, for example in marriage. Swidler argues that both halves should be present in every human, male and female. Every woman and man should have the choice to be receptive, giving, soft, and firm, emotional and rational in order to be perfectly human. Wholeness cannot be achieved by only being one half-human.

A significant reflection for Moltmann-Wendel (1991: xi) was on the different experiences in women’s’ early lives, beginning as the same sex as their mothers. Women do not suffer the same detachment process from their mothers as their brothers, they tend to remain close to this traditional feminine space of care, feelings and relationships and at the same time in danger of being consumed by these spheres. In her book, *A land flowing with Milk and Honey* (1986:16), she states that as daughters are brought up by their mothers, who were often also dependent and immature and kept close, women find it more difficult to become independent and mature. Women are often brought up to place self-control above self-love, resulting in many women not being able to ask themselves about their wishes, aims and needs

(Moltmann-Wendel 1986:16) Hilbert (1995:327) also discusses this and a similar notion by stating that because women remain the primary parent in most cases, boys learn to separate from their mothers to become an individual person. Moltmann-Wendel (2000:88) concurs with this thought. Girls on the other hand, who would become potential mothers, see their selfhood in this very important relationship. This, according to Hilbert (1995:327) has implications for theology and the perception of God in relationship with humanity. The process that women go through on their way to autonomy is often guilt-ridden and challenging, much so because of the high priority of relationships in women's lives.

Moltmann-Wendel echoes her own experiences when saying that many women find themselves divided because of the many responsibilities they have, family, work and the public sphere. All the more reason, according to Moltmann-Wendel for women to develop self-awareness, responsibility for themselves and self-love. As a result of their socialisation women often have a different world view, resulting in the view that relationships are more important than an independent life, while men often have the opposite thought processes. A noteworthy difference between men and women according to Moltmann-Wendel and Moltmann is that women do not have stronger feelings than men, they are just more open to showing them. This has an impact on feminist thought because women do not want to risk separation of feeling and logic, it is a difficult but promising mission (Moltmann-Wendel & Moltmann, 1991: xi-xiii).

Moltmann-Wendel (2000:30) contends for the introduction into contemporary theological thought patterns and the social spheres, of friendship, 'earthing', embodiment and the notion of contact which comes from the experience and reflection of women. This results in healing and healthy perspectives in both theology and our social world.

a) A feminist theology of the cross

The focus of the Western feminist scholarship is not as much on Jesus, but on the role and experience of the women witnessing the crucifixion and resurrection, as well as their experience of the Holy Spirit in the early church communities (Hilbert 1995:327). Moltmann-Wendel follows a similar approach to her feminist theology of the cross.

In the 1980's Moltmann-Wendel asked a radical question in a published essay: Is there a feminist theology of the cross? Saying that in recent times the cross, an important symbol for our faith, has become a contentious issue for many Western feminists (Moltmann-Wendel & Moltmann 1991:77). When approaching this subject Moltmann-Wendel firmly places herself in the feminist theology tradition, and how it differs from traditional theology, as it originates from experiences, especially the experiences of women, not from the revelation event. She argues for the understanding of the differences between the thinking of men and women, and how this as a result has accumulated numerous masculine patterns of thought in our theology over time. According to Moltmann-Wendel (1991:78), if women understand this notion, they will also begin to see how traditional theology is an expression of this specific masculine world view of the self and the world, instead of accusing this theology of being destructive and oppressive. Moltmann-Wendel discusses the difference between men and women according to Wilson Schaef, saying that in the male system, to live in tune with God means to be connected with something outside yourself, wherein the female system it means to be in tune with what you already are. When you are connected with yourself, you are connected to God, this is not the case in male patterns of thought. This has consequences for the theology of the cross.

I understand Moltmann-Wendel in the following way; when it comes to sin, as an expression of distance from God, it is predominantly a masculine view of sin pertaining to the experience of inability, powerlessness and alienation from God and other beings. Where the feminine view of sin is simply to be out of touch, or out of tune, according to Moltmann-Wendel's it is with yourself. She again refers to Schaef, saying that when we are out of tune with your internal process, we experience distortion of ourselves and that this can be destructive towards others, this is the real nature of sin (Moltmann-Wendel 1991:79).

On the subject of sin, Moltmann-Wendel (1997:111) states that feminist theology shows that there are distinctions between men and women pertaining to sin, that needs to be recognised. Among women, sin is viewed more in the light of not appreciating themselves, to deny their selves and to not live out their full creation. For men, sin is seeking to be God-like and not accepting himself in a worthy and

comfortable way as a creature because most male concepts of sin begin with the need of human beings to be like God. Moltmann-Wendel (2000:54) refers to the work of Goldstein in this regard, who says that there is something different in the sin of women, which cannot be described in male terms such as pride or striving for power. Female sin, not female virtue, is therefore lack of 'self-love', 'self-contempt', self-confidence, modesty, unselfishness, seeking peace and obsessing over harmony (Moltmann-Wendel 2000:56).

For Moltmann-Wendel (2000:52) this goes hand in hand with guilt, which is experienced more by women than men. This is particularly true of the Protestant culture from which Moltmann-Wendel writes and the tradition to which I also belong (Moltmann-Wendel 2000:59). Women more often excuse themselves, explain, ask for understanding and seek the root of the problem in themselves. Women are extremely sensitive to their guilt. Moltmann-Wendel (2000:53) asks how women can remove themselves from this evil circle of always feeling guilty.

With reflection on the theology of the cross she specifically drew attention to feminist theologians who directly rejected and outraged by a theology of the cross (McDougall 2012:167, Moltmann-Wendell & Moltmann 191:77). Cooper- White (1995:461) writes that Moltmann-Wendel examines the symbol of the cross without discarding it as other feminist scholars do, she rather reframes it as a "living act of integrity" not a "self-negating act of sacrifice".

Johnson (1994:15) states with regard to Christian doctrine of the cross, that yes, it shows the Father's grace and forgiveness, but that this grace and forgiveness is subject to the suffering of an innocent child. This according to Johnson, equates God's will with violence and punishment and feminist theologians argue that this can have social consequences of justifying patriarchal and authoritative behaviour. More of these criticisms, as shown by Hilkert (1995:327), include statements that the symbol of the cross is more problematic for feminist theologians as the cross itself, by describing it as encouragement for "women disciples to accept the role of passive victim". This has implications for the context of violence against women and children and that "the Father allows or even inflicts the death of his only perfect son" describing it as a form of "cosmic child abuse."

The work of Mary Hunt (1991:150), a theologian Moltmann-Wendel also discusses, argues how the central saying about friendship in the book of John, that there is no greater love than the person who lays down his life for that of his friends, shows a Christianity obsessed on the symbolism of death. Hunt wants to reinterpret this metaphor of friendship because women will not put the death of a friend at the centre but rather the survival of women, a metaphor derived from women's experience where a group of women will triumph over injustice without losing someone resulting in a "feminine history of resurrection". This communal ideology of friendship and solidarity is a theme also present in the work of Oduyoye (2001:21) when writing that women's theology is created in situations of women's solidarity, where in the community of women no one is treated as an object. They recognise mutual interdependence, support and correction embarking on the same journey in search of relevance. Moltmann-Wendel (2001:25) comments on Hunt's work on friendship saying that it is "stimulating, militant and oriented on life" and in the view of incarnation it takes the first strides towards "embodiment and this-worldliness".

Moltmann-Wendel (2000:31) argues further on the subject of the Lord's supper, that she like many others are opposed to the deeply-rooted notion of sacrifice fundamental for the Eucharist. This is because women, still today, become and internalise the behaviour of victims and second because this notion is the opposite of what feminist theology understands of God. Self-surrender and sacrifice is no attraction to women and in feminist circles, this has been dramatically criticised (Moltmann-Wendel 2000:44). Moltmann-Wendel (2000:41-42) argues for the Eucharist to be once again celebrated as a meal of friendship, fellowship and liberation not only of sacrifice. With this being said the challenge for Moltmann-Wendel was the criticism of the central symbol of the Christian faith, and she asked the question if feminist theology will become a theology without the cross (Moltmann-Wendell & Moltmann 191:77-78)?

McDougal (2012:167) wrote that "this feminist consensus against the theology of the cross did not sit well with this Reformed theologian" referring to Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel. This did not mean that Moltmann-Wendel suggested there should be no feminist critique of the cross because she admits the cross as it has been preached so many times, past and present, has had fatal consequences for women (McDougal

2012:167). Moltmann-Wendel (1991:77) tells of various women's interpretations of the cross and the way that it has become problematic for many women and fails to bring them any strength. She argues further that the preaching and interpretation of the cross have had terrifying costs. For example, to 'take up your cross'⁴⁰ has been used to urge women to tolerate an abusive or violent husband or to accept social injustices⁴¹. To 'crucify one's flesh'⁴² is another example offered by Moltmann-Wendel, saying that it can denounce pleasure, joy and desire. These types of interpretations of the cross could further contribute to the oppression of women (Moltmann-Wendell & Moltmann 191:77).

On the subject of feminist critique of the cross, Moltmann-Wendel did challenge some of these feminist objections, saying that the concerns against the cross are unsolved. They need to be examined in the context of male thought patterns. It also has to be asked if these critiques are justified (McDougall 2010:167, Moltmann-Wendel & Moltmann 1991:80). First, the opinion that the cross is sadomasochistic showing how the Father violently murders His own Son for the redemption of humanity, Moltmann-Wendel counters this argument by saying that although Paul showed us that God was the agent of the crucifixion it was at the hand of humans that Jesus was crucified. Second, there are feminist re-imaginings of the cross to minimise the violence associated with it, using goddess myths, but for Moltmann-Wendel this poses a dangerous de-politicisation of the cross. Last, Moltmann-Wendel rejects the feminist argument that the sacrifice of the cross establishes an unhealthy paradigm for women's discipleship. Which in turn cultivates obedience and subjection and puts women at risk of oppression and abuse, saying that we should rather focus on Jesus's life instead of his death. These criticisms underscore, according to McDougal (2012:167)⁴³, that feminist theology's dismissal of the theology of the cross does not seem to be consistent with the Biblical witness and puts a limit on painful experiences

⁴⁰ Matthew 16:24 (ESV)

⁴¹ Joanna Dewey (2004) argues from a New Testament perspective that Christians today and especially Christian women often interpret this piece of Scripture (in her article she cites Mark 8:34) as a call to self-sacrifice, subservience and to endure suffering all of this because of discipleship. Dewey argues that this is a misreading of this particular text.

⁴² Galatians 5:24 (ESV)

⁴³ These criticisms of critiques of the cross can be read more in detail in Moltmann. *Moltmann-Wendel, E & Moltmann, J. 1991. God: His and Hers. London: SCM Press.*

and the hopes that people have.

Moltmann-Wendel also offers constructive alternative proposals to her criticisms (McDougall 2012:168-169). She encourages feminists to pay closer attention to the women we find at the cross and how they can be in solidarity with the suffering of women throughout history and at the present. With this, she also suggests the focus of attention on the dangerous memories of women with regard to their suffering and helping to find alternative ways of healing. Last, she suggests that feminist theologians attend to the redemptive possibilities of the feeling of being God forsaken on Easter Friday and the experience of the women on resurrection Sunday.⁴⁴ Oduyoye (2001:10) also writes on this subject of resurrection, who uses the image of the resurrected body of Christ to deal with the spirituality of hope of African women. For African women, hope is a live reality despite the history of subjugation, poverty, sickness, death and the culture of hospitality. African women's resilience lies in the hope of resurrection (Oduyoye 2001:113, Ras 2017). Oduyoye (2001:113) explains this the following way:

They retell again and again the story of the three women who set out to anoint the body of 'the crucified one', knowing full well that there was a colossal stone to be rolled away before they could reach the body. Not even Africa's mammoth poverty can breed despair in women even though from the outside what others see is a future of 'pain, death, the misery of watching one's children die and the death of hope itself'. The 'death of hope' is an impossible concept in African women's theology, because they believe Scripture that says, with God, they can scale walls.

Ackerman (1996:144) also describes hope as something that women have to create and that this is why women challenge all that is disempowering and to wait for the "fullness of new life" because they refuse to give way to death, hopelessness and unconcern.

These arguments of Moltmann-Wendel, Oduyoye and Ackerman surrounding the

⁴⁴ These proposals for the theology of the cross can be read more in detail in Moltmann. *Moltmann-Wendel, E & Moltmann, J. 1991. God: His and Hers. London: SCM Press.*

cross and resurrection correlate with the theological work of American Theologian Serene Jones, who proposes a theology of the Trinity and the cross that can carry the weight of suffering and loss. Jones (2009:128) writes more specifically about unwanted reproductive loss. She echoes Moltmann-Wendel when asking how can feminist theory and theology can help with women's experiences and respond to women's questions? McDougall (2012:169) also mentions Jones's work saying that it offers a moving account of women survivors of violence finding peace, rest and strength between themselves and the story of the passion of Christ.

At this point, the research can engage with the topic of reproductive health, as Serene Jones shows in her work as well as the theology of the cross. Moltmann-Wendel develops the cross to be a powerful symbol for loss and suffering often associated with reproductive health. When women (also men and couples) experiencing an unwanted reproductive loss such as a stillbirth, miscarriage, involuntary childlessness and struggles related to infertility, this image of the Trinity carrying the loss of Christ (Jones 2009:128) and a Father His child can offer some consoling theology to women with the loss of a child or possible children. She suggests that women who have experienced their own wombs as the graves of their unborn children while remaining alive themselves can teach us something about the Trinity (Kenneson 2001:344). The heart of the Triune God is a mystery, but through the experience of reproductive loss, a powerful image of God can be made possible. Jones argues that the death of God's Son can be an image that provides necessary and possible grace-filled resource for women who have suffered from reproductive loss and is still embracing the future. Jones suggests that because of the painful experience of the Trinity witnessing the death of Jesus Christ on the cross, women holding similar loss of a child in their bodies can find comfort and solidarity in this knowledge. Dealing with reproductive loss in this theologically and pastorally tender way may possibly contribute to a more open, honest and helpful conversation surrounding unwanted reproductive loss.

Also as Moltmann-Wendel argues that we do not shy away from the death, loss and suffering of the cross but to offer women who are challenged with loss, death and suffering relating to reproductive health redemptive possibilities using this above proposed feminist theology of the cross. The cross can also offer women, challenged with these issues of reproductive health, the solidarity in suffering from the women we

find at the cross. Women who as Ackerman states in the above-mentioned argument refused to give way to death and hopelessness and as Oduyoye shows can find restoration and healing in the resurrection.

Hilkert (1995:327) mentions, in connection with these thoughts on the cross that Moltmann-Wendel argues, when we look at the context of Jesus' life, ministry and relationships the cross can be recovered as a symbol of wholeness and life, not only of death and violence. To briefly attempt a summary of Moltmann-Wendel's theology of the cross McDougall's (2012:173) explanation has to suffice. Regarding the feminist critique of the cross, Moltmann-Wendel (1991:85-86) writes that this perception of religion without violence begs the question whether it is ignoring reality and taking cover behind the life of Jesus without giving attention to the death of Jesus.

Moltmann-Wendel does not rush to the feminist theology of empowerment. She takes time to work through the silence, loss, despair and God forsakenness one finds at the cross because the cross offers a unique space for the suffering of women. This suffering can include the evils of patriarchy, of violence, their personal lives and the relationships captivated by sin. This theology of the cross does not romanticise or enhance suffering, but simply offers the witness the truth that the suffering women endure is not hidden or ignored by God (McDougall 2012:173). Hilkert (1995:327) also offers redemptive possibilities for the cross, and states that feminist liberation theologians argue for a cross with a prophetic and liberating message, but that this does not take away from the tragedy, suffering and evil, it highlights those who did not leave Jesus - the women around the cross. This interpretation of the cross shows how Jesus was not a passive victim of God's plan for human sin, but that Jesus's death was a final act of resistance of evil and death along with his solidarity with suffering and injustice (Hilkert 1995:327, Johnson 1994:15). Moltmann-Wendel (1991:91) asks that feminists can rediscover in discussions surrounding the cross "a sign of salvation that we can erect out of death and nothingness and transplant into new spheres." Elizabeth Johnson (1994:15) echoes Moltmann-Wendel by saying that "(the cross) stands in history as a life-affirming protest against all torture and injustice, and as a pledge that the transforming power of God is with those who suffer to bring about life for others."

The next section will discuss the exegetical work of Moltmann-Wendel, this is important because it shows the fresh interpretations she had surrounding certain texts when women were implicated in the stories.

b) Gender-critical Biblical interpretations

Moltmann-Wendel did important work on the narratives including the women that surrounded Jesus in the time spent on earth. I am not a Biblical scholar so this next section will not be an attempt on Biblical exegesis, only reflection on the Biblical interpretations, which in my opinion are executed with a gender-critical lens, of Moltmann-Wendel. Due to the scope of this research Moltmann-Wendel's hermeneutical approach in reading Scripture is not discussed to the full extent that is possible. A gender-critical approach to Scripture can be broadly defined the following way (Müller van Velden 2018:18):

...gender criticism refers to the range of approaches that engage critically with matters pertaining to gender and sexuality, of which the most familiar are feminist, womanist, and queer criticism, as well as masculinity studies... it refers to a hermeneutical approach that interrogates the male/female and masculine/feminine binary, and the type of power relations invested in such a binary...it is an approach which aims at critiquing and questioning polarization, dualism, complementarity, essentialism, and even social constructivism, as it relates to gender and sexuality.

The reason for the inclusion of this section is to show how Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel engaged with Scripture throughout some of her theological work. Swidler states that Jesus was a feminist, feminist being a human being who affirms and realises the sameness of man and woman, someone who seeks to treat women primarily as human beings (Moltmann-Wendel 1974:132). Moltmann-Wendel (1974:132) shows how Swidler interprets Biblical texts where Jesus encounters different women and how these encounters can be described as being feminist. Oduyoye (1998:32) agrees with this when saying that Jesus was “pro-women and the poor” unlike His Jewish counterparts. Jesus questions the notions of women as sex objects, he rejects the blood taboos of his day, he shows compassion to women no one dared to, challenged

marriage and divorce traditions where it concerned women. He also made the intellectuality of women a high priority and used a metaphor that compared God to a woman (Moltmann-Wendel 1974:138-146). Schenker (2000:80) also includes this in the discussion on Christianity and the status of women arguing that with in the case of divorce Jesus did away with this “low estimation of women”.

When discussing the life and view of Mary Magdalene, Moltmann-Wendel (1982:64, 2000:71) vents her anger at the distorted view of this woman as the ‘great sinner’, equating her life with that of sexual sin, as years of misinterpretations have been cast upon her. She writes that sexual guilt complexes have been projected onto Mary Magdalene and the advocates for a moral life have been using her life as an example. She describes the process of how this distorted and confusing view of Mary Magdalene came into being, how at the cost of women, a provoking image was created in the patriarchal church and how this picture of Mary Magdalene was constructed by men and for male fantasies. Mary’s history in Luke 8 was combined by the story of the woman who was a great sinner in Luke 7, and also the story of Mary of Bethany with her jar of ointment in John 12 (Moltmann-Wendel 2000:69). Moltmann-Wendel (1982:66) asks the question, what happened to the great male sinner, did something like this exist and how have we dealt, still today, with the double standards for male and female sin?

Women in the church have for so long been exposed to this view and narrative of Mary Magdalene and have had to identify with her submitting to the image and story that has been presented over centuries (Moltmann-Wendel 1982:67). Moltmann-Wendel (1982:84) challenges the system of sexism present in this issue and argues that a new and healed person of Mary Magdalene would need to be encountered and that her eroticism is freed from the narrow view of sexuality that for so long resulted in discrimination and stigmatisation at her expense.

In her theological work Moltmann-Wendel strongly emphasises various feminist interpretations of Biblical texts, but especially gives attention to the fact that the disciples deserted Jesus at His greatest moment of suffering at the cross. The women around Jesus were the first ones to witness the resurrection and that a woman knew about the messianic secret before any man (Moltmann-Wendel 1982:99,109,

Moltmann-Wendel & Moltmann 1991:1, 54).

On the subject of the women at the tomb of Jesus, Moltmann-Wendel makes a very important observation. Officially church history began with the sending out of the male apostles, and officially these apostles did not include women. Moltmann-Wendel argues that the story of the women at the tomb of Jesus in Matthew should actually be presented as the beginning of church history, not the story of the former (Moltmann-Wendel & Moltmann 1991:1). This was the beginning of a church governed, moulded and lead by men. God is thought of in predominantly masculine terms, such as a judge, king, warlord or ruler. Feminine attributes such as warmth, nearness, tenderness are ignored (Moltmann-Wendel & Moltmann 1991:1). Moltmann-Wendel (1978:93) also presents the argument of Phyllis Trible on how Biblical interpretations can be highly patriarchal; God only seen as the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Jesus and Paul.

She also shows how in the light of certain texts, women are often perplexed at their supposed roles or the options thereof. As in the story of Mary sitting at the feet of Jesus while Martha is serving her guests, Moltmann-Wendel illustrates how women are left with a difficult choice between two options, servants who are constantly apprehensive or learners who fail to do their part of the work (Rigby 2012:181). In this way of interpreting certain texts, Moltmann-Wendel asks difficult questions of how the Biblical texts have been complicit in assigning gender roles to women (and men) that are still present in our societies and churches today.

As discussed in the previous section, Moltmann-Wendel reflected on these questions in her own life as a mother, wife and theologian in her autobiography. Rigby (2012:181) argues that Moltmann-Wendel helps women who wrestle with Biblical stories, to break the mould of, for example, Martha and Mary and that she does this in ways that are accessible to those with no formal education on Biblical interpretation. She develops models of Biblical women that can be used “by everyone” (Rigby 2012:181). Ras (2017) when discussing African women’s theologies state that a very important part of these theologies is the approach to reconstructive theology made possible by storytelling. Ras (2017) writes that the stories of women and communities in African contexts can be used for the purpose of healing and reconciliation. Connecting Ras’s argument with that of Moltmann-Wendel’s argument for a different approach to stories

of women in the Bible through a gender-critical perspective, Moltmann-Wendel also asks for a reconstructive theology through a different approach to telling the stories of the Bible. These stories that can contribute to healing and restoration.

c) Friendship

Sallie McFague (1982:190) describes, how friendship is important for men and women and for the whole of humankind, but that friendship is also relevant among women in relation to men. On the subject of friendship, Moltmann-Wendel takes back the narrative of that of women's friendships. She argues that the category of friendship is not often discussed in feminist theologies (Gonzalez 2012:193). She describes how women's relationships are usually presented as "competitive, selfish, and vicious" and that it needs to be reclaimed as an empowering and ground-breaking thought (Gonzalez 2012:193). Moltmann-Wendel (2000: 2-3) writes the following:

...friendship between women introduces new emphases: in it, public and private characteristics are combined. It flourishes in everyday life, awakens hitherto unknown energies, and creates freedom from family ties. It also brings openness to same sex relationships between women and to homosexual partnerships. There is friendship as a political factor, friendship as freedom for other forms of life, friendship as earthing – as a source of the discovery of one's own personality and as liberation from rigid forms of life.

Moltmann-Wendel (2000:3) also argues that the traditional ways of thinking about family are undergoing a cultural change. Family ties and norms are beginning to fade into the background and are replaced by more groups of friends. This can be in addition to the family but also as a substitute. She also asks if we are on our way towards a friendlier culture where domination, violence and hierarchy will be replaced. She notes that in theological circles there has also been a shift towards the term "tenderness" that can replace the dominating images of God and human behaviour (Moltmann-Wendel 2000:4).

The image of 'God the friend' has been forgotten and unwelcome in our present theological thought patterns and hierarchal churches. This thought of 'God as a friend'

also unlocked negativity in feminist theology. Although Moltmann-Wendel (2000:6) debates that this image of God as our friend is present in many peoples search for God as an ally, companion and someone who can support in times of need and through life's complexities. Here Moltmann-Wendel (2000:20) draws on the work of theologian Carter Heyward, where friends and friendships saturate her theology and provide a basic pattern in her work. She asks that we give bodily form to God and that this can happen through friendships and friends (Moltmann-Wendel 2000:27). McFague argues similarly, that the world is God's body, meaning she recognises the relationship between God and the world in the human relationship of the Spirit of the body (Moltmann-Wendel 2000:28). She writes that when we speak or write about God as a friend, this title does not exclude other titles we use for God, for her God is also what we can think of as mother or father, sister or beloved, friend or brother⁴⁵. These images for Heyward express how God can build bridges between us and that God is the power in a relationship. Reflecting on God in terms of friendship can enlighten our own image of friendships. We can also experience God, the divine, in friendship and as a power in relationship.

Moltmann-Wendel (2000:32) offers a critique of the long-standing father and child relationship metaphor we have for God, and how this relationship is only defined by sin. This metaphor only shows paternalistic qualities indicating dependence. She argues further that this ignores areas such as earth, birth and body, areas which can again be recovered under the ideas of friendship. Moltmann-Wendel (2000:26) further discusses the work of Hildegund Keul, who states that the image of God is one who listens passionately, like a woman friend who listens to her friend, and that in this way She can become a companion to liberation. This is different from the more traditional image we have of God. When discussing the topic of reproductive health and this theology of friendship Moltmann-Wendel presents it offers liberating possibilities for women who face difficulties surrounding reproductive health. When the relationship with God is redefined as mentioned above by more feminine characteristics (earth, birth and body), and as a friendship relationship (listener, companion), it may be easier

⁴⁵ Juliana Claasens's work in the field of Old Testament studies also argues for new and fresh ways of thinking and speaking about God. In her book, *Mother, Mourner, Midwife: Reimagining God's delivering presence in the Old Testament*, Claasens (2012) argues for liberating God-language and present three alternatives for speaking and thinking about God.

for women (and men) to engage with God, and subsequently the Christian community and church, about the reproductive challenges they face. Can this have a liberating and transformative implication for some of the discussions and issues surrounding the field of reproductive health?

Moltmann-Wendel (2000:11) shows in her book, *Rediscovering Friendship*, how the relationship between Jesus and his disciples can also be described with closeness and as friendship and how these relationships included friendships with women. She also comments on how the term 'friend' is an important description of relationships in the time of early Christianity, these relationships were not based on certain links, blood or kinship. It suggested a new community or society based on fellowship and the inclusion of outcasts. Moltmann-Wendel (2000:13) draws on the work of Sallie McFague, who wrote various studies centred on the concept of friendship. She explains that in the Bible the original opposite of friend is not an enemy but a stranger, friendship does not exclude strangers but includes them. Moltmann-Wendel (2000:17-19) mentions two theologians, Jürgen Moltmann and Sallie McFague, who both use the stories of where Jesus ate with sinners and tax collectors to illustrate how his sharing meals with strangers initiated the relationship of friendship.

For Moltmann-Wendel (2000:31) Jesus as a friend also has become necessary and important again. Here Moltmann-Wendel (2000:38) draws on the work of African Feminist Theologians, who state that women still have an interest in Jesus as a friend. According to Mercy Oduyoye, the Jesus of women in Africa is a friend, companion, meets their needs, has power over death and liberator of patriarchal and oppressive structures (Moltmann-Wendel 2000:38). This image of a compassionate Jesus proclaims solidarity with those who suffer and can lead to the renewal of life (Moltmann-Wendel 2000:39). It concerns Moltmann-Wendel that a Christology of friendship has not been developed, this when Jesus is clearly concerned with friendships and experienced as a friend. Why cannot Christianity have more brotherly and sisterly friendships, friends that can heal and forgive, liberate and transform (Moltmann-Wendel 2000:40)?

Moltmann-Wendel (2000:70, 77) makes a special reference to the relationship between Jesus and Mary Magdalene. They shared a special intimacy and she is

described as the companion of the Saviour, a leader, it is also said that Christ loved her and sometimes kissed her on the mouth, offending the disciples. Moltmann-Wendel (2000:70) uses the terms erotic and mystical fellowship to describe their relationship. She explores that the story of Mary Magdalene and her otherness could take the church back to what it is supposed to be. Leading from “disembodied togetherness” to “embodied communication”, putting listening before speaking, making brothers and sisters into friends and out of this a friendship could arise, like Jesus and Mary Magdalene, which is not characterised by dependence but by caring and Eros (Moltmann-Wendel 2000:81).

To end of this section Moltmann-Wendel (2000:119) writes that an everyday experience like friendship can break away with alienation and hostilities in our lives and that the word friendship can break down the hierarchies that oppress us. To live in this process of friendship can result in friendliness, attentiveness, tenderness and where we can experience something of the secret of God’s power (Moltmann-Wendel 2000:120).

The following section will discuss how Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel’s theological work included a central focus on the body, embodiment and bodiliness.

3.3.3 Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel And The Body

In this section of the theological work of Moltmann-Wendel, the focus will be on how Moltmann-Wendel uses and portrays the body and bodiliness in her theology. As above-mentioned, her work in *“I am my body”* will not be included in this discussion as the next chapter will be devoted to this specifically.

According to Hilkert (1995:327), embodiment is a crucial and essential part of feminist theology. Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel dedicated a significant amount of attention to the body and embodiment in her theological work. In her reflections in her autobiography, Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel writes of the early encounters with ideas and revelations of “freeing” the body, asking whether the body should not be just as important as the soul and often wrote about the rediscovering of the body (Moltmann-Wendel 1997:33,37,56). She encountered other theologians and scholars who spoke

with openness about, sex, sexuality and sexual practices and also how male and achievement centred our sexual ideas were. Moltmann-Wendel (1997:52) also shows how it developed that the male and female body began to receive more attention as the site where oppression and liberation can take place. She describes the challenges of including sex and sexuality into the academic sphere of discussion and she recalls how an African consultation avoided the topic of sex because of its mysterious nature and that the church should respect this mystery (Moltmann-Wendel 1997:105).

In ancient times and society, according to Moltmann-Wendel (1982:103), the human body was seen as taboo when unclean, sick or dead. To touch such a body would render a person unclean. Still, in today's modern society there are taboos surrounding the body, especially pertaining to sexuality. Moltmann-Wendel writes about her own experiences stating that the topic of sex was a taboo in many churches and that this made it difficult for women to publicly share their experiences. Luckily progress was made from discussions of these topics. Theologians were asked to engage in discussions where the body is central and taken seriously. This ensured that the theology being deliberate could not pass over these themes of sex, sexuality and the body. Moltmann-Wendel (1997:109) shows how the theology of the Reformation was emerging with contemporary ideas such as feminism, psychology and natural sciences on the topic of a holistic human being and how this challenged the dualism of body and soul.

For Moltmann-Wendel (1997:165) the human body and especially the female body became a place of experience and recognition which resulted in new theological thinking and new life. She describes this process as the “embodiment of a negative experience of women”, but at the same time a place where liberation can start from. For her, women can experience and be aware that human beings understand with their bodies, perceive with their senses and discover and see through their social experiences (Moltmann-Wendel & Moltmann 1991: xi). This is also true of how Christian women of faith believe and experience Jesus, that Jesus was whole, fully human and that this can liberate us to be fully human too (Moltmann-Wendel & Moltmann 1991:54). Oduyoye (2001:104) concurs when she writes that she hopes women themselves will feel fully human in the body that God has given them and that they have to come to terms with their embodiment.

Moltmann-Wendel discovered that acceptance of being a body can be a source of new meaning. She was convinced by Ruther's analyses of the dualism in theology including splitting the body and Spirit and also Millet's political view of how sex can be exploited politically (Moltmann-Wendel 1997:165). On the subject of the dualist notions of body and soul, Hilkert (1995:327) writes that the linkage of women to body and nature is a basic issue for feminist theologians and that this link has often resulted in a dualistic hierarchical view of mind and soul over the body. Men were traditionally linked with the mind and soul and women with the body. It has to be noted though that feminists also value the uniqueness of a woman's embodied experience (Hilkert 1995:327).

This process of feminist thought with regard to embodiment led Moltmann-Wendel to think about the body not being private and inwardly but a political organ that can represent devastation as well as redemption (Moltmann-Wendel 1997:166). She moved towards a new understanding of the body that made it possible to experience the body in the way it moves and flows and considered the body more from a feminist standpoint and how this can develop in the Theology of Embodiment (Moltmann-Wendel 1997:166-167). Moltmann-Wendel (1997:167) challenged Western feminist theology's difficulties to think in these terms of the body because it tends to focus more on the patriarchal abuse of the woman's body rather than taking an affirmative approach to the body. Although the experience of the body was taken seriously and the notion of embodiment is present in feminist theology but according to Moltmann-Wendel the experience was not being identical to the body.

Hilkert (1995:327) similarly notes that feminists agree that embodiment plays a central role in the Christian faith. Although there is not one clear definition of embodiment, feminist theologians argue that if we have better appreciation of the embodied character of our existence, this can have the transformative potential in our understanding of what it means to be human, consequently challenging traditional anthropological beliefs of the superiority of rationality and independence over affectivity and interdependence (Hilkert 1995:327).

Rigby (2012:184) writes about the hermeneutical approaches Moltmann-Wendel took and argues for Protestant hermeneutics, it shows how we have lost sight of the

character of Gods' embodied self. Moltmann-Wendel stated that we should not lose the fundamental truth, that God has become body and is body, in our doing theology. She urges us to remember that unfortunately at the centre of our faith lies this unconceivable and inconvenient belief that God became a body (Rigby 2012:185). Moltmann-Wendel (2000:99) maintains that God has become human, and the fact that God has taken a body invites us to take our bodies seriously and ask whether they have a part in the divine.

Throughout the Bible we encounter Jesus's humanity and tenderness, he is full of compassion, he needs cushions when he sleeps, he feels, he touches other people's bodies, he spits, embraces and kisses (Rigby 2012:185, Moltmann-Wendel 2000:84). Johnson (1994:12) states similarly, on the subject of salvation, that if Jesus fed, healed, soothed and cared for persons and their bodies, and if his resurrection affirms our part in the wholeness God can give, then salvation is not only for the soul but for the body as well. Salvation then is not only for heaven but for this world too. Moltmann-Wendel also takes this approach to salvation when discussing the stories of the woman suffering from blood flow in Mark and the bent woman made straight in Luke.

Moltmann-Wendel (1991:54) writes that for a long time Jesus' humanity was hidden under the masculinity that church and society so badly wanted him to portray, but that Jesus was a person who experienced happiness, grief and fatigue. Jesus experienced hunger and could be offended, at times he was uncertain of himself and doubted God. We see Jesus maturing, that he needed others, and that other people could anger and disappoint him. With this Moltmann-Wendel engages with masculinity studies, addressing gender as a whole and focuses not only on women in this particular regard.

Jesus also ignored the body taboos of the time and society he lived in, for him this did not exist. Jesus touched and healed those who were sick, obliterating the boundaries sustained by the beliefs that these bodies should be isolated, restoring them as part of God's created good (Moltmann-Wendel 1982:103, Moltmann-Wendel 1986:80). The same goes for Jesus's encounters with the body of a dead girl and a bleeding woman, both unclean and seen as untouchable and off-limits. Rigby (2012:185,186) shows further how this notion is very important because of our culture and society which isolates people and ignores our senses. In a section in her book on friendship,

Theogusty-tasting God, Moltmann-Wendel (2000:47) comments that the meals Jesus and his friends enjoyed together were completely experienced, through “happiness, satisfaction, pleasure and vital strengthening”. She asks how we can again use similar meals today, especially the Eucharist, in ways so that we can again taste and see how friendly God is. It is the Eucharist that brings us right next to the body, liberating us (Moltmann-Wendel 2000:50).

It is, for this reason, Moltmann-Wendel argues that this theology of tenderness should find its place in this culture as a means of communication. We associate tenderness with closeness, warmth and snuggling up and makes most people think of sexuality or more simply just love (Moltmann-Wendel 2000:82). With this being said Moltmann-Wendel shows that tenderness and *eros* are not theological concepts and are not present in Dogmatics nor directly in the Bible. For that matter, we cannot find these terms in any sermon. She draws on the work of Heinrich Böll when writing how this term of tenderness was described as feminine, belittled and ignored, was revived when he stated that we have a church that was anything but tender (Moltmann-Wendel 2000:84). Moltmann-Wendel (2000:85) called this a “cultural shift” where the distinction between body and soul was being questioned. Rigby (2012:186) asks a relevant question of what the implications are for this theology of tenderness with regard to the current phenomenon of the internet church and virtual communion. How are we to do theology, and in this case a theology of tenderness, in a society withdrawing and yet longing for human contact and connection? Rigby (2012:186) asks what it would “look like to eat a roll with all one’s senses, understanding this act in relation to the “embodied God””?

At this point in the discussion of Moltmann-Wendel’s work, I would like to connect this topic of tenderness and the suggestion by Moltmann-Wendel that a theology of tenderness can offer liberating ways forward where the body is concerned. The topic of fertility and infertility in the South African context with regard to reproductive health is discussed in this regard⁴⁶. Fertility challenges and consequently infertility is affecting

⁴⁶ I collaborated on a chapter, discussing the implications Moltmann-Wendel’s theology of tenderness for reproductive health, that will be published later this year in the following edited volume: Van Zyl, F., 2019 forthcoming, 'Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel's theology of tenderness: Implications for reconceiving reproductive health', in M. Kotzé, N. Marais & N.

15% of South Africans⁴⁷. A theology of tenderness can assist a Christian faith or church community with appropriate theological language, helpful Biblical interpretation and educated pastoral guidance when dealing with men and more specifically women who are faced with fertility dilemmas. Learning from Moltmann-Wendel's interpretation on the life and work of Jesus, who especially challenged the disconnect with our bodies, blood and body taboos (as mentioned above) and engaged in liberating ways with the women he encountered, a new approach of tenderness can be imagined. This will have the implication of reconceiving our daily confrontation as a Christian church, faith communities and leaders with the ever-increasing fertility challenges people face today. The stigma surrounding infertility and the isolation that childlessness bring are just a few realities a theology of tenderness can begin to counter. A similar argument can be presented for the discussion surrounding the ethics of the use of reproductive technology (such as *in vitro* fertilisation, artificial insemination and surrogacy⁴⁸) where infertility is a reality.

Moltmann-Wendel insists that touching will help us experience and accept our bodies. According to Rigby (2012:187), we cannot commune without our bodies, because this is what we are and because God entered into these bodies with us, showing and receiving tenderness from us. Consequently, Moltmann-Wendel invites us to experience God, ourselves and others. Touching makes us experience, accept, love, see and listen to our bodies again. Our body is stimulated through our skin, our largest and most sensitive organ and this can make it possible for us to experience once again

Müller van Velden (eds.), *Reconceiving Reproductive Health: Theological and Christian Ethical Reflections*, pp. 51-66, AOSIS, Cape Town. It is included in this dissertation with the permission of the editors."

⁴⁷ More of the research done in South Africa surrounding infertility can be read at the following link: <https://www.health24.com/Medical/Diseases/Infertility-general-20120721>

⁴⁸ To read more on specific reproductive technologies see: Dyer, S.J & Kruger T. F. 2012. *Assisted reproductive technology in South Africa: First results generated from the South African Register of Assisted Reproductive Techniques*. South African Medical Journal. 102 (3). Also to better understand the scope of the debate surrounding assisted reproduction consult Schenker (2000:85) who briefly discusses various religions and denominations perspective on assisted reproduction.

the holistic being that is our body, soul and Spirit (Moltmann-Wendel 2000:86). This was the way Jesus healed, by touching, not by great words or speeches, putting an invitation to the church of today to follow his example, because through touching and being touched by others, healing and incarnation can take place (Moltmann-Wendel 2000:86,98). Moltmann-Wendel (2000:88) offers a brief critique on the thoughts and arguments on a theology of tenderness saying that women are afraid to be forced back into these notions of tenderness and motherliness and can be viewed the opposite as renewing, liberating and emancipatory.

In Moltmann-Wendel's hermeneutical approach to texts, especially about women in the Bible around Jesus, she takes into account the bodies of the characters. Moltmann-Wendel (1986:80) also shows how Jesus frees women from their social and traditional roles, he addresses them as individuals and makes them independent individuals. In the story of Martha and her sister Mary, Moltmann-Wendel (1982:21,36, 1986:84-85) shows how these women's embodiment has been portrayed. Martha embodied righteous works and active Christianity and this image got confused and complicated with the image of her more thoughtful sister Mary and thus rendering her worthless. Martha the more mature and stable figure of the two, where Mary has been made the embodiment of lust, sexuality and the flesh, all of this thought of and encouraged by men. These images proved to have grave implications for women in the church reflecting on this story of Mary and Martha. Moltmann-Wendel's use of imagination in rediscovering these images and stories will be discussed in the next section of this chapter.

In her book, *Women around Jesus*, Moltmann-Wendel (1982:68) discusses the life and story of Mary Magdalene. She suffered a great mental health illness and as a result of the healing, she received from Jesus she followed him. Moltmann-Wendel writes about the body experiences of this story. Jesus touching or embracing her, helped her to get up, how she felt a nearness and connection with Jesus and what the impact of this was on her life. She became herself again, free to decide and experience the world around her, to enjoy herself and learned to live again (Moltmann-Wendel 1982:68). Moltmann-Wendel shows how her healing of this illness became the salvation for her and how this impacted her discipleship and serving life. Her salvation was a fully embodied experience. Moltmann-Wendel (1982:69) informs us regarding

the close proximity in which Mary Magdalene lived to Jesus and describes how her serving Jesus included physical contact, human nearness, bodily warmth and a healing presence. Moltmann-Wendel (2000:15) also describes how the medieval legends show that Mary Magdalene was 'kindled with his love' and accepted her as his special friend.

Moltmann-Wendel (1982:82) illustrates how Paul in his writings was in contrast from the example set by Jesus, clearly separating the flesh and Spirit, dangerously equating sin with sexuality as well as immorality and idolatry. Paul had a fear of the body according to Moltmann-Wendel (2000:100) building further on the hatred of the body which was so clearly present in the work of Augustine. This resulted in what we can see today is a total mistrust of the body, urging Moltmann-Wendel to ask that we turn back to friendship with our bodies. She says that just as trust is evident in friendship so it should be in our relationship with our bodies as well. This friendship with our bodies can flourish in the ups and downs, intimacy and detachment and in pain and pleasure (Moltmann-Wendel 2000:102). In her writings Moltmann-Wendel (1982:83,84) presents how Western theology easily located sin only to one side, specifically to women, and that we still today suffer from this theology separating body and soul which obstructs us to discover and view our bodies as a "good" created by God. Moltmann-Wendel (1986:39) draws from the hierarchal and patriarchal dualisms such as the division between body and soul, in which the body is assigned to the woman, the division between private and public sphere, the women associated with the private, and the division between humility and power of which the former is attributed to women.

Moltmann-Wendel (1982:143) clearly challenges this dualism, especially that of the division between body and soul. Consider her interpretations of the stories surrounding Jesus, using for example the story of the crippled woman in Luke. She states that this narrative shows how the soul and the body for Jesus are not two separate entities but that "crippling for the body, is at the same time crippling of the soul." This same narrative Moltmann-Wendel uses to show that what oppresses you, surely also oppresses your body. She has been separated and isolated because of her sickness. Jesus frees this woman not only of the crippling of her body but also of the oppression, separation, loneliness and isolation her body experienced (Moltmann-Wendel &

Moltmann 1991:58).

On the subject of incarnation, Moltmann-Wendel (2000:29) writes, that the diverse “earthings” as discussed in *Rediscovering Friendship*, indicate the basis for an image of God as woman and friend or theology of friendship. This stimulates us to experience incarnation, the embodiment of God, ourselves through our hearing, touching, tasting, and the interplay between our bodies and spirits in our actions. Moltmann-Wendel (2000:103) asks the following:

What, for example, would a feminist theology of the body look like which beings with the body, disempowers all male conceptuality and is based on reality? What magic could we develop in ourselves and among ourselves if we learned again to detect and see Spirit in the body in us and among us?

Talking and thinking about the body goes hand in hand with that of a language that emphasises and celebrates embodiment, in this next section the contribution to theological language and imagination with regard to embodied language by Moltmann-Wendel will be discussed.

3.3.4 Theological Language And Imagination Of Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel

As stated in chapter 1 in the section presenting background and motivation it is necessary to devote a section to the specific and unique theological language and the use of imagination in the work of Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel. This is because she may have a valuable contribution to make to the development of theological language that speaks meaningfully to the experiences of people. Meiring (2015:4) also writes about the importance of language when discussing bodies. He acknowledges the intersection between the body and the aptitude for language and the way it is associated with rituals, myths, symbols and images. This type of bodily knowledge, including body language, is about a body constantly interacting with its environment and that body’s experiences in this particular environment (Meiring 2015:4). This language of experience is not always necessarily easy according to Meiring (2015:4). There is a tension between language and experiences, that the two cannot replace

each other and that there will always be a part of experiences that cannot be fully described by language. Kelsey (2009:3030) agrees on the challenges facing the relationship between language and experience, stating that it should not be used in a false or dishonest way.

Language played a very important part in the theological work of Moltmann-Wendel, especially in her feminist theology. She states that in the feminist movement new language and new liturgies are a common factor that can unite women, regardless of their differences (Moltmann-Wendel 1997:164). For Rigby, Moltmann-Wendel pushes beyond the interpretive options that are available to us, encouraging the re-imagination of women in the Bible that can result in new understandings of ourselves (Rigby 20120:178). Although this is not the main aim of this particular research it contributes to better illustrate Moltmann-Wendel's theological work as a whole. Rigby shows how Moltmann-Wendel focused her work to help men and women to envision the women in the Bible, and especially the New Testament, in a manner that encourages healing, wholeness and life. Showing how we have portrayed female stereotypes on these women and how we can 'tenderly' think differently about them. Rigby (2012:185) accurately describes Moltmann-Wendel as promoting "tenderness". Moltmann-Wendel, rather, draws us into a relationship with these New Testament women (Rigby 20120:178).

In her early work, Moltmann-Wendel uses the hermeneutical approach of the "joy of life", encouraging sensitivity to personality, to wholeness and the courage to follow your heart (Moltmann-Wendel 1978:86). Her aim, as mentioned previously, promotes living life to the fullest, healing, wholeness, renewal and tenderness, this correlates with the foundation of feminist theology and feminist experience (Rigby 2012:178). Rigby (2012:179) states Moltmann-Wendel develops a Christian feminist theology of Scripture that is "oriented in relationship to the embodied, incarnational reality which lies at the center of confessional Christian faith."

In the theological work of Moltmann-Wendel, she aims to interpret various texts in the Bible, especially those narrating the lives of women, in such a way that we can imagine the women, and consequently ourselves in a different and more holistic way (Rigby 2012:181). Moltmann-Wendel also draws from other possibilities to interpret Biblical

texts such as artwork and non-Biblical stories of the lives of these women. This results in new ideas and interpretations accessible to any person that seeks more holistic Biblical models of the women in the Bible. By using imagination as Moltmann-Wendel suggests we retrieve access to the Bible and an interpretative spontaneity that we have lost, and that we can use art and culture to reclaim traditions the Christian community has forgotten (Moltmann-Wendel 1982:9) (Rigby 2012:181).

Moltmann-Wendel (1982:11) discusses the possibilities for theological imagination in her book, *Women around Jesus* and shows how these possibilities can contribute to experiencing God as a liberating force. Rigby (2012:182) comments on this approach by saying that Moltmann-Wendel recommends a way of reading the Bible in the light of our experiences of God and that these experiences give permission for the use of imagination when we read the Bible. This is a “chicken-and-egg phenomenon”, as it can also be our imaginative reading that results in this liberating experience of God (Rigby 2012:182).

Moltmann-Wendel (1982:9) goes further to state why the use of imagination in theology and the church should receive attention. The past methods for approaching the Bible was either theological or Christological, ignoring the importance of imagination and simple human approaches to the Bible that value experiences and emotions. For centuries, according to Moltmann-Wendel (1982:9), the Bible has been used to “keep women under control”. Therefore, theological imagination is necessary for a church that has lost touch and marginalised women. This will give life to a liberative gospel, and a theology that can attribute to the holistic human being.

In Moltmann-Wendel’s interpretations of the Bible, her use of language becomes relevant for this research, and as I will argue later, important for her contribution to Theological Anthropology. Through the use of a certain type of language, I will argue a language of tenderness also mentioned by Rigby (2012:185), Moltmann-Wendel offers a new way of seeing for example, the stories of Mary of Bethany and Mary Magdalen amongst others, in a new light and interpreting their story. When discussing the life of Mary of Bethany, Moltmann-Wendel imagines and describes how this woman emerges from the shadows cast upon her, by becoming the “clumsy, loving, independent, tender, restrained and yet spontaneous” woman she was supposed to

be. A woman that becomes herself, a woman that, in her own way, starts a “voiceless revolution”, a free woman capable of the “loving action” she performs on Jesus (Moltmann-Wendel 1982:56, 57). Moltmann-Wendel shows in her imaginative interpretation of the story of Mary of Bethany, how this woman is emancipated through her relationship with Jesus, how this “nearness” to Jesus gives her the permission to become the person no one expected her to be.

In her further discussion on the life of Mary Magdalene, she uses language not unknown in the field of Theological Anthropology, saying that Mary’s experience with Jesus resulted in the feeling of freedom. Previously held captivated by an illness she now, through the “nearness” and “touch” of Jesus, can also experience the feeling of holistic freedom (Moltmann-Wendel 1982:68). The same type of language, as mentioned above, is used in the interpretation of the story of the unknown woman who anointed Jesus in Mark 14. Moltmann-Wendel (1982:97) describes this woman as “unashamed, tender and compassionate”, she is bold in her action, she shows sympathy for the suffering and death of Jesus and “takes her place beside him”.

In her interpretation of the story of the bent woman who was helped to stand upright again, in Luke 13, Moltmann-Wendel (1991:58) writes that she can “imagine the scene vividly” and “I can also imagine how embarrassing” this episode was in this woman’s life. Again Moltmann-Wendel emphasises the gift of freedom this woman receives through her experience with Jesus. Moltmann-Wendel (1991:58) draws on the body experiences this woman’s story is portraying and uses embodied language to describe this; becoming whole again, touch, intimacy, warmth, concern, embrace, and physical proximity.

To conclude this section, it is necessary to note some critique of Moltmann-Wendel’s use of certain language and imagination in her theological work. Rigby (2012:182) writes that there is a danger that when we use imagination in our theological reflections, we might imagine only our own self-projection and that this can create idols rather than awe for God and His creation. She further states that this fully embodied, Spirit sensitive approach can raise concerns in the Biblical scholastic community because they prefer to use historical-critical methods in their interpretation. A further concern might also be that these “dreams” and “fantasies” can refrain to lead to a

deeper understanding of who God is and what He has created us to be (Rigby 2012:183). Although, this being said, Rigby (2012:183) shows how Moltmann-Wendel suggests that we “dream” and “fantasise” in ways that bring forth healing alongside the crucial commitment to critically and wisely engage the content of Scripture.

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the theological work of Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel in as much depth as the scope of this research allowed. This chapter not only offered a brief biography of Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel but also presented the various theological themes included in her work and how it contributes and developed her Theological Anthropology and embodied language present in her work. The next section will discuss and analyse only one of her books, '*I am my Body*', which was not included in the chapter above, to explore this specific work's contribution to Theological Anthropology and the language we use when talking about our bodies.

CHAPTER 4

CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF “I AM MY BODY”: A THEOLOGY OF EMBODIMENT

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will be focused on the critical analysis of the 1995 book “*I am my Body*” by Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel. As stated in chapter 1 of this research her book shows how central the body of God (of Jesus) and the human body (the woman’s body) once were in Christianity and how that could motivate us, with looming disembodiment, to ask new questions about our bodies. Also how this can possibly make a contribution to the development of a theological language that speaks meaningfully to the experiences of people. This critical analysis will include the identification of the author’s thesis and the argument she aims to make with this work. The analysis will also identify the main ideas and broad themes Moltmann-Wendel proposes in this book, this will be best understood with a basic outline and brief summary of the book’s content. I will attempt to describe the work in my own words, in relation to Moltmann-Wendel broader spectrum of theological work within the framework of Theological Anthropology and the field of Body Theology. Most importantly this chapter will aim to explore the relevance of what Moltmann-Wendel is claiming through this specific work and to show how it answers the research question as proposed in the first chapter of this thesis. How does Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, through her work on Theological Anthropology, portray the human body and the ideas of embodiment and how does she address the tension in the two-fold claim, popular in Theological Anthropology, about having or being a body.

4.2 “I am my Body”: A Theology of Embodiment

“*I am my Body*”: *A Theology of Embodiment*, by Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, was published in 1995 by a New York publishing company Continuum, but was originally published in 1994 through Gütersloher Verlagshaus. The book was translated from German to English by John Bowden and also translated into five other languages. This book forms part of a long list of theological works by Moltmann-Wendel, all originally written in German most of which were translated into English. With this book,

Moltmann-Wendel joins a growing number of other feminist theologians who have made the body a central and important focus in their theological work (Cooper-White 1995:461). Although Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel writes from a German feminist perspective, this shared similarities with American feminism but also challenged various feminist discourses, as discussed in chapter 3. According to May (1996:420), this book is clear-sighted and courageous. This book flows well and reads easily and many, especially women, will possibly connect with the personal experiences Moltmann-Wendel shares (Cooper-White 1995:462).

In her autobiography, Moltmann-Wendel (1997:166) discussed the developing theological work surrounding the body and embodiment in the late 1980s and early 1990s. She describes a fundamental misunderstanding that she continually challenged, the idea that the body is only something private and inward. This she challenged by stating that the body is also a political organ that can represent destruction and salvation. Her work on the topic revealed that salvation cannot only be understood as the salvation of the soul but the salvation of the body as a whole. She argued that the body is not just a container and should be fully experienced. In this book, she indicates the biological differences between men and women's bodies, the dominant male body in her Western German culture and how the experiences of the women's bodies rarely become public (Moltmann-Wendel 1997:166). These examples of experiences may include amongst others, motherhood, giving birth, menstruation and menopause. This book, according to Moltmann-Wendel (1997:167), presents her thesis for a Theology of Embodiment.

4.2.1 Thesis

With this book, Moltmann-Wendel aims to "investigate the body, its experiences, its traditions and its religious and social significance, without bringing sexuality to the foreground" (Moltmann-Wendel 1995: xiii). With this statement, she offers this book as an argument for a Theology of Embodiment, which in her opinion is not a new theology but a forgotten one at the time of this book. This place of embodiment and the body can open new theological avenues for thought and action (Moltmann-Wendel 1995:103). She also states that the title of the book is "not meant to indicate some revival of Western individualism in a feminine form", but that it "refers to a self which

is bound up in this multi-dimensional body and which experiences relationships and selfhood through it" (Moltmann-Wendel 1995: xv). To elaborate on this main thesis, May (1996:419) states that Moltmann-Wendel retrieves the centrality of "the body of God (of Jesus) and the human body (women's bodies) in Christianity". For Cooper-White (1995:461), Moltmann-Wendel "offers her own version of the feminist critique of the mind-body split that entered Christianity through Greek philosophy."

4.2.2 Outline

Moltmann-Wendel (1995: xiv) states that she writes within the framework of feminist practice and theory. Therefore, she begins this book with generic examples of experience we have as different bodies, both women and men. Moltmann-Wendel writes within her own Western German context and states that these experiences happening in a culture ever-changing but still plagued by values of Western Christianity. She divides these human experiences into different stages of our lives on earth, childhood, youth, being sick and being old. In this first section Moltmann-Wendel shows how values and perception of the body still originate from the ancient mistrust Augustine had of the body, as discussed in chapter 2. She explains how he rather started from the fall and sin than from the creation and God's pleasure in earth and how this impacted his theology (May 1996:420). In her theological work, but especially in this book, Moltmann-Wendel shifts the focus of a theology of sin, exclusion and the fall to a theology of goodness, positive energy and creation (Cooper-White 1995:461). May (1996:420) writes further that we can still see this previously mentioned mistrust of our bodies and the impact this had when we look at Christian churches and communities and the distance we have from our bodies but Moltmann-Wendel appeals to us to focus on our bodies and to realise that they have voices of their own.

Moltmann-Wendel specifically mentions women's bodies. Women's bodies are violated, abused, seen as vessels and used in war, resulting in women having no bodies of their own in a society where the male body is the norm (May 1996:420). Although Moltmann-Wendel, according to May (1996:420), engages the broader subject of gender and also with this demonstrates men are just as alienated from their bodies as women, they carry heavy bodily expectations, they suppress their feelings and are more careless with their bodies. Moltmann-Wendel (1995:16-20) discusses

the vulnerability of men's bodies, showing that apart from physical strength there is not much more to affirm the phrase of 'men as the stronger sex'. Moltmann-Wendel (1995:16-20) writes that the male embryo is more susceptible to death in the womb than female embryos, the mortality rate in new-born boys are higher than girls, they take less care of their bodies and they commit suicide more often than women. "He exists at a remarkable distance from his body" according to Moltmann-Wendel (1995:17). Although Moltmann-Wendel's focus is mainly more on women's bodies than men, she dedicates a section of this book to what is currently known and discussed as masculinity studies, especially fragile, toxic and hyper-masculinity⁴⁹.

In the second section of this book, Moltmann-Wendel investigates the ambivalent role the church and Christianity played and still plays in this regard, because of the hostility towards the body and also the affinity toward the suffering body of Jesus as very unique in the Christian religion. Also relating to this according to Moltmann-Wendel, is the negative attitude towards women's bodies which are feared and denied and in the Jesus movement, a part of Jesus's life on earth and shortly thereafter. The body, and healing of the body, of women and men, played a fundamental role. In this section of the book, she focuses on these healings, which according to Moltmann-Wendel happened directly from the body to the body (May 1996:421). This movement of Jesus started a revolution that left the body free, freedom which later, according to Moltmann-Wendel was theologically and historically undermined by Paul and the early Christian church (Moltmann-Wendel 1995:39, May 1996:421):

This freedom of the body was freedom from biological social norms, above all from norms about the family, and freedom for life in the family of God, for a new life-style having particular significance for women in a society oriented around the family (Moltmann-Wendel 1995:39) (May 1996:421).

Cooper-White (1995:462) argues that this book's most important contribution is Moltmann-Wendel's exegetical work. She urges preachers to approach Scripture in

⁴⁹ For further reading on masculinity studies consult the following sources: Connell, R.W & Messerschmidt, J.W. 2005. *Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the concept*, Connell, R.W 1995. *Masculinities*. Polity Press, Chitanda, E & Chirongma, S. 2012. *Redemptive Masculinities: Men, HIV and Religion*. WCC.

ways that use images, narrative and examples of salvation and healing which speaks to us in bodily ways. Moltmann-Wendel (1995: viii) makes her argument on embodiment clear from the beginning of her book. The body was central to the message of Jesus. Despite all the repressions and adaptations as discussed in the previous section, Christianity has managed to remember the memory of the essential acceptance of the body in the Jesus movement (Moltmann-Wendel 1995:44).

The most powerful section of this book, according to May (1996:421), is the section where Moltmann-Wendel offers the argument for “a body reformation of the church” drawing from New Testament stories of healing, especially those including women. These illnesses and subsequent healing involved the whole person (May 1996:421). Moltmann-Wendel in this section offers a strong argument for the forgotten impact of touch and being touched. She argues that when we not only focus on Jesus as the miracle worker but also on the process of becoming whole, “we get a bit closer to the healing stories” (Moltmann-Wendel 1995:60). She argues that we read these stories of healing with our senses and take note of the skin contact and touch present in them, and in this way interpret what touching can mean for our modern existence (Moltmann-Wendel 1995:60). Moltmann-Wendel (1995:63) offers examples out of Scripture showing the ‘different kinds of touching’ in healing stories such as Peter’s mother-in-law (Mark 1:31), Jairus’ daughter (Mark 5:41), the epileptic boy (Mark 9:27), the bent woman (Luke 13:13) and the blind man in Mark 8:23. Moltmann-Wendel (1995:64) refers to the touch Jesus offers to people, a “democratic kind of skin contact” because he touches women, children, lepers and disciples. Through touch, Jesus offered self-confirmation, acceptance and love and he also received and experienced love, recognition and confirmation when he was touched by the unknown woman in Bethany and the woman that anointed his feet (Moltmann-Wendel 1995:64). This gives Moltmann-Wendel (1995:65) enough reason to argue that the church should look to new and old forms of touching so that the importance of touching can be reinstated.

In the third part Moltmann-Wendel explores new areas open to theological thought and action. She indicates developments in various spheres of life that are taking the body more seriously, making women independent in the use of their senses and understanding. This results in bringing our thoughts closer to the body which can have liberating consequences for women and men. She writes the following:

Unnoticed by some loud contemporary movement in recent decades, the body has emerged from the shadow of the head. This can be seen from simple testimonies by contemporary men and women. It is reflected in an ecological philosophy... It has become the topic of women, who here find a distinctive approach to their life and thought. And it could help us all to extend our restricted perspectives. This reversal is striking: the head, which for centuries was the crown of human beings, is only a part of the person (Moltmann-Wendel 1995:84).

In this section Moltmann-Wendel also offers her critique of the notion of women's bodies as vessels, resulting in this refreshing view of "thinking with the body" and using all of our senses as well as the statement that "women should understand their whole bodies" (May 1996:421, Moltmann-Wendel 1995:85).

The last part of this book is focused on bringing together thoughts of a Theology of Embodiment. Rediscovering the body can be, according to Moltmann-Wendel, a turning point in Western Christianity and the world. Moltmann-Wendel argues that not enough attention has been paid to the feminist aspect and that it is needed urgently.⁵⁰ She further urges us to look at ways we can challenge disembodiment and the hatred of the body, remembering the scandal of God becoming a body.

4.2.3 Main Ideas

In this next section of the chapter, themes that stand out for me from the work that Moltmann-Wendel provided in this book will be presented and critically interrogated. These themes included disembodiment, Jesus and the body and a Theology of Embodiment.

a) Disembodiment in the church

⁵⁰ Since this book of Moltmann-Wendel (1995), there has been progress in this regard although much more attention and research study is still needed.

For most of the Christian era the body has been mistrusted and feared (Nelson 1992:9)⁵¹. For Nelson, this means that we have not taken our bodily experiences seriously in our theological reflection. Marcella Althaus-Reid and Lisa Isherwood (2008:2) also describes that we have witnessed a Christian culture that “slice” the bodies of women through acts of theological disembodiment and that this begins with the separation between mind and body. A deadly “weapon of dualism that sustains patriarchal ideologies” (Althaus-Reid & Isherwood 2008:2). Oduyoye (2001:61) also writes about the fear of our bodies and explains that it has made it challenging to accept the integrity of our being and resulted in the separation of body and soul. As discussed in chapter two of this research, most early Christian writers and theologians made an overall distinction between body and soul. This dualism although present from as early as Aquinas and Augustine, can still be noted in theological anthropological thinking today. According to Isherwood and Stuart (1998:19), these early “church fathers” have greatly influenced the theology of the body, although not always in a positive way. Moltmann-Wendel includes this as a concern in her overall argument. The relationship between the body and Christianity is characterised by notions of the body being denied, despised, hated and controlled and Moltmann-Wendel argues that we are finding it difficult to detach from these old thought patterns (Moltmann-Wendel 1995:35). This is a statement Isherwood and Stuart (1998:52) agree with, although they attempt to offer the positivity towards the body in the Old and New Testament as well as early Christianity.

In the sphere of the church especially the female body is associated only with sexuality, something that is only supposed to be limited, controlled and managed (Moltmann-Wendel 1995:35). On the subject of sexuality Oduyoye (2001:61) argues that sexuality and spirituality are essential to our humanity and that women’s humanity cannot only be limited to their biology and to guarantee the continuity of humankind. Older and more recent church publications show how the language of discipline, renunciation and obedience of the body are still being used. This shows how the age-old anxiety of the body, its desires and needs are still present in our thoughts of and relationship with our bodies today. Our bodies and its’ desires are in many cases still

⁵¹ To read the work of Nelson on sexuality and the church see: Nelson. J. 1995. *On Doing Body Theology*.

viewed as sin incarnate, something that needs to be overcome, suppressed and oppressed by a higher authority, which in our framework represents the church (Moltmann-Wendel 1995:35).

The experience of being a body can be threatening for a lot of people, because “unfortunately we only learn that we are bodies – painfully and in a limiting way – in boundary situations: chronic illnesses, in handicaps which seem final, in old age, when there are no longer any fountains of youth to promise eternal youth” (Moltmann-Wendel 1995:2). The church has made some of the pleasures of the body suspicious to us, resulting in a disembodied society who Moltmann-Wendel argues lost more than they can imagine (Moltmann-Wendel 1995:2). Moltmann-Wendel (1995:36) argues that if we want to change these old thought patterns, an all-inclusive and wide-ranging change should be attempted in our traditional Christian doctrine of grace and sin. Moltmann-Wendel (1995:36) argues that doctrine starts from creation rather than the fall, this would result in the body being perceived as a field of energy and a political organ. Nickel (2018:66) writes on the subject of the body and justification, “justification means forfeiting the idea that a Christian’s bodily actions—along with the habits she builds up—can have any positive impact on her relationship with God.” but that “embodied human nature, after the Fall, is just too sinful for that to be the case.” Nickel (2018:66) also states the following:

Original sin is dependent on a denial of creatureliness and embodiment. Adam and Eve fall by believing they can love and trust God and yet disregard God’s commandments that require embodied obedience. Their disobedience is only possible because they believe the serpent’s lies, including the lie he tells about their status as embodied creatures.

For Moltmann-Wendel (1995:104) we need a reflection on embodiment that mistrusts a theology that begins with the fall rather than creation and the pleasure God takes in it. Our theological traditions are still rooted in sinful human flesh. What we need, Moltmann-Wendel (1995:104) argues, is to see that there is a lack of relationship, beginning in an earlier phase of life, between human beings, humans and animals and

humans and our environment.⁵² Oduyoye (2001:67) similarly argues that true humanity asks that we respond to God's hospitality by stewarding nature and that this includes our humanity. And that when there is disrespect to women's humanity, according to the anthropology women seek, the whole of humanity and the God who made us woman and man is disrespected (Oduyoye 2001:68).

Moltmann-Wendel (1997:165) further writes of a need for the deconstruction of theologies of the Spirit which depreciate physical life, especially life as conveyed in the bodies and sexuality of all women. Women's anthropology especially asks for the avoidance of dehumanisation (Oduyoye 2001:67). This is a theme also present in the work of Denise Ackerman (1996:146) writing that women resist being dehumanised when refusing feelings of incompetence or disgrace that attacks their humanity and intimate self.

At this point an argument can be made for deconstruction as well reconstruction, the reconstruction of theologies of the Spirit that take the physical life and bodily experiences of women into account.⁵³ Although this topic will not be discussed in detail further. Dualism has always been a strong theme in Christianity according to Isherwood and Stuart (1998:17). As Isherwood and Stuart also write from a Western perspective, it can be assumed that Western Christianity is implied. Nelson (1992:9) also describes the dualistic nature of body and soul as an "enduring problem" not only a historical one because this dualism is manifested in various ways, in the sexism, homophobia, meaning of masculinity, racism, ecological abuse and hetero-sexism we perceive today. Moltmann-Wendel (1997:167) states that "the dualism of Spirit and body must overcome and we must understand anew the holistic energy of life which consists of resistance, renewal, support and preservation, healing and growing."

Moltmann-Wendel (1995:36) indicates how Protestant preaching and the Word have been rationalised and disconnected from the body, resulting in the church leaving the body in the background. However, this was not the case in the early Jesus movement, as will be discussed in the next section. Moltmann-Wendel (1995:41) asks the

⁵² For further reading on this theme and subject see McFague, S. 1993. *The Body of God*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

⁵³ Oduyoye also writes on reconstructive theologies as discussed in the previous chapter.

question of how we have come to despise the body in early and present Christianity. She offers two explanations. First, she places the blame on the apostle Paul. According to Moltmann-Wendel, (1995:41), Paul mixed the ideas of a person in its totality and human beings in their sin “the high significance of the body for salvation is already constantly exemplified in a devaluation of sexuality characteristic of anthropological dualism (Moltmann-Wendel 1995:41).”

These restrictions contributed to the damaging perceptions of sexuality we still deal with today. Second, Moltmann-Wendel (1995:41) shows how early Christianity could not maintain the theology of Galatians 3:28 “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus”.⁵⁴ ⁵⁵ This may be a key text undoing biological norms but according to Moltmann-Wendel, this specific text became more “programme than praxis”, as it was and sometimes still is not as easily put into action as preached. Adaption to the norms of society took place, the male body became normative and yet marginalised bodies, like those of women and children, kept resurfacing. This pattern which has shaped many Christian ideas of the body, according to Moltmann-Wendel, has kept occurring over centuries.

She argues that early Christianity gradually adapted to Stoic sexual ethics, which saw sexuality not for pleasure but for procreation only, an ideal still “advocated by the Vatican” (Moltmann-Wendel 1995:42). On this topic Schenker (2000:81) explains it the following way:

In early Christianity the church fathers in Rome articulated principles of the perspective on sexual intercourse. Their central concern was liberation of spirit from flesh and not reproduction and formation of a family. The objective of sexual intercourse in married couples was almost exclusively procreation. Pleasure was excluded as evil and unworthy of a Christian. Sexual pleasure was unacceptable. Because of the transmission of original sin through sexual

⁵⁴ This is quoted from the Holy Bible using the English Standard Version, translation (2001).

⁵⁵ Also discussed in Chapter 2.

intercourse and because of the pleasure, this made it unavoidable to commit a sin through sexual intercourse.

The positivity towards the body, put in motion by Jesus, was soon replaced by the Greco-Roman ideals of separating body and soul, body and Spirit, developing a dualism which Christianity has not completely and successfully challenged to date. Cooper-White (1995:461) states that “it then was compounded by medieval formulations of bodily sin and reinforced by the rational emphasis of Western philosophy from scholasticism through the Enlightenment.”

The Hellenistic philosophies Christianity encountered saw the body as fundamentally different from the soul (Isherwood & Stuart 1998:64) Although this pattern of thought was not always the case, body and knowing once were one (Moltmann-Wendel 1995:88). However, according to Moltmann-Wendel (1995:42), this previously mentioned hierarchal view remained alive in theological thought till as recent as Karl Barth, who argued that man is above woman and soul above the body. Further, man was being associated with the Spirit and woman with sensuality, nature and the body and Augustine argued that as man commands woman, the Spirit should also rule the flesh (Moltmann-Wendel 1995:43). Throughout Christian church history, the body was developed as the “serving body”, not receiving an embodiment of its own, a model used by both the church and society making the human body, especially bodies other than the normative male body, a machine that should function well. Cooper-White (1995:461) writes that Moltmann-Wendel asks a crucial question in her book: What does the body want? Making the body the central focus of investigation.

When there was a theological reflection on the body, the male body was usually used as the norm, which meant (and means) that this is the only image available for women when they want to do the same, this was true from Biblical times (Moltmann-Wendel 1995:43). Moltmann-Wendel (1995:44) asserts that the male norm of the body which is positioned towards work, rivalry, productivity and accomplishment thus being the only way by which embodiment can be measured, should be countered.

Despite that over the centuries adaption to the ideas of the body is made and the male body is the norm, Christianity always retained the memory of the acceptance of the

body which started with the Jesus movement. According to Moltmann-Wendel, marginalised movements, for example, feminist theology remembered the body as God's good creation. Although there was a development in embodied theological thinking, the fundamental problem of the male body being the basic model remained. No sufficient attention was paid to the female body or images of God for the female bodily experiences like giving birth, allowing growth, dependence and participation in nature (Moltmann-Wendel 1995:45). This according to Moltmann-Wendel (1995:45), resulted in, the female experience of life and relationship rather than individualism as a starting point for thought and action, still being unfamiliar and unused in Western theology and philosophy. The woman's body remained suspicious and later became invisible to church and theology (Moltmann-Wendel 1995:45).

This is also evident in the notion that women's bodies are vessels, as Moltmann-Wendel (1995:79) describes. It is an old notion with different cultural interpretations, both matriarchal and patriarchal, of which the latter is the present notion. This already occurred in writings by Plato, Aristotle and Paul. We see it in Judaism, Christianity and Islam and modern art, theology, medicine and philosophy. Ancient and late- Jewish notions of women as vessels were associated with the sexual possession of the women to be used by men. The male was the active one, where the female was seen as passively waiting for fulfilment as a vessel. Without the male, the woman is an empty vessel, socially and sexually (Moltmann-Wendel 1995:80).

Western feminist thought and theology has in many ways also contributed to disembodiment, finding it difficult to think in terms of the body because it focuses more on the patriarchal abuse of the woman's body than taking the risk of a positive approach to the body (Moltmann-Wendel 1997:167, Isherwood & Stuart 1998:15). Secular feminism opposes the need for a Body Theology, stating that the body is the place of female oppression (Isherwood & Stuart 1998:15). With this being said, according to Moltmann-Wendel (1997:167), the notion of embodiment is not absent in feminist theologies. The scepticism about the body from left-wing feminist critique, according to Moltmann-Wendel (1995:7), does not apply to all feminist efforts, women who are moved by feminism vary between scepticism of the body and hope for the body.

To overcome this disembodiment, especially when it comes to women's bodies, the forgotten experiences of women's bodies should be reintroduced to the world (Moltmann-Wendel 1995:104). Oduyoye (2001:110) argues similarly for the resurrection of women's bodies, how the resurrection of Jesus is a source of empowerment for this and how this continuously reaffirms women's humanity. It is important to note that embodiment, and especially a Theology of Embodiment, would not be a reinvention, it would not be something new, Jesus already put a movement of embodiment in motion. This movement, as argued by Moltmann-Wendel, and all that it entails, especially the empowerment of women's bodies, will be discussed in the next section.

b) Jesus and the body

The story of the healing of the woman suffering from blood flow in Mark 5 starts off her investigation of embodiment, stating that it "plunges us deeply into the dimensions of the body and shows us the body as a field of energy". This story is vivid, physical, painful, deeply bodily, disgusting and extremely liberative. It speaks of the bodily experiences of bleeding, puberty, sexual maturity, suffering, medical abuse, illness, emissions, odours and impurity (Moltmann-Wendel 1995: ix). These bodily experiences also meant this woman suffered from religious and social isolation, and bleeding for this woman had meant death on more than one level; economic, psychological, and religious. Her encounter with Jesus was nothing less than an emergency and in light of the existing purity laws of ancient Israel, exceedingly dangerous. Her healing meant much more to her than just the healing of her body, Moltmann-Wendel (1995: x) describes it the following way:

Her blood remains in her. Her strength no longer flows out. Something belongs to her which has previously been shedding. She is somebody, a body which does not suffer and has to give itself up.

Moltmann-Wendel (1995:x) debates that this healing, unlike other Biblical narratives, is purely about bodily well-being. It is not about the promise of salvation and it is something that she did for herself, with no help and against all rules and regulations. Cooper-White (1995:461) agrees with this by writing that Moltmann-Wendel presents

bodily healing in the Gospels as definitive for the healing or the renewal of the social order. Both the woman and Jesus had a bodily experience, energy and strength flowed out of Jesus's human body, and the woman received something in return. Jesus's body releases a force that makes another body healthy, breaking an order which was built on the logic of purity, setting himself above the taboos. More than one Biblical narrative tells of the ways Jesus challenged the taboos of his culture (Moltmann-Wendel 1982:103). Jesus also uses his own body for healing purposes in further narratives, using his spittle as a means to cure another body (Moltmann-Wendel 1995:37). According to Moltmann-Wendel 1995: xi) with this healing action in the story of the woman suffering from blood flow, Jesus promised *shalom*, wholeness and well-being, and shows how salvation has "come about in her body". Nothing can take this body away from you, discriminate against it, isolate it or induce pain on it. This body belongs to you, it makes you a person, peaceful and liberated.

A significant argument for Moltmann-Wendel (1995: xii) is that this story makes it clear what the body, the body of Jesus and the human body, especially that of women, once was to Christianity. This story can and should motivate and inspire us to challenge the loss of our bodies, or in other words, disembodiment, that we are experiencing and to ask new questions about our bodies today. This was what Jesus successfully did with His time on earth, His movement was marked by a revaluation of the body (Moltmann-Wendel 1995:36).

Jesus's incarnation was the first sign of this, he did not bring about salvation to this earth by overcoming his bodily nature, but by becoming fully human (Moltmann-Wendel 1995:36) (Rigby 2012:184). It is unclear if Moltmann-Wendel picked up the work of other body theologians such as Nelson, or if her work only resonates with it, but both touch on the theme of incarnation. Writing from an American context Nelson (1992:10) states that an incarnational faith declaring that Christ lives and that God constantly becomes embodied in "our common flesh in saving, healing, liberating, justice making ways."

This is a statement Isherwood and Stuart (1998:11), writing within the context of the UK, agrees with when saying that Christian Theology has always been an embodied theology because it is rooted in creation, incarnation, resurrection and sacrament. On

the subject of incarnation, Moltmann-Wendel discusses that the central figure of Christianity had a body and that we cannot only associate this body with the crucified body of Christ but very importantly the incarnate body of Christ. This shows that Moltmann-Wendel foregrounds incarnation over the crucifixion. She argues that there is a whole New Testament speaking of the body of Christ of which we do not speak as often as the crucified body of Christ. If we want to see the body as God's good creation once again and as a field of energy, we should challenge this narrow view of the body of Christ (Moltmann-Wendel 1995:46).

The four Gospels in Scripture give four accounts of the life of Jesus, which were extremely invested and interested in his flesh and his life. It tells of his birth, youth, public life and his death. Moltmann-Wendel (1995:46) asks if these accounts of Jesus's life still have anything to say to the questions we have today? As discussed in the previous chapter, Moltmann-Wendel (1995:47) gives examples of the human nature of Jesus, who had human reactions, outbursts of anger, he groaned, sighed, showed compassion, loved, slept on a cushion, ate, kissed and needed God in a time he felt Godforsaken. We cannot still afford to proclaim a Jesus stripped of his passion, anger, relationships and tenderness. His body cannot be distinguished from other human bodies and only be the body of the cross and resurrection without any relationship towards his earthly life (Moltmann-Wendel 1995:45-49). As a preaching minister in a church, I agree wholeheartedly with this statement by Moltmann-Wendel. The focus in the church, in many cases, is mainly on Jesus's death and resurrection and not as much on what Jesus did with time spent on earth and how this impacts the daily lives of Christians.

Moltmann-Wendel (1995:36-37) contends that bodily healings were central to the saving actions of Jesus and that this did not only affect what was within human beings but it was concerned with the whole person, body and soul, the opposite of the dualistic nature discussed in the previous section. Jesus's message took the holistic nature of the problems people faced seriously and wanted them to be liberated from all that was unfamiliar, including that of the body. It was also referring to more than just the individual but a society, community and culture (Moltmann-Wendel 1995:37).

At this point in this chapter this thesis would like to bring into this discussion of “*I am my body*”, the topic of what this perspective of Jesus can mean for the discussions surrounding reproductive health. In chapter 1 the definition of reproductive health describes it as a person in a “state of complete physical, mental and social well-being in all matters relating to the reproductive system”. For Jesus, as Moltmann-Wendel reasons, salvation and liberation was and is not only for the human soul. Jesus was concerned with the whole of a person, that which included the body, mind, soul and holistic well-being. As mentioned above this also counted for the problems people faced whether physical, mental, personal, societal or economical. If this can be brought into relation with the reproductive health issues people face today, it can be assumed that Jesus will be concerned about that as well. Whether unwanted reproductive loss, infertility, injustice according to reproductive rights, discrimination, unavailability to access to reproductive healthcare or sexual violence it concerns the holistic well-being. The *shalom* of a person, something which Jesus took extremely seriously and offered salvation, healing and liberation where needed. If Christian Theology can learn from the approach Jesus had and still has towards the holistic well-being of the body and its place in society. How can Christian Theology “do” theology today that takes these issues as serious as Jesus did with His time on earth. Can Christian theology today also offer liberation and healing to the whole body not only one part of it?

Another narrative Moltmann-Wendel (1995:65) considers for her argument, is the story of the epileptic boy in Mark 9. Here Moltmann-Wendel argues that touching creates a new life and that this healing means resurrection. This story is told vividly, shows disturbing violence and tells of a small person whose body is being torn apart. This story shows all bodily restrictions and lifelessness this boy is suffering from, and the consequential loss of hope and disappointment for this family. The desperate attempt of this family, urges Jesus to touch and heal this boy, confronting the evil Spirit that has taken possession of him, and by this Jesus liberates this boy, being the object of this narrative:

...we hear quite clearly that he fell to the ground. Now the child is suddenly no longer the object. He is himself. He is a tormented human being, but he is no longer just the plaything of the evil spirit, no longer just a something which has

no capabilities, which has to be carried and looked after... (Moltmann-Wendel 1995:65)

Jesus changes the status of the boy from object to subject, doing away with the hierarchy ancient times that did not see this boy as a person because of his age and disease. This boy is introduced to us as himself, first, when he fell to the ground, the second time he is introduced to us when he stands up independently (Moltmann-Wendel 1995:71). The word used is the boy was “raised”, this is the same word used for the resurrection of Jesus. This boy received a new bodily life. Independent, his own person, with his own language, dignity and his own story (Moltmann-Wendel 1995:71). This story, although it is a male story shows how Moltmann-Wendel indicates that Jesus changed the hierarchy of whose bodies count and whose do not, an adult body is not above a child’s body, a male body not over a female body, and as the next story demonstrates abled bodies are not over disabled bodies⁵⁶.

The story of the crippled woman who was made straight again in Luke 13, like many other Biblical narratives, can also be included in this argument. This woman was healed from the restriction of her body, and not only received the hope that was lost to her over her lifetime but she also received a new identity (Moltmann-Wendel 1982:143). In this story Luke is trying to illustrate how the crippling of this woman’s body was also the crippling of her soul, this was no separate issue. Moltmann-Wendel is disputing that this woman’s disability was connected to sin, and that this is the reason she is in need of salvation. Rather that the disability of her body had a holistic effect on her life, physical, social, emotional and spiritual. Jesus knew this and when he healed her gave her salvation not only for her physical body but her body and life as a whole. Ultimately resulting in holistic bodily well-being.

⁵⁶ This scope and time for this thesis did not allow engagement with the theme of disability and disabled bodies although if interested, The University of Stellenbosch faculties of Theology and Health Sciences hosted a conference with the *theme Theology, Disability and Human Dignity* in May 2011. This conference resulted in a volume titled *Searching for Dignity: Conversations on human dignity, theology and disability*. Edited by Julie Claassens, Leslie Swartz and Len Hansen. This conference and consequently this book contributes a space where abled and disabled bodied persons share their experiences and “grow in respect for the dignity of persons”.

These stories were included in the Gospels so that we should not forget the bodily dimensions of the message of Jesus. In his time on earth, Jesus a Jew reinterprets the previous understanding of what it means to be pure and impure. This had major implications for the woman's body, as they were readily more affected by these purity laws. The story mentioned previously of the woman suffering from blood flow, illustrates this perfectly. This movement and notion resulted in early Christianity no longer being bound by these laws.

On this subject of Jesus and the body, Moltmann-Wendel offers discussions on how this movement had and still has implications for the female body as well as for liberation theologies. Liberation theologies as a theme does not receive isolated attention in the discussions in *I am my Body*, therefore the decision was taken not to write a separate section on this topic alone although Moltmann-Wendel definitely uses liberation and social theology in her theological work in this book. Moltmann-Wendel (1995:5) mentions the student, feminist and New Age movements that broke with the traditions and oppressions of their time especially by propagating for sexuality as a symbol of freedom. These movements all have adequate critique, especially feminist critique, questioning if these movements really advocated for the freedom of the body or only another form of oppression. More specifically asking what the influence of these movements were on the female body because women's bodies were regularly that which made victims of them. This asked for societal change and liberation so that women's bodies can also be free (Moltmann-Wendel 1995:6).

Moltmann-Wendel (1995:8) argues that these movements did leave their mark, they showed us how economic exploitation has an impact on human beings, and how this abuse manifests in our bodies. They have shown humanity its way back to bodies as fields of energy and gave us a way to be counter-cultural which has offered us a liberation of its own. Moltmann-Wendel contends that there is a "return of the body", especially in women's studies. We are hearing voices asking for more thought from the body (Moltmann-Wendel 1995: xiii). This statement resonates with what is current in various theological spheres and disciplines today.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ See various author's work: Meiring, J. 2010, 2014. (Practical Theology) Punt, J. 2005. (New Testament). Windley-Daoust, S. 2016. (Systematic Theology).

Regarding women's bodies, Moltmann-Wendel spends ample thought and discussion, arguing that women and men's relationship with their bodies are different. Although she discusses that women take better care of their bodies, they also experience a sense of alienation towards their bodies, and this intensifies their negative experiences of their bodies. Moltmann-Wendel reasons that at the time of writing her book this has in many ways started to change. Although further discussion is necessary to see if this is still true in the current context. Women are beginning to make their own discoveries about their bodies on the basis of their experiences (Moltmann-Wendel 1995:11). A statement that other body theologians in other Western contexts in the same period in history such as Nelson (1992:9), Isherwood and Stuart (1998:9) also advocate for. Moltmann-Wendel (1995:13,14) briefly mentions the violent and oppressive appropriation women's bodies have undergone in many a political situation. She also comments on the disturbing number of physical violence present in the lives of many women, the "appropriation of women's bodies by scientific curiosity" and the use of women's bodies in waging war.

What can and should Jesus's attitude towards the body mean for liberation and social movements, for theologies and also for women's bodies? The Jesus movement and its attitude towards bodies show us specifically how Jesus was not only concerned with our souls and its salvation, but with the liberation of our whole bodies and our social lives. In most healing narratives, Jesus not only gives back a person their body and its' bodily functions but also gives them back their place in society. Their healing resulted in not only bodily liberation but also social liberation (Moltmann-Wendel 1995:58). Many women healed or touched by Jesus found not only new or more healthy bodies but also new freedom with regard to their place and contribution to their community and society, often breaking free from the norms and rules keeping them captive.

Examples of this can be seen when Jesus calls the bent woman who is now upright a 'daughter of Abraham', breaking the patriarchal spiritual heritage. The woman suffering from chronic bleeding is given wholeness (*shalom*), Peter's mother-in-law served in Jesus's ministry, Jairus' daughter can now grow up past her twelve-years and the Syro-Phoenician woman is healed *albeit* behind her mother's back (Moltmann-

Wendel 1995:58). Moltmann-Wendel (1995:58) shows how these “enslaved bodies” that seemed impossible to heal became healthy and entered into a new social, family and religious relationship. For Moltmann-Wendel (1995:58) this means that there is a close connection between the illnesses of the women in these stories and social liberation.

There is no indication in this book of Moltmann-Wendel if she explores whether there is ambiguity in Jesus’ attitude towards women and women’s bodies. In this particular work, Moltmann-Wendel’s focus is on the positive approach Jesus had towards the body and especially women’s bodies during his time on earth.

In the next section the critical question present in the field of Theological Anthropology ‘having or being a body’ and how Moltmann-Wendel engaged with this question will be discussed. As this study is situated within the field of Theological Anthropology this section forms an important part of the overall argument.

c) Having a body and being a body

In her book, *I Am my Body*, Moltmann-Wendel touches on the theological anthropological question; do we have bodies or are we our bodies? She states that we have bodies for our day to day lives and what we do with them, but when our bodies are in crisis, our experience is that we are our bodies (Moltmann-Wendel 1995:1). It becomes evident that Moltmann-Wendel places a great deal of emphasis on the notion of experience. Because of this experience of being a body, we cannot take for granted, in the current culture of competition and consumerism, that people are under the illusion that they can have all the achievements and pleasure they want (Moltmann-Wendel 1995:2). We often have to learn that we are bodies, not only having them when we are limited or constricted in some way. This key point guards against the commodification of the perfect body, forming part of the argument that all bodies have value not only bodies perceived as perfect.

According to Moltmann-Wendel (1995:2), this experience of being a body can, for some people, be very intimidating, and that if we let go of the notion that our bodies are instruments, we might have a positive and happy experience of being a body. This

experience of being a body can include the experiences of well-being, being alive, the rhythms of the body and being one with nature. This is something that some Christian churches made us suspicious about. Furthermore, our society's culture resulted in us distancing ourselves from our bodies and taught us to be in control of it (Moltmann-Wendel 1995:2). This again shows the overwhelming dualism between mind and body also contributing to the disembodiment Moltmann-Wendel is challenging in this book. Moltmann-Wendel (1995:3, 4) asks, even in this day and age of loving our bodies more than ever before, if this pertains to having or being? Is what we give our bodies, what our bodies want? Does the body have a dynamic of its own? Are we still ignoring the body? Are we experiencing our bodies and the cosmos together?

Moltmann-Wendel (1995:9,10) argues that women's bodies are the places where these battles become palpable, by feeling that their bodies carry multiple gender burdens. Women today are entering many other spheres previously not reserved for them, still needing to maintain traditional responsibilities and this creates tension in the body. According to Moltmann-Wendel (1995:10,11), although women are more sensitive towards their own bodies, they experience more alienation towards their bodies and experience more negativity towards them, than men. This results from the enormous amount of pressure received by the culture of our societies. This luckily, according to Moltmann-Wendel (1995:11) is starting to change "... women have also already begun to make their own discoveries about their bodies on the basis of their own experiences." Although in many aspects I agree with Moltmann-Wendel, that women are more sensitive to their bodily experiences and how this influences different spheres of their lives, there is still much work to be done and ground to be won in this regard. Without going into the theme in its entirety, there are still many women today unable to live freely and enjoying the human rights they deserve. Without this they cannot make adequate discoveries about their body's experiences and apply it to their lives. Women should be ultimately free from all oppression and discrimination before the ultimate change in this regard, as Moltmann-Wendel states above, can be achieved.

Women do not experience their bodies as being helpless and weak any more, but adaptable and capable of change, other than the male body that does not change that much (Moltmann-Wendel 1995:11, 12, 31). On the subject of sex and sexuality many

women are agreeing that it is not only determined by men, it also includes the whole person, it relates to both men and women and it represents both lesbian and heterosexual relationships (Moltmann-Wendel 1995:12). There is a developing change in the physical self-awareness and self-understanding of women (Moltmann-Wendel 1995:13).

On the subject of the sick body, Moltmann-Wendel (1995:22) further develops a notion she put forward in the introductory remarks as mentioned earlier in this section. When our bodies are sick, it is not only our bodies but ourselves that are sick. We say: "I am sick". I am in my body, I have no other identity (Moltmann-Wendel 1995:22). Moltmann-Wendel (1995:22) reasons that it is only when we come up to such limitations, that we become aware of our true existence that we are in the body. On this subject, Moltmann-Wendel (1995:22,23) delivers a critique of the definition of health produced by the World Health Organisation that says that "health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not just the absence of disease and infirmity."

A very important aspect of her thought is that Moltmann-Wendel (1995:22) argues that the view of the WHO is so idealistic that it is problematic, and that it cannot only consider the individual but also the individual's social involvement which is a part of what it means to be healthy. This view expresses the dream of what it means to be a healthy society rather than indicating a vision of health that is practical (Moltmann-Wendel 1995:23). This definition also fails to do justice to the body, according to Moltmann-Wendel, because the body is never perfect. It grows old, it becomes sick and forms part of a society and in all of these limitations can experience joy and well-being. It is very important, as this argument shows, to neither demonise nor glamourise the body as perfect.

Moltmann-Wendel (1995:99) ultimately discusses the notion that the body is the place in which we are in the world and that is what existence can be described as. Our bodies are spaces and also need space according to Moltmann-Wendel (1995:98). This may be dependent on outside factors like gender, weight and our attitude towards ourselves, so when we reflect on our bodies we need to reflect on the physical spaces our bodies will need to develop properly (Moltmann-Wendel 1995:98).

The notion of having or being a body can also be brought into conversation with the topics surrounding reproductive health, especially as Moltmann-Wendel debates if this body is confronted with limitations, sickness or disease. When issues pertaining to reproductive health for example infertility, miscarriage or reproductive limitations are being faced, a person can easily be confronted by what Moltmann-Wendel is presenting as a Theological Anthropology argument in this specific book; are we bodies, or do we have bodies? If your body is “failing” in some way or another when it comes to wanted reproduction or procreation, and you carry this “failure” in your body it can contribute to the overwhelming experience that you do not only have your body but that you are body as well.

Jesus understood this notion of being a body best. Salvation was the healing of the whole person in the body, not only for the afterlife but for the current life of the person. (Moltmann-Wendel 1995:50). What is questionable is if the church currently understands this? Or is the church still today contributing to the emphasis that we only have our bodies, and ignoring our being our bodies? This question may be an invitation to further research on this specific topic.

This question may be the reason why Moltmann-Wendel proposes the option of a Theology of Embodiment which will be discussed in the section that follows.

d) A Theology of Embodiment

In her book Moltmann-Wendel offers a way towards a Theology of Embodiment, this subject and theme have a need of further development in our theology today, and the issues Moltmann-Wendel brings to the foreground can serve as a starting point.

Moltmann-Wendel (1995:51) states that she is of the opinion that Protestant church culture in particular, contributes to major disembodiment and the suppression of what it means to live an embodied life. It approaches the body and the use of the body in a very intense and rationalistic way. Catholic Church culture is doing better on this front as they enable more focus on the body, but Moltmann-Wendel claims that although bodily aspects are included in worship it is often ritualised and not representing of

bodily needs and expectation. In other words, it is often not connected to the body. According to Moltmann-Wendel (1995:51), worship should be lively, physical, sensual and meaningful and many non-mainstream churches and other church bodies seem to excel in this. She offers examples of praying with our eyes and palms open, savouring meals, opportunities to respond in sermons, cheering, whistling, music that moves you, dancing and says that this is encouraging new beginnings of a new church finding her way back towards embodiment. The research did not show if Moltmann-Wendel engaged with other denominations such as Pentecostal church ideas, traditions and rituals. With this being said Moltmann-Wendel (1995:51) declares that for this to be an effective and lasting change the ritualised hostility to the body we experience should be killed at its root.

Moltmann-Wendel (1995:51) makes an argument especially for a more embodied perspective on how we celebrate communion. She asks that we bring this ancient Christian meal to life by finding joy in our senses and the communion and relationships we experience through this sacrament. She offers examples such as the symbol of a farewell meal, a strengthening meal, commemorative meal, ecological and a cosmic meal. She also asks for a more embodied way of preaching, where hearers can be involved, can associate with symbols which move their bodies, where the promise of salvation is not using metaphors borrowed from the legal sphere but from the physical bodily sphere and where words can create opportunities for bodily experiences (Moltmann-Wendel 1995:55,56).

Looking at the life Jesus lived and the theology he presented, Moltmann-Wendel (1995:65) asks that the church also revisits the topic and notion of touching and what it means for people. We live in a world full of fears about touch and touching (Moltmann-Wendel (1995:65)). This contributes to the fact that the importance of touch is neglected. The church, according to Moltmann-Wendel (1995:65), should look for new and old forms of touching because touch means to stimulate people in their entire existence, senses and souls. This can also bring healing and make people “capable of contact, thought and experience.”

On the subject of touch Moltmann-Wendel (1995:65) presents the narrative of the epileptic boy in Mark 9, where touch created a new life and how this healing resulted

in a kind of resurrection. She uses the same urgency for the painful matters of taste, smell and once again feeling and how this has been distorted in society as “subjective, unprovable and deceptive” (Moltmann-Wendel 1995:92).

For Moltmann-Wendel (1995:103) a Theology of Embodiment is not a new theology, only a forgotten one, much needed today. A Theology of Embodiment offers a place from which we can do theology, from which we can think and from which we can act, and this place is the human body. The highly resonates with the perspective of the field of Body Theology. The body has been misused and suppressed in the Western Christian tradition. This is especially true of women’s bodies. A Theology of Embodiment is showing new interest in the bodies and lives of marginalised groups which include, women, older people⁵⁸, persons of minority sexual orientation and gender identity, indigenous peoples. These are often groups that Moltmann-Wendel argues have experienced hostility in the church (Moltmann-Wendel 1995:103). This return to embodiment brings back one of the most distinctive features of the Christian faith, incarnation, God becoming a body. A return to embodiment also starts from the creation rather than the fall, the pleasure God takes in His⁵⁹ creation with less emphasis on the sinful human flesh (Moltmann-Wendel 1995:104). Reflection on embodiment recognises the lack of relationship between human beings, humans and animals and humans and their environment and what this can mean for reflections on the meaning of sin. When we strive for a Theology of Embodiment we will reject a form of spirituality which is estranged from the body, life, earth, and social relationships.⁶⁰ Disembodiment, according to Moltmann-Wendel (1995:104) is lovelessness. A Theology of Embodiment invites people to experience their senses, love them and trust them. This theology rather follows a concrete body language which includes

⁵⁸ Touching on the subject of reproductive health, Body Theology and older bodies Christina Landman (2008) argues that the AIDS management programs in South Africa primarily focus on persons under the age of 48. Her article *A Theology for the older Female, HIV infected Body*, argues for “theological attention to women over 50 who remain voiceless and isolated in their bodies”. Landman draws from the field of Body Theology to discuss this problem.

⁵⁹ Moltmann-Wendel uses the male gender term for God and in reference to God in this particular theological work, but writes significantly on God as woman in her book co-authored by Jürgen Moltmann. *Moltmann-Wendel, E & Moltmann, J. 1991. God: His and Hers. London: SCM Press.*

⁶⁰ For further reading on this theme and subject consult the eco-feminist theological work of McFague, S. 1993. *The Body of God.*

symbols, myth and fairy tales into a theological discourse (Moltmann-Wendel 1995:104).

For Moltmann-Wendel (1995:105) a Theology of Embodiment is also not in love with success but sees the cross as a symbol of failure and of hope of “life in death, gain in failure, resurrection in passing away”. On the subject of resurrection and life after death Moltmann-Wendel (1995:72) states, in the section (resurrection of the flesh) preceding the one discussion a Theology of Embodiment, the following:

In its creed the church confesses the resurrection of the dead. We should ask whether this hope is contained in Jesus’ message of justice and the healing of our bodies or whether it is a reaction to the only thing that we know our bodies will be buried in the earth, burned, scattered on the sea or to the four points of the compass.

She also argues that eternal life “begins here in us with our bodies” and that the mysteries of eternal life still evades us, “since Jesus did not speak of them, but only of life, of body and the world” (Moltmann-Wendel 1995:78). Moltmann-Wendel engaged with themes of incarnation as well as with resurrection when it comes to the body and Christianity and especially a Theology of Embodiment. This theology is focused on Jesus’s humanity, his life, love, sacrifice and passion and regards his divinity as his deepest humanity. It recovers the Biblical images of God as a woman, a God who weeps with us and in us, for the creation and in it. This theology recognises God in the human experience (Moltmann-Wendel 1995:105).

Before engaging in critique this section can be concluded by bringing the incarnate body of Christ into conversation with women (or men) faced with reproductive health issues. As Moltmann-Wendel argues that an embodied theology is a theology focused on Jesus’s humanity. God as woman and a God who weeps with and in us can be a worthy place to start when discussing reproductive health issues. If Christian Theology believes in a God who became fully human and understands what it is to be human, is this not a God in solidarity with any bodily challenges we face, especially for the purpose of this research, challenges where reproductive health is concerned?

4.2.4 Critique

This next section would briefly discuss the critique with regard to “*I am my Body*” by Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, by external sources and also by myself.

To start off this section of critique, it is necessary to note that Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel was a white, Western female theologian, and as this research is conducted and read mainly in a South Africa and African context it is important to note that her research may not be or seem relevant, especially with regard to embodiment and a Theology of Embodiment, to African readers. With this being said it can be argued that due to the intersection between gender and bodiliness present in this thesis, Moltmann-Wendel’s theological work is opted for rather than a male body theologian such as James Nelson.

Cooper-White (1995:462) wished for more engagement by Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel with non-Western writers, women of colour and women of different social standing, especially with regard to the topic of eco-feminism and its intersectional relation to race and class. With this being said, much of Moltmann-Wendel’s theological work resonates with the existing theological work of for example that of Oduyoye who also argues for more embodiment in theological fields (Christology, Anthropology, Ecclesiology, Spirituality and Eschatology) as already in many cases practised by African women theologians. So although the work of Moltmann-Wendel itself does not incorporate that of non-Western theology, her work can certainly be brought into conversation with that of various African women theologians.

In her review of Moltmann-Wendel’s book Cooper-White (1995:462) comments that while Moltmann-Wendel draws from her own experience, and that women can relate with this, she often leaves the reader in need of elaboration. Cooper-White argues that Moltmann-Wendel often uses “whole bodies of scholarship” in single sentences and that this creates room for more explanation. I agree with this, Moltmann-Wendel’s thoughts are brief and not explored to the full extent that is possible. She also refrains from in-depth exploring of sex and sexuality. This Moltmann-Wendel made clear at the beginning of her book, she investigated the body and the experiences of the body, as well as the traditions and the importance it has within religious and social spheres but

that this will be done without discussing sexuality. This she states because sexuality according to the male perspective is the central topic when the body is concerned and that she disagrees with this (Moltmann-Wendel 1991/1995: xiii). I understand the argument that Moltmann-Wendel is making but I do believe that when discussing the whole bodily well-being, sex and sexuality cannot be left out of the discussion and should at least be acknowledged as a part of the human experience, especially for women and other minority groups such as the queer community. The scope of this research did not allow in-depth and further discussion or interaction with embodiment and in this regard a Theology of Embodiment and what it can mean and contribute to queer theology⁶¹ and the queer community. Moltmann-Wendel only briefly refers to homosexual men and lesbian women (Moltmann-Wendel 1995:20,40) and on occasion uses the theological work of lesbian feminists⁶². I would have liked to see more engagement for and with more than the heteronormative group of heterosexual women and men. Although it can easily be assumed, in this research it is not clear if Moltmann-Wendel, in her feminist theological work and in this book in particular, includes all groups of women, and women's bodies, not only those of heterosexual women. She does not engage with queer bodies, for example, as she does with other types of bodies. My view is that this could have possibly contributed to the understanding of embodiment, especially a Theology of Embodiment when it relates to queer bodies.

May (1996:422) argues that on the one hand she agrees with Moltmann-Wendel that the tradition holds much that we can return to when it comes to a Theology of Embodiment. On the other hand challenges and questions the use of the word embodiment, stating that it "signals to me that the Word is still in its place of primacy". May (1996:422) argues that the "pulsing physicality and body energy" that Moltmann-Wendel brings to the front throughout her book is still in a way contained, and her statement around the scandal about God becoming a body is, according to May, being evaded. With this being said, May (1996:422) says that she speaks her "disappointment in solidarity with Moltmann-Wendel", because "one of the difficulties

⁶¹ Here the book edited by Gerard Loughlin (2007). *Queer Theology: Rethinking the Western Body* can offer further and in depth reading on this subject.

⁶² Moltmann-Wendel (2001) discusses the theological work on the topic of friendship of May Hunt more in detail in her book: *Rediscovering Friendship*.

we face in setting forth a theology able to speak our bodies' voices the absence of adequate language to do so" (May 1996:422).

I will personally argue that the section on "Being Open to New Areas" leaves me wanting more. My suggestion would have been to dedicate more of the last section of the book to what a Theology of Embodiment will mean to humanity, but especially to women. What can this theology change in the way women see themselves, how can it change their bodily experience and what can the contribution of this specific theology be towards a changed and more embodied society? The subtitle of Moltmann-Wendel's book suggests a study of a Theology of Embodiment, and the brief discussion at the end of the book does not seem nearly adequate enough. My further suggestion will be that the two-fold claim of Theological Anthropology 'having or being a body' should have enjoyed more attention throughout this book and the various themes as discussed. I would also propose more elaboration on the theory and theology Moltmann-Wendel began to formulate in the thesis of this book and how this can be integrated in an interdisciplinary way. For me, Moltmann-Wendel fails to be concrete enough about what needs to change in the process towards a Theology of Embodiment.

4.2.5 Conclusion

In this next and final section, I want to attempt to answer the research questions I presented at the start of this thesis. Overall conclusions will be made in the next chapter, but this section will focus on how this critical analysis of *I am my Body* can contribute to discussing the research questions presented in chapter one.

It is safe to say that in *I am my Body*, Moltmann-Wendel portrays the body as central to her theological work, thought and writing. Moltmann-Wendel gives the body back its importance and the attention it deserves. She consciously shows how the dualistic thought surrounding the body has resulted in disembodiment that is still present in our societies today. Moltmann-Wendel urges her readers to realise again that Jesus put a movement in place with his time on earth. Jesus placed the body, its well-being, *shalom* (wholeness), its place and importance in society, healing and salvation of the body at the centre of his ministry. For Jesus the body was and is important, therefore

Moltmann-Wendel reclaiming a Theology of Embodiment is an important contribution because it is something the Christian church has forgotten, neglected and deliberately silenced. She invites us to give the body back its freedom and centrality.

Moltmann-Wendel clearly distinguishes between the two-fold claim of “having” and “being” a body and the important role language plays in this regard. In her book, *I am my Body*, she discusses the way the tension between this two-fold claim can be eliminated by giving language to our bodily experiences. Moltmann-Wendel surely argues for this point but I do not agree that she explored this enough in this book. To adhere to the experience that we are bodies is, according to Moltmann-Wendel, central to our well-being that will not suppress the darker side of life and attempt to escape into disembodiment. The ‘body language’ Moltmann-Wendel uses, contributes to describing our bodily “experiences of well-being, being alive and a conscious experience of the rhythms of the body, the happy feeling of being one with nature, with trees, grass, cats. It can arise from pleasure and not just pain”.

I will argue that the theological anthropological work of Moltmann-Wendel can greatly contribute to the field of Body Theology, and also other fields of theology. Body Theology asks that we refrain from doing theology to the body, but rather attempt to do theology from the body. Moltmann-Wendel asks the central question at the start of her thesis, what does the body want? With this question, Moltmann-Wendel gives back to the body the authority it has been deprived of and this contributes to doing theology that is far from disembodied. This was very clear in her exegetical work where she reads, imagines and interprets the stories where especially women are concerned differently. Moltmann-Wendel forms a part of and still contributes of the larger conversation on what it will mean and what it will look like if we take a Theology of Embodiment seriously because this will offer the human body as a place from which we can do theology.

Moltmann-Wendel’s interpretation of various gospel narratives, especially the narrative of the women suffering from blood flow in Mark 5, can have healing and restorative implications for various debates surrounding reproductive health. Moltmann-Wendel’s argument was that Jesus was concerned not only with salvation of the soul but with bodily well-being and wholeness, especially with regard to the

woman mentioned in Mark 5. When we can utilise the language and theology, used by Moltmann-Wendel, this can result in liberative and healing implications for discussions surrounding, fertility/infertility, reproductive loss, miscarriages, reproductive and sexual health and other current reproductive health debates and discussions.

The following concluding chapter will review the work that has been done throughout this research. The research problem and questions will be reviewed and the research findings will be presented. The research methodology and goals will also be discussed and reviewed. This concluding chapter will evaluate the relevance and contribution of this study and will propose further areas of research for the future.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION OF THE STUDY

5.1 Introduction

This final chapter will close this study by concluding the research carried out to critically analyse the Theological Anthropology of Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel not only in her work in *I am my body* but in theological work in general. In this chapter, I will also review the research problem, research question, methodology, research goals as well as the relevance and contribution of this study to evaluate whether what this research set out to do at the beginning has been achieved. I would also suggest further possibilities for research.

5.2 Review of the research problem

In chapter 1 the research problem stated suggested a perceived lack of research in Christian Theology that is focused on and values women's bodies where reproductive health is concerned. This research study proposed that the field of Body Theology and Theological Anthropology can possibly contribute to the discussions on reproductive health and that the theological work, especially the Theological Anthropology, of Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel more specifically may prove valuable to the discussions. As this research developed, it became clear that the need for research in this field is vital and that theological work like that of Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel can provide an important contribution. The theological work of Moltmann-Wendel and specifically her book "I am my Body" offers a way towards a Theology of Embodiment, embodied language and a focus on Jesus's body-positive approach that can speak meaningfully to the current discussions surround reproductive health.

5.3 Review of the research questions

Having reviewed the research problem, this chapter will now look at the research questions that were asked at the beginning of the study to evaluate whether we have possible answers for them.

5.3.1 Primary Research Question

The primary research question asked at the beginning of the research: How is 'body' portrayed within the broader context of Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel's Theological Anthropology and theological work?

The research found the following:

This primary research question was first approached by discussing Theological Anthropology in general, how the body was viewed theologically over time and what the different aspects of Theological Anthropology involve. The discussion of themes such as sin, freedom and *imago Dei* presented a valuable background to the study and an important place to start this research. Why this approach is also important is because it provides a good basis for the discussion surrounding the theological work of Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel. This assisted adequately in placing her anthropological work with the theological work of past and more recent scholars conducting research in the field of Body Theology and Theological Anthropology. This section of the research gives a suitable background to how 'body' was and is currently portrayed in the field of Theological Anthropology and Body Theology, helping to better understand how this is similar or different to how 'body' is being portrayed in the work of Moltmann-Wendel'.

It became evident in chapter 3 that the theological work of Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel relies heavily upon the experience of the body, Jesus's approach to the body and a feminist perspective to the body. The research also found that it is without a doubt that the body plays a central role in her theological work. In her work she attempts to give the body back its central place and ask that we again pursue a friendship with and trust of our bodies, fighting back the age-old mistrust and vilifying of the body as seen in early Theological Anthropology. The findings in this chapter is important because it shows how in the theological work of Moltmann-Wendel she emphasises the way Jesus approached the body. She

offers liberative alternatives to the body taboos of Jesus's time, also giving back the body its central place and importance in society and showing us that Jesus was just as concerned about our bodily well-being as our spiritual well-being. In her theological work, Moltmann-Wendel also encourages the use of different and imaginative theological language specifically where it pertains to the body. This can result in liberative consequences notably when it comes to reproductive health issues where the body is concerned.

In chapter 4, the critical analyses of *I am my Body*, it is clear that Moltmann-Wendel argues that we do not only have bodies but that we are bodies. These findings are significant because it places the work of Moltmann-Wendel firmly in the field of Theological Anthropology engaging with Body Theology. She brings the body and its experiences to the foreground, once again showing that 'body' is being portrayed as central in her work and approaches to various themes. This book's thesis aims to reclaim a Theology of Embodiment, this is discussed in chapter 4 lacked substance without a clear way forward. Nonetheless, the research argues that the contribution can still be valuable as Moltmann-Wendel argues that the forgotten incarnated body of God needs to be central and foundational. She argues against disembodiment, the dualism of body and soul and offers a clear argument for embodiment through her interpretation of the various New Testament text pertaining to Jesus and the body, especially women's bodies. For the purpose of this research, these findings are thought to be a valuable contribution to discussions surrounding reproductive health and the issues that women are confronted within this regard. Moltmann-Wendel offers the argument that a Theology of Embodiment is the place from where we ought to do theology. When we strive to do theology from the body, we will reject any spirituality that proclaims any form of disembodiment.

5.3.2 Secondary Research Questions

What follows is the secondary research questions proposed at the beginning of the study:

a) What is 'body' and 'embodiment' within the broader context of Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel's Theological Anthropology?

The research found the following:

As chapters 3 and 4 clearly show, body and embodiment play a central role not only in Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel's theological anthropological work but in her theological work as a whole. As shown in chapter 3, where the different themes in Moltmann-Wendel's theology are discussed, it is evident that throughout the various fields of theology she studied, be it, political and social theology, feminist theology, Biblical interpretation or the theological field of friendship, Moltmann-Wendel shows that she dedicated a significant amount of attention to the body and embodiment in her work. She places a high value on the body and its experiences and takes the body seriously when developing her theological work.

Her theological work was focused on freeing the body, making it an important part of her theology, especially her Theological Anthropology, as is the soul. Her theology of the body and embodiment fought against the taboos and stigmas she encountered not only in the Biblical interpretations and history but in her present contexts as well. In this she did rely on the approach Jesus had towards the body, believing that bodies should not be feared or ignored or undervalued and thus restoring them as part of God's created good, as well as reiterating the humanity that Jesus portrayed in His time on earth. This can also offer liberating implications for the body taboos of our time with relation to reproductive health. What body taboos still exist today that, in relation to Moltmann-Wendel, need to be "fought against"? Stigmas surrounding the use of contraception, child marriage and pregnancy, women's bodies as only vessels for childbearing and the debate on abortion are only a few examples of taboos still surrounding the body today.

Moltmann-Wendel clearly challenged the dualistic divisions between the body and soul, for her the body was not separate from the soul or the mind, but she viewed the body as holistic taking into account all that makes us human and

arguing that this is also the way Jesus approached the human body. These findings are important because it has significant implications for when reproductive health is discussed, showing that the body and its experiences, especially those including reproductive health, are a part of the holistic body and should be taken as serious as anything else. The reproductive health issues women (and men) face can now be discussed with redemptive, liberative and transformative possibilities made possible by the contribution of a Theology of Embodiment and embodied theological language.

b) How does 'body language' function within Theological Anthropology and the tension of the two-fold claim, "I have a body" and "I am a body"?

The research found the following:

Language plays an important role in Theological Anthropology, especially in the Theological Anthropology of Moltmann-Wendel. This becomes evident in her feminist theology as well. Her work in re-envisioning the women of the Bible includes the language of healing, wholeness, life and a tender way of thinking and talking about them. Her theological work develops a relationship between feminist interpretation of Scripture and the embodied incarnation reality of the Christian faith. Her interpretation of Biblical text and the theological language that follows also opposes the oppression of women and their bodies, as it has been interpreted and preached over centuries, suggesting the liberative possibilities of certain texts of Scripture especially for women and their bodies. The research shown in chapters 3 and 4 clearly shows these findings. Moltmann-Wendel uses fresh theological language as part of her Theological Anthropology, making use of descriptions of peoples' experiences of freedom following encounters with Jesus releasing them from the captivity in various spheres of their lives. In her theology and her reading of Scripture, Moltmann-Wendel draws from body experiences and uses embodied language when she describes this.

In chapter 4 Moltmann-Wendel's book, *I am my body*, calls the readers to attend to their bodies, bodies she describes as having a voice of their own, taking our bodies more seriously and again asking for freedom of the body only to be found in a relationship with Jesus. She thoroughly discusses the theological anthropological notion of "having and/or being a body". She writes that it becomes clearer to humans that they are bodies when the body reaches its limitations or they encounter true existence, saying that the body is the place in which we are in the world and that this is the way our existence can be described. The research found that this discussion also has implications for when people are confronted with their body's reproductive issues, contributing to the experience that we do not only have bodies but that we are them as well. Her book urges the reader to create distance between them and anything resembling disembodiment, the distinction between body and soul, anxiety, fear and oppression of the body. This includes theologies of the Spirit that devalues physical life, bodies and sexualities, especially those of women. Her use of theological language also distances itself from patriarchal language when it comes to women's bodies.

The critical analysis in chapter 4 focused on Moltmann-Wendel's interpretation of the story of the woman suffering from blood flow in Mark 5. In this interpretation it is clear that she uses embodied language when describing the experience of this woman alongside Jesus. She focuses attention on the notion that her liberation and salvation came solely for her body, from the body of Jesus and that this was experienced fully in their bodies. This makes a definite distinction between having and being a body. Moltmann-Wendel also again emphasises that Jesus did not only have a body but was fully human (being a body). Jesus was and is the central figure of Christianity, thereby urging us not to use language, especially theological language, that is disembodied.

Moltmann-Wendel started to develop a Theology of Embodiment, urging the church to find her way back to theology that takes the body seriously. Including theological language and action in rituals such as communion, taking into account the whole of the body, emphasising the power of touch and connection

and seeing the body as a place from which we can do theology. This places her work firmly in the sub-field of Theological Anthropology, Body Theology. This can possibly result in the church fully embracing that we “are” bodies, we do not only “have” them.

c) How do these questions shape theological language for the use in discussion on reproductive health?

The research found the following:

Discussing reproductive health highlights the lack of adequate theological language. The theological language of Moltmann-Wendel, and especially her approach to Theological Anthropology, may contribute to better discussions and language with regard to reproductive health. Moltmann-Wendel as discussed in previous sections, calls us back to our bodies, to our human experiences, to the humanity of Jesus, to bodily well-being, tenderness, wholeness, to the salvation of the body not only the soul and to embodiment. This has implications pertaining to the theological language we use when discussing issues of reproductive health such as fertility, reproductive technologies, miscarriage, stillbirths, abortion, sexual health and contraception. All of which was not discussed during the scope of this research.

When keeping the theology of Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel in mind, especially her theological language, the discussion on reproductive health can change and open our eyes to new possibilities. This section however rather emphasises “that” Moltmann-Wendel’s work is helpful and can contribute to these discussions. Not as much time is spend on the “how” of this question. Although this is very necessary and is still present in some aspects of this section and throughout the study, but the scope and time of this research does not allow for adequately engaging with this question. From personal experience, the dilemmas surrounding reproductive health encountered by women, in particular, are rarely openly discussed and especially not in the sphere of faith or church communities. Moltmann-Wendel argues for a theology that can affect the whole

person, and to further this argument it will include the reproductive health of a person, and women in general.

The theological language Moltmann-Wendel includes in Theological Anthropology can assist a Christian faith or church community in appropriate theological language, helpful Biblical interpretation and educated pastoral guidance when dealing with men and more specifically women who are faced with fertility dilemmas. This will have the implication of reconceiving our daily confrontation as a church and faith communities and leaders with the ever-increasing fertility challenges people face today. The stigma and taboos surrounding infertility and the isolation that childlessness bring are just a few realities adequate theological language can begin to counter. The same can be said for issues and dilemmas such as unwanted reproductive loss.

Moltmann-Wendel and other theologians showed that a theology of the cross and the language of death, loss, suffering, hope, wholeness, solidarity and love can offer redemptive possibilities to women dealing with the loss of a pregnancy, reproductive loss or the death of a child. This can also offer a way of dealing with reproductive loss in a theological and pastoral way that takes bodies and its experiences seriously by placing it at the centre. It may possibly contribute to the more open, honest and helpful conversation surrounding unwanted reproductive loss. When dealing with unwanted reproductive loss, the traumatic experience is located fully in the body. By applying Moltmann-Wendel's suggested theological language and the salvation Jesus offered to the bodies he encountered during the time spent on earth, new imaginative theological approaches are possible. Through Jesus's tender approach, healing and concern for people's bodily well-being, Jesus offered a wholeness only he can give.

Moltmann-Wendel also presented a feminist theology of friendship accompanied by theological language that describes the relationship with God as a female friend who listens and offers companionship. The research found that this view of God can have a positive contribution to make in care given and received by women (and men) faced by reproductive health issues such as loss, infertility and violence.

These are only a few possibilities of how the theological language of Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel can contribute to the discussions surrounding reproductive health.

5.4 Review of research methodology and research goals

In chapter 1.7 it was stated with regard to methodology:

This research will be non-empirical and will use theological analyses. First a brief discussion of Theological Anthropology will be undertaken to introduce the field in which this research is being done. The approach that will be taken to address the research problem is by critical analysis of the broader work of Moltmann-Wendel's. In this way, her theological and theological anthropological work will be evaluated, tested and revised to increase the understanding thereof... The sections and different themes of the book, 'I am My Body' by Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, will be specifically analysed and studied... Secondary sources, for example book reviews, will further be consulted. This research will also attempt to evaluate if the theological language used in the broader work of Moltmann-Wendel, especially regarding bodies, embodiment and bodiliness, can offer theological grammar in the conversations on reproductive health in our faith communities... This methodology will be used to analyse, but imagine and create as well to show the theological potential behind the language and rhetoric of Moltmann-Wendel.

In chapter 2 a brief overview of the field of Theological Anthropology has been presented, this was carried out to introduce the field in which this research has been done, also to adequately place the theological work of Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel in the further research. An introduction to the field was presented, as well as a discussion on the early church and scholars who wrote in this field, this included, Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Barth and Tillich. Theological Anthropology with its various subsections was discussed, which included, *imago Dei*, sin and freedom and will. In this chapter, the relationship between gender and Theological Anthropology was also discussed drawing on the work of Gonzalez (2007) and Schumacher (2016). The chapter ended with a brief discussion on the interrelations between Theological Anthropology and Body

Theology drawing on the work of Isherwood and Stuart (1998), Meiring (2015) and Nelson (1992).

In the following chapter, 3, an extensive view of the theologian herself and theological work of Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel is presented. The various theological themes present in her lifetime of work then followed, this included political, social and liberation theology, feminist theology, feminist theology of the cross, gender-critical Biblical interpretations and friendship. A section was also dedicated to the work Moltmann-Wendel did on the body, placing her work firmly in the above-mentioned field of Theological Anthropology and Body Theology. Her use of theological language and imaginative interpretations was also presented in this chapter.

In chapter 4 Moltmann-Wendel's book, *I am my body*, was critically analysed and the different themes were studied and secondary sources and reviews of her book were consulted and acknowledged. The thesis of the book, as well as the outline, was carefully presented and with this the theological themes identified in the book which included disembodiment, Jesus and the body, the question of having or being a body and a Theology of Embodiment. In this chapter, a brief section of the critique is also present.

5.5 A review of the contribution and relevance of this study

In chapter 1.2 the following was stated:

Is the church a safe space to talk about the reproductive dilemmas? Do couples, facing fertility challenges, have the courage to talk to ministers or church leaders about these challenges? If they do, do ministers feel equipped enough to deal with modern day reproductive dilemmas, rights, and/or technologies? Can we say that Christian Theology kept up with the changes regarding reproductive health? Has the Christian church generated a voice, guidance or theology that can adequately guide people of faith when they face various reproductive dilemmas? Do we have adequate theology and/or theory that can speak to the experiences

of women and men when it comes to reproductive health? Does the Christian community have an adequate theological language that can speak to the lived experiences, lives and questions of people, and especially of women? It concerns me that I have to answer “no” to most of these questions.

When asking whether this study can possibly make a contribution to these questions, I would like to risk a positive answer. This study may have only touched the surface of what is possible and necessary when it comes to theological thought with regard to reproductive health and the dilemmas people in our faith communities face today. If this and similar research can be undertaken more often and by more theologians, especially women theologians, Christian Theology may start to develop a valuable voice, guidance and helpful theology that can adequately guide people of faith and speak to the experience of especially women when they face dilemmas of reproductive health.

I am convinced that the theological work of Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel makes a valuable contribution to the development of theological language that speaks meaningfully to the experiences of people, especially women, and that there is much to be learned from her book, *I am my body*. Attention should also be paid to the broader context of her Theological Anthropology and translate her language and insights into tools that may be helpful in the conversation surrounding reproductive health. Her argument for the return to a Theology of Embodiment and the concern Jesus had for the whole human body and its well-being can be liberative for the discussions as well as experiences surrounding reproductive health and the issues women (and men) are facing in our current context.

There is currently more focused attention on the area of reproductive health as well as the broader field of SRHR. It is my opinion that studies such as this one and similar research can ensure that theological thought and language equally partake in what is taking place in the secular spaces with regard to reproductive health. I believe that with studies and research like as this, Christian Theology can make a meaningful contribution. The need for theology that is helpful and

meaningful and speaks to the bodily experiences, especially those with regard to reproductive health, of people today, makes this study and those similar to it very current.

5.6 Proposed areas for further research

Further research areas I want to recommend is a body sensitive approach to Biblical interpretation, but especially in the field of New Testament studies. This study shows the various encounters Jesus had with different people when their bodily well-being was at stake. I would like to propose to New Testament scholars to undertake a Body Theology approach to New Testament texts where stories such as these are of interest especially those stories that include women of the Bible. I believe the exegetical interpretation of the texts Moltmann-Wendel uses in her theological work alongside an approach of a Theology of Embodiment and tenderness as she proposes can be meaningful. This can offer further research possibilities and Biblical interpretations that can assist in the discussions surrounding themes of health, and in this regard more specifically reproductive health.

The Old Testament has the most to offer with regard to the Bible mentioning fertility. As there are recent studies already done on various themes regarding fertility, infertility and the Bible⁶³ I can only briefly propose that even more in-depth and interdisciplinary studies should be undertaken to ensure that Christian Theology and Biblical scholarship can contribute meaningful theological language and interpretation when discussing reproductive health from a Christian perspective.

⁶³ Moss, C.R & Baden, J.S. 2015 book on *Reconceiving Infertility: Biblical perspectives on procreation and childlessness* offers an important contribution to the theological perspectives on the field of reproductive issues.

See also Moyo, C. 2006. *A Karanga perspective on fertility and barrenness as blessing and curse in 1 Samuel 1:1-2:10*.

Cooper-Hilbert, B. 1998. *Infertility and involuntary childlessness: helping couples cope* offers a more pastoral perspective on this topic.

In the field of Practical Theology, I am familiar with various helpful studies that speak meaningfully to issues pertaining to reproductive health, such as fertility and reproductive loss⁶⁴. I would like to propose even more specified studies with regard to reproductive health so that our faith communities can offer more valuable pastoral assistance to people, men and women, couples and women specifically. In this way, we can also ensure that people working in ministry are adequately equipped with the knowledge, theological language and resources to deal with these issues when they arise in their congregations, counselling conversations and preaching.

In the field this research is situated, Systematic Theology, I want to propose that the intersection between, gender, health and Systematic Theology be further explored. More specifically the intersection between Theological Anthropology and gender offer various areas open for new and current research. Are there areas of study included in Theological Anthropology that has not yet been viewed from a gender-critical perspective? Main areas of interest for Theological Anthropology such as sin, freedom and *imago Dei* amongst many others. How can these themes be discussed in new and fresh ways when a gender-sensitive approach is taken? Further, in the field of Systematic Theology, I would like to propose in-depth research at the humanity and physical life of Jesus life through the perspective of Christology applying a gender-sensitive approach to the person of Christ.

An area that I would have liked to explore but did not have the time or scope for is how Body Theology and/or Theological Anthropology can speak to current gender issues such as gender violence, rape, female genital mutilation, the use and availability to contraception and access to reproductive and sexual health. If a field such as Body Theology places a high value on human experience and what this can teach us about our theology, what will the implication for this be when domestic or sexual violence is discussed, or when the still present practice

⁶⁴ The following two sources also contribute to the perspectives of practical theology with regard to Reproductive Health dilemmas: Vergin, L. 1983. *Infertility: a guide for pastoral counseling* and Nel, J. 2000. *Die pastorale versorging van die gesin wat 'n miskraam beleef het – 'n Praktiese Teologiese perspektief*. Universiteit van Pretoria.

of female genital mutilation is on the table? How can body theology, a Theology of Embodiment or theological body language speak meaningfully to these issues?

Due to the scope of the debate surrounding abortion I have decided not to include it in the discussions where reproductive health was brought into conversation with the theological work of Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel. Alongside this, this research did not engage with the broader topic of patriarchy, the oppression of women and their bodies in relation to Moltmann-Wendel's political theology.

A specific reproductive health issue I would like to explore further is what Body Theology can contribute to the enormous reality of miscarriages and unwanted loss of pregnancy couples and women especially face today. I am aware that this issue receives attention from a Practical Theology perspective, but I hope to engage with this topic in the future from the perspective of Systematic Theology and more specifically Body Theology. This I would aim to do more in my own context of Africa and South Africa to explore how this topic is present and relevant for South African women and what a study such as this can contribute.

To end of this section it is necessary to note that I would have liked to make this research more contextual and concrete for my South African context today. Due to limited time and the scope available to me for this project this was not possible to the full extent that I would have liked. I am convinced that the topic of Theological Anthropology and Body Theology and theologians in conversation with these themes are necessary to be approached through an African and South African perspective. If this can be pursued I am convinced that such a project can speak meaningfully to the body experiences and more specifically experiences surrounding reproductive health people face in our country and continent today.

5.7 Conclusion

This chapter concludes by having reviewed the research problem, research questions, research methodology, research goals, and the contribution and relevance of this study. The last section also discussed possible areas for further research.

I want to complete this study and chapter by summarising what was discussed in each chapter. Chapter 1 offers an introduction to this study by presenting a research proposal and a general overview of what is planned. This includes background and motivation, structure and outline, methodology and research questions.

In chapter 2 a general overview of what the field of Theological Anthropology entails, drawing on the history of the field as well as what is current is discussed. This chapter also discussed the relationship between Theological Anthropology and gender as well as Body Theology. What was learned is that the problems and dilemmas we are facing today with regard to disembodiment, are much to blame on the views the early church and early scholars had of the body and that as Moltmann-Wendel declares this disembodiment should be uprooted. This chapter also teaches that there is still much to write about the topic of gender and Theological Anthropology and how Body Theology relates and fits into this field of study.

Chapter 3 was dedicated to the life and work of Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel as a person, woman and also very important as a theologian. We learned that the themes of her work were identified as mainly, liberation and feminist theology but she also made enormous contributions when it comes to gender-critical Biblical interpretations, embodied theological language and the argument for the return to a Theology of Embodiment, tenderness and giving bodies back their central place. These ideas clearly connect with what was discussed and explored in chapter 4 and the critical analyses of *"I am my Body"*. This chapter and the work of Moltmann-Wendel showed us that her theological work can make meaningful contributions to theology and the theological language necessary for the discussions pertaining to reproductive health.

The critical analyses of Moltmann-Wendel's book, *I am my body*, was discussed in chapter 4. The background, thesis and outline of the book were presented as well as

the different themes identified in her work. We learned that this included disembodiment, Jesus and the body, the question of having or being a body and Theology of Embodiment. Moltmann-Wendel makes a clear distinction in this book that we do not only have bodies, but that we are bodies, and with this, her work is placed firmly in the field of Theological Anthropology. This anthropological statement, as shown earlier in this chapter and in chapter 4, can be brought into conversation with the field of reproductive health, especially where women's bodies are concerned.

In conclusion, this research has shown that Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel's theological work can greatly and meaningfully contribute to the present discussions surrounding reproductive health and the issues that form a part of this field. She calls us back to a forgotten Theology of Embodiment, a theology of tenderness, bodily well-being and a movement Jesus put in place that is fully concerned with the salvation and healing of our whole bodies not only our souls - a call I wish to accept whole-heartedly.

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