

Maternal-thinking, *Missio Dei*, and Managerial Missiology: A Colombian Case Study

Renee Rheinbolt-Uribe

Published in *Global Missiology*, www.globalmissiology.org, April 2024

Abstract

“Maternal-thinking” in missiology emphasizes the importance of mothers in God’s eyes. Maternal-thinking emphasizes motherhood and womanhood, and it has implications for mission, church, and society. This article examines a case study in Colombia, highlighting the impact of mothers in a congregation in crisis due to the collapse of a mission agency.

Missio Dei acknowledges God’s reach beyond Christian institutions, the space that many times mothers have influenced throughout Christian history. However, in today's world, the concept of motherhood is often perceived through the lens of the dominant USA culture, identified as the “Age of Systems.” Moreover, related to how the current missions epoch is enmeshed in managerial missiology, the case study is evidence of how inadvertently the oppression of mothers and women from other cultures can be made “in the name of Christ.” This article’s comparison of the dominant culture in the West to a Colombian experience offers suggestions for research and corrective measures.

Key Words: managerial missiology, maternal-thinking, *missio Dei*, motherhood, womanhood

Introduction

“Maternal-thinking” (Ruddick 1995) is a vital tool that reveals the pivotal role of motherhood in the *missio Dei*. Maternal-thinking in missiological research is a pivotal lens, it seeks to highlight biological mothers, mothering, and maternal imagery in texts and empirical data. Missiology has historically provided much rich empirical data in the Global South (GS) from the grassroots level, where many times mothers are sustaining communities, families, and congregations (Freeks 2018).

Motherhood is a cherished and highly valued role in the eyes of the Godhead. Based on this assumption, the article first will view evidence across multiple academic disciplines, extending far beyond the realms of theology. However, in today's world, the concept of motherhood is often perceived through the lens of the dominant USA culture, which can inadvertently lead to the oppression of women from other cultures. So-called “Managerial Missiology” (Escobar 1991), in this “Age of Systems” (Cayley 2005; 2021), can export these USA values and practices globally through religious branded organizations (RBOs) (Rheinbolt-Uribe 2023). The second point of this article is to show the serious consequences of such value exportation, as demonstrated by a case study involving a congregation in Colombia that was impacted by the collapse of an international mission agency.

Thirdly, it is vital to adopt a maternal perspective of *missio Dei* to overcome these challenges and bring hope to humanity through the spread of the gospel message, especially viewing mothers’ activity throughout Christian history. By embracing this viewpoint, we can gain deeper insights into the value of motherhood and its possible significance in different cultures worldwide. Such insights serve as a reminder that motherhood is not just a biological process but a spiritual and emotional one that connects us all as human beings. The article’s fourth point demonstrates the wide potential of the maternal-thinking lens. As we continue to grow in appreciation of the diverse

ways motherhood is celebrated, respected, and practiced around the world, the benefit is to work towards empowering and uplifting women in the church, mission, and society.

Maternal-thinking: An Interdisciplinary Approach

The main theme of this article relates to *motherhood* and *womanhood*. An interdisciplinary focus is necessary to attempt to grasp this theme. Motherhood has a broad meaning. The founder of Motherhood Studies, Andrea O'Reilly (2021), helps with providing such definitions for key terms like "biological mothers," "mothering," and "motherers." Poet Naomi Ruth Lowinsky (2009) provides the term "motherline." Many academic disciplines speak to this theme of motherhood. The following eight sections provide a few connections between academic disciplines and motherhood.

Motherhood in Literary Criticism, Psychology, Anthropology, and Economics

Literary critic Gayatri Spivak (2003, 386) beautifully depicts empowerment within motherhood by noting it to be "[A] natural power we carry within ourselves." Darcia Narvaez, et al. (2016) sum up the psychological research about motherhood. There is clear evidence that mothers play a crucial role in shaping their child's development, both during pregnancy and after birth. The quality of a mother's care influences various aspects of a child's health and behavior, such as their immune system, stress response, attachment, and social orientation. Anthropologist and primatologist Sarah Hrdy (1999) was forced to set aside her original hypothesis that a maternal instinct does not exist. She did so after analyzing the overwhelming data in research on animals, historical study, and her lived experience as mother. Genevieve Vaughn (2015), in her groundbreaking work in economics, introduced the concept of "maternal gift economy." She appeals to the logic of motherhood as a radical way for economic and social transformation.

Motherhood in Theology and Biblical Studies

The disciplines of theology and biblical studies also have rich scholarly work around motherhood. An example of the richness available in these disciplines is seen from a quote by theologian Amy Peeler (2022, 62), in which she graphically describes the vital role of motherhood and womanhood in the Incarnation process:

The Son of God is then born, which, no matter how this happens, with pain or not, by separating the hymen or not, means that the embodied God passes through the birth canal of a woman. Because he is completely human and was born in the time before formula and bottles, he nursed at the breast of a woman. From that moment until he was grown, her hands held him; her arms enveloped him; her lap gave him a place to rest.

God's choice to allow the body of a woman, even the most intimate parts of herself, to come into direct contact with the body and blood of the Son stands against any who would deny women *by virtue of the fact that they are women* access to the holy (emphasis original).

In African culture, theologian J. Kabamba Kiboko (2001, 213) highlights a concept "thinking-with-the-womb," which suggests that women not only think with their head and heart but also with their womb, seen as the center of life. This idea was used during a Bible study among Sanga women in the Democratic Republic of Congo, where a 98-year-old woman recognized the importance of

the Samaritan woman's womb in her story with Jesus. This concept reflects the belief that the womb is a source of knowledge and nurturing, "as it was chosen by God as the place to nurture the Savior."

Theologian Kat Armas (2021, 12) presenting *abuela theology* ("grandmother theology"), raises the question: "What if the world's greatest theologians are those whom the world wouldn't consider theologians at all?". Armas's question arose from what might be called her training in "kitchen theology," whereby she learned about God while her grandmother cooked and talked.

These examples are only a minute sample of the wealth of the scholarly work that can be discovered on the topic of motherhood in theology and biblical studies. There is also robust research to delight the mind and heart within religious studies and spirituality.

Motherhood in the God-image

This article agrees with the "Christian confession that God, who created the world, is good. Moreover, Christians confess that what God created is good, and God's good creation is intended for good. This confession is also a political claim that has consequences for both faith and public life" (Forster 2022, 5). Based on this affirmation, this article also assumes that the Godhead is gender-neutral and is depicted in the biblical text as a good Parent: both a motherly Father and a caring Mother (cf. Claassens 2012; Rheinbolt-Urbe 2017; Peeler 2022). Hannah Whitall Smith (as cited in Rheinbolt-Urbe 2017, 1) stands out with this unmatched description:

But God is not only a father, but He is also a mother as well, and we have all known mothers whose love and tenderness have been without bound or limit. And it is certain that the God who created them both, and who is Himself father and mother in one, could have never created earthly fathers and mothers who were more tender and more loving than He is Himself. Therefore, if we want to know what sort of Father He is, we must heap together all the best of all the fathers and mothers we have ever known or can imagine, and we must tell ourselves that this is only a faint image of God, our Father in Heaven.

Embracing this robust God-image of our Christian God is vital for grasping the development of maternal-thinking as a guiding light for related insights into mission, church, and society.

Motherhood in Missiology

The theological concept of *missio Dei* intertwines quite nicely with motherhood and missiology, as my earlier research shows (Rheinbolt-Urbe 2023). The oft-repeated maternal phrase overflowing with maternal imagery, "mission is the mother of theology" (Bosch 1991, 16, 521) hints at how the feminine and motherhood is a foundational concept in missiology. *Missio Dei* is a theological recognition that the Creator of the Universe works beyond the borders of human endeavors and institutions to reach out in love to both humans and nonhumans. As asserted by pastoral theologian and missiologist Lynne Taylor (2020, 54), quoting a Uniting Church in Australia document: "God has been at work in nurturing and sustaining the First Peoples, people who had already encountered the Creator God before the arrival of the colonizers." *Missio Dei* complements and questions church-centered mission, especially managerial missiology.

Motherhood in the Age of Systems

Maternal-thinking should not be confused with Western feminism, although there is overlap in that both concern females and the female body. The closest Western feminism comes to the logic of

this article is “matricentric feminism” (O’Reilly 2021). That perspective not only empowers females but carries a family-centered and community-centered emphasis as well (cf. Freeks 2018 for empirical data in Southern Africa). Missiologist, theologian, and social critic Ivan Illich (1981; 1983) describes the tension of what can be perceived by many as a binary battle between males and females that is common in Western feminism. I agree with Illich’s placing of the dominant USA culture within the Age of Systems (Cayley 2005; 2021) (although it is beyond the scope of this article to present my full argument regarding the connection of the missiological implications of the dominant USA culture, managerial missiology, and the Age of Systems).

Illich refers to the Age of Systems as a modern *unisex regime* with a “loss of gender” including “genderless education” (Illich 1983, 10-13; Cayley 2021, 225, 242). Illich is deeply concerned, rightly so, with the ways in which complex systems could diminish human freedom and well-being. Illich (1983, 80) boldly asserts: “The concept of sex role could not come into being until society’s institutions were structured to meet the genderless needs of genderless clients with genderless clients with genderless commodities produced in a genderless world. The sex role builds on the existence of genderless *man*” (emphasis original). Illich, throughout his life work, continually calls for a reevaluation of our reliance on these systems and a return to more human-centered ways of living and organizing society.

I understand USA laws as assuming this unisex logic, along the lines of the “genderless man”. I assume that is the reason for USA federal law that entitles a new mother, but only under certain circumstances, to a maximum of 12 weeks of *unpaid* leave (U.S. Department of Labor n.d.). The USA system for care and allowances is market-driven, so the private sector and individual states are allowed to decide how to best approach the vulnerable moments of workers, such as the welcoming of a new baby into the family unit. Conversely, many countries in the world have a nationwide view of systemic care, are protected by federal law, for such moments as childbirth and adoption. In contrast to the previous mentioned USA federal law, Colombian federal law provides 18 weeks of *paid* leave for mothers and two weeks of *paid* leave for fathers, as well as many other benefits (Angulo et al., 2021). I have grave concerns in regard to consequences of global missions that apply the template of the USA legal paradigm following the logic of the market as in managerial missiology.

Managerial missiology is defined by theologian and missiologist Samuel Escobar (1991, 11): “As a typical school of thought coming from the modern United States, the quantitative approach is predominant and the pragmatic orientation well defined. . . the evangelistic task is reduced to a process that can be carried out in accordance with standard marketing principles.” The closely bound relationship between marketing principles and missions in this Age of Systems has led to new denominations. I coined the term religious branded organization (RBO) (Rheinbolt-Urbe 2023) as a category in religious studies for new denominations that expand as a brand without ties to historical denominations.

Illich (2005, 620) locates the 1980s within the Age of Systems, the epoch within which managerial missiology gains strength (Escobar 1991). The 1980s was also the decade when the denomination in the case study grew internationally.

Motherlessness in the Age of Systems

English literature professor Wendy Nielson (2022) connects this motherhood theme with technology, arguing that *motherless* creations in the West have resulted from technology. She

concludes that men, as creators of “life,” would then become the “mothers.” Hrdy (1999, 506) she suggests that encouraging a system where very young infants are cared for by a paid communal daycare could potentially lead to adults who are “‘more qualified’ for life in the modern world [to work in the Age of Systems], . . . as they are less securely attached and less capable of forming close relationships.”

Nielson’s and Hrdy’s conclusions link to maternal images in Illich’s Age of Systems, in particular the use of the words “motherless” and “womb-less” to describe these systems (Cayley 2021, 383). Illich sees a corrupting effect on people’s understanding of themselves: “We become a part of a system, as if a part of a computer” (Cayley 2021, 250).

This Western *motherlessness* can easily be linked to the “self-made man” and the ahistorical theme of the Enlightenment epoch of “emancipated, autonomous individuals” (Bosch 1991, 267; cf. Illich 1983, 10). Furthermore, this motherlessness, the legacy of the West, could be expressed personally as, “I have no mother. I came to this earth out of nowhere.” On a reflective note, within managerial missiology I would argue that a society creating autonomous individualism is a valuable trait, as adults can work more efficiently within the Age of Systems for the purpose of Christian mission.

Motherhood in Feminism

Feminism and motherhood have a rocky relationship, a full examination of which is beyond the scope of this article. Indigenous researcher Bagele Chilisa (2020: 300-306) provides a sweeping overview of the history of feminism. The origins of first-wave and second-wave feminism can be attributed predominantly to white women residing in the West. These feminisms she terms as Liberal, Bourgeois, or Individualistic Feminism and Radical Feminism or Marxist-Socialist Feminist Theory. Much of the activism in these first two waves was made possible by Black or endarkened women caring for the white women’s children, while leaving their own children behind due to economic reasons. Chilisa also highlights aspects of third-wave feminism, describing Black feminisms, African feminisms, borderland-Mestizaje feminisms, Asian feminisms, and other marginalized non-Western feminisms. She specifically links to the concept of maternal-thinking within African feminism “as woman-centered and mother-centered,” linking to Kiboko’s thinking-with-the-womb.

Motherhood in Tacit knowledge

My biological motherhood experiences are what allowed me to connect with my own female body, its embodied knowledge, and my motherline. All of these have led to my developing of the tool of maternal-thinking within the *missio Dei*. In my own personal experience as the daughter of USA medical mission practitioners in the highlands of Guatemala and as a mission practitioner within the denomination being studied here, I have reflected upon the reality of the unisex approach latent in my background. These experiences led to appreciating the tacit knowledge of Colombian culture I was learning through being around young mothers and grandmothers, as well as to admiring the protection offered by Colombia’s federal laws.

The Colombian tradition of *quarentena*, a 40-day rest period for new mothers, is a common practice rooted in biblical customs (cf. Leviticus 12:1-8; Luke 2:22, 27). During this time, the mother is cared for by her own mother or a close female family member; she stays at home and solely focuses on caring for herself and her newborn. Initially, I did not respect this practice but

came to appreciate its value after experiencing the challenges of having twins. Both Hrdy (1999) and Narvaez et al. (2016) conclude that the vital bond between newborn and biological mother correlate with this custom. In contrast, in the USA, new mothers are expected to resume normal activities shortly after giving birth. (The customs in Colombia and the USA are distinct due to several factors, although a full description is beyond the scope of this article.)

A bird's eye view of many disciplines that connect to motherhood allow for a robust understanding of the maternal-thinking lens used in the following case study.

Case Study: Motherhood, Managerial Missiology, and Age of Systems

The *modus operandi* of the USA-based denominational mission agency in this article's case study fits into the category of managerial missiology. I applied maternal-thinking as a lens while reading the official book that guided mission theology and methods for the denomination in Latin America, ironically titled *Bent on Conquest* (Giambarba 1988). Maternal-thinking led me to focus on the teaching where young converts were discouraged to have closeness to their parents. This approach was based on a literal understanding of Jesus's words in Luke 14:26:

As the gospel expands across the globe, encountering family systems much stronger than those in the United States, the disciple's love for Jesus must never be rivaled by his love for a person, whether father or mother, wife or children, brother, or sister. If he loves one of them or himself more than following Jesus, he has failed the test of discipleship. Jesus will not name him among his own (Giambara 1998, 5).

The second and third of Escobar's (1991, 12) characteristics of managerial missiology can be observed in both the above quote and denominational literature: (ii) "prepackaged theologies translated from English" and (iii) "a reductionist understanding of the Gospel and Christian mission." (The first of the three (1991, 11) is the relationship of managerial missiology to quantitative methodologies.)

The mission theology and methods, prior to the agency's collapse, were quite distinctive in their prioritization of kinship within the church "family" over physical or blood relationships. Text analysis of denominational literature confirmed a narrower biblical interpretation as well, namely that the spiritual "family" was not the mystical body of Christ that unites all Christian believers but only the members of that particular denomination.

Matricentric Colombian Culture Meets the Motherlessness West

This USA denomination's exclusive teaching and practice about church family are quite different from the Colombian culture, which places a great emphasis on the importance of family and kinship ties. The family is considered the cornerstone of society, and it is often seen as the primary source of support and comfort for individuals. The Colombian culture is *matricentric*, which means that family life is centered around the mother (Gutierrez de Pineda 2000; Serrano 2016). In many homes the mother is considered the head of the household, and she is often responsible for maintaining strong family ties and traditions. In contrast, the USA-based denomination's teachings and practices could be seen as a direct attack against the mothers and motherhood, as they prioritized the church "family" over physical or blood relatives.

Interestingly, however, the manner in which the leadership structure of the congregation was configured held both female and male leadership in parallel. This ecclesial model is based on a

tool termed “one-on-one discipling” (cf. Rheinbolt-Urbe 2023, 89, 215, 364). The women were encouraged to place their confidence in, and allegiance to, the female leadership figure, as a spiritual mentor. Similarly, men would be encouraged to place theirs in the male leader and spiritual mentor. The man oversaw the men, and the woman was responsible for the women. From personal experience I can confirm that a woman’s maternal experience was not factored into this structure; the load could be extremely heavy for a young mother with several children.

The church planting methodology can be identified within Western feminism in that the females were empowered within the structure in the manner that was developed in the USA. My personal view is that the structure was built upon the logic of the Age of System’s *unisex regime*, a type of “forced feminism” (cf. Jacoby & Jacoby 2002, where they document the consequences of this structural reality and the consequences on many mothers’ mental, spiritual, and physical health). The mission agency was not alert to the maternal aspect of the female existence, especially from the cultural and legal perspective of Colombia. The fourth and final point in this article will highlight the policy and legal aspects related to this theme.

The potential implications of the case study as to possible “forced feminism” or Illich’s “genderless man” within managerial missiology are vast and especially for mission endeavors from the West to the GS (cf. Hofstede 1998 for research in cross-cultural psychology as to the intersection of religion, gender, and sexuality). I assert that the prevailing perspective in the GS tends to be the opposite of a Western *motherlessness*, as the interconnectedness of reality centers around recognizing the significance of one's mother, father, and ancestors (Bosch 1991, 264, 355; Chilisa 2020, 47; Rheinbolt-Urbe 2023, 60, 66-67). Theological and biblical studies confirm this interconnectedness, as signaled in the article’s first section (cf. Armas, Bosch, Claassens, Kiboko, Peeler, Rheinbolt-Urbe, and Taylor). From my extensive research I have seen that the disparities in viewpoints between the USA and Colombia are obvious but would suggest furthermore that such disparities could be a wider global issue, particularly when it comes to the approach to motherhood.

More Details in the Case Study

The international collapse of the USA mission agency in 2003 had great consequences on the associated church in Colombia (COL). The church was planted in 1992 with a mission team of 10 people (3 USA/7 COL). The profound impact of the collapse can be viewed quantitatively in this membership report (Castellanos 2011, 65, 76):

- 2002 (prior to the collapse) - 2000 adults
- 2003 (after the collapse) - 200 adults
- 2010 (after the regrouping stage) - 700 adults

A maternal-thinking lens allowed me to see that the congregation in Colombia had been built on “sacred ground” (cf. Chilisa 2020). That sacred ground was the role and place of the mother in Colombian life. As previously noted, the mission agency’s theology and methods of mission meant to undermine the role of the mother, but the culture and a resilient spirituality proved stronger than the mission’s theology and methods. This is evident from how many mothers joined their children, who were university students, into the church planting process. Instead of fighting with their children over their involvement in this new denomination, many mothers “leaned in” and became a part of the congregation.

Mothers in Jesus's Movement: "Leaned In"

In the biblical text there is a shift in Mary, Jesus's mother. During Jesus's ministry there is evidence of Mary's concern about his sanity, highlighted in an episode depicted in Mark 3:20-35. The Acts narrative (Acts 1:14), however, reveals that she decided to "lean in" wholeheartedly; Mary joined her son's followers, the Jesus movement. I think that it is safe to describe Mary's "leaning in" as *thinking-with-the-womb*, as a woman thinking not only with her head and heart but also with her womb, noted earlier to be "the center of life" in African life.

I observe the *missio Dei* in Mary's life, as well as in examples of women, many of them presumably mothers, in the Jesus movement throughout the book of Acts. I highlight three examples of many:

- (i) Cooking and opening their homes for daily fellowship as narrated in Acts 2:42-47;
- (ii) Holding prayer meetings amid crisis, such as in Acts 12:12;
- (iii) Equally receiving persecution for being part of the Jesus movement as described in Acts 8:3, as both men and women were going to prison.

The mothers in the Colombian congregation helped kept the community together during the tough times brought on by the mission agency's collapse. The collapse was a financial collapse as well as in the area of legal and ecclesiastical authority. The mothers continued to open their homes, cook, and give biblical teaching. Some of the church's family units, centered around the mother, stayed connected with the congregation during the crisis. Other family units left to attend another congregation or met as a house church. The *missio Dei* clearly was at work in these mothers, just as in Jesus's mother Mary and the examples in the book of Acts.

Using maternal-thinking makes it obvious that the USA-based denomination in the case study mission methods and theology were not sensitive to the maternal factor within the cultural dynamics of the Colombian culture. Also, it should be clear how in the crisis within the Colombian congregation the mothers were vital for sustaining the Christian faith. And in contrast to the mission agency's mission theology and methods, there is a vital role of mothers in the New Testament, with special emphasis on the role of Mary, the mother of Jesus, and the women in the Jesus movement community in Jerusalem.

Mothers: Faith Sustainers

Despite accusations that Christianity has suppressed women, there is evidence of mothers being empowered within Christianity. Missiologist and historian Dana Robert (1997, 2019) emphasizes that women and mother empowerment is often hidden in mission history. But when applying maternal-thinking, overwhelming evidence of the *missio Dei* related to mothers' empowerment within Christianity comes to the forefront.

Mothers Active throughout Christian History

The *missio Dei* can be observed throughout Christian history when mothers have sustained and nurtured their communities during crisis and difficult times. Historian Philip Jenkins (2008, 63, 73, 176) emphasizes the importance of both biological and spiritual mothers in continuing the Christian faith, even in times of extreme persecution. In revisiting the "lost history" of Christianity in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia, Jenkins notes how within the "destruction of churches and Christian communities. . . women were a critical factor in preserving underground faith" (176).

Similar evidence was provided by Annemie Bosch during our series of interviews. During her husband's (David Bosch) doctoral studies in Switzerland, she was told by a German minister that grandmothers from Eastern Germany would secretly cross the border at night to have their grandchildren baptized.

The empirical data from the Colombian Christians interviewed pointed to the influence of their grandmothers and mothers as the first persons who taught them about faith in God. The data is very rich, not only as to the profound spiritual influence of their motherline but also in many cases the communal way of being raised by the extended family. Armas's *abuela theology* and kitchen theology link to this data, as well as does Spivak's emphasis on the natural empowerment within motherhood. This extended family influence confirms the Colombian view of family and community. This logic could be extended to other GS communities for comparison.

Mothers Sustaining and Planting Congregations

Although it was not the primary focus of the USA-denomination's approach, I made it a point to prioritize the well-being of mothers and grandmothers in the congregation. To address their specific needs, we formed a group called "NoheMi's," named after Ruth's mother-in-law in the book of Ruth. This group offered classes on various topics related to womanhood, including female friendships, widowhood, menopause, and motherhood. Members of the group shared their own knowledge and experiences, while also inviting guest speakers from different countries to provide diverse perspectives. The most remarkable aspect of this group has been the enduring bond and support that has withstood the challenges faced by the congregation. Rather than putting mothers on a pedestal or diminishing their role, the group aimed to cultivate a deep yearning for spiritual growth and unity among its members.

Many of these women have not only sustained the congregation in crisis but have also been pivotal for planting and sustaining congregations in their hometowns and cities. Such central women's roles are missiological examples of aforementioned Vaughn's "maternal gift economy." The collapse of the mission agency empowered many of the mothers, as they stood firm while the institution had a complete melt-down. These mothers who are self-funded, non-institutional itinerant ministers, or evangelists have made a significant contribution to the growth and spread of the gospel message in different parts of this country. Their dedication, commitment, and selflessness are a testament to the transformative power of faith and resilient spirituality—and specifically of motherhood and womanhood.

Implications, Consequences, and Potential of Maternal-thinking Research

This article has emphasized the importance of maternal-thinking in cross-cultural mission work and diverse societies. Understanding and adapting to the maternal norms and roles of different cultures is crucial. However, challenges arise due to the dominant influence of the USA in global mission structures and funding. Differences in guidelines and laws regarding maternal care between the USA and other countries can create issues. For example, it is questionable whether a USA mission board and donors would support a mission practitioner from Colombia taking 18 weeks of *paid* maternal leave, paying to have a family member care for her while working for the mission agency, as well as other benefits that a Colombian would receive in their home country.

Instances of Inadequate Measures to Safeguard Mothers

Two examples from a USA mission agency in Latin America highlight the issue of inadequate family laws and customs. In one case, a missionary couple with a newborn baby were expected to immediately relocate internationally. In another case, a pregnant mission practitioner and her husband were unexpectedly dismissed for failing to contact their home church weekly. This second example of a “hire and fire” practice is common in managerial missiology and has been observed in other mission agencies (cf. Borgall 2016; Rheinbolt-Urbe 2018).

Much more data is needed as the GS multiplies their missions in this epoch of missiology “from everywhere to everyone” (cf. Rheinbolt-Urbe 2015 for empirical data comparing with the research population of GS and Western missionary mothers). Research is needed on job agreements, workplace environment, ethical questions in the termination of contracts, and in some cultures the acknowledgment of the significance of the extended family. I believe such research could uncover information that certain mission agencies might prefer to overlook.

Consequences for Mission and Church

If GS families are traveling far from their home culture, but their culture and even its laws and guidelines are not respected, the consequences for the family can be profound (cf. Jonas 2022 for specific examples in the Southern Africa context). Research in GS families seeking to understand issues in the second and third generation in transnational mission practitioners is of utmost importance. There exists extensive research as to the issues and consequences on Western families in their international mission endeavors (cf. Baker and Priest 2014). If my assumption is correct, and managerial missiology is a common expression and structure of mission endeavors, not only from the USA but also GS mission organizations, much prayer and reflection are needed.

Consequences for Church and Society

Maternal-thinking allows to uncover many areas of potential research for denominations and mission agencies. As the case study shows, there are aspects that can also prove to be crucial for societies that are expanding in their intercultural dimensions. Maternal-thinking can supply themes for fostering intercultural understanding and dialogue, as well as show a path for reflection into the dominant systems and structures. It asks questions that can potentially seek to engage with the values of those on the outskirts or the periphery. An engagement using maternal-thinking could result in the transformation of policies and laws, such as providing greater protection for women during their journey to and through motherhood. I reject the notion that the only solution is for mothers to withdraw from civil society.

Potential for Christian Mutuality

Additionally, cultures that are considered peripheral to the West can offer valuable insights, solutions, and wisdom on these matters that are of utmost importance for the future of all human beings, particularly in the West. Following Bosch (1978), there needs to be a willingness to embrace this mutual exchange of knowledge in the spirit of Christian mutuality. As many Western mission practitioners before me, I have had the opportunity to engage in a process of mutual transformation. I have been transformed by being immersed in the Colombian culture and with Colombian mothers. The Western Christian community, as well as those in the GS, have the opportunity to continue down the road of personal transformation. This article argues for the area of maternal-thinking, illustrating the impact of its implementation in discovering other ways of living and thinking—in churches, mission endeavors, and even civil societies.

Conclusion

A wide range of points have been made in relation to maternal-thinking within Christian mission and society, understood as mothers and mothering participating in the *missio Dei*. Overall, this article seeks to demonstrate the amazing insights that can be acquired using maternal-thinking as a lens.

The first point in the article was meant to detail an interdisciplinary overview of motherhood, so as to have a robust understanding of maternal-thinking. Secondly, data from the case study was revealed so as to encourage a corrective in the use of managerial missiology. The third point was to argue for an awareness of the resilient spirituality of mothers in the difficulties faced within Christian communities throughout Christian history and in contemporary Colombia. The fourth and final point was to argue for research into legal and policy applications and correctives within church, society, and mission organizations.

The need to recognize and empower mothers is emphasized in the New Testament. However, Western concepts of motherhood may not be applicable to all cultures. A case study in Colombia demonstrates how this difference led to oppressive theologies and mission methods. These issues need to be researched, recognized, and corrected. Western Christians have the opportunity to continue to learn from other cultures and recognize the importance of mothers, while the GS must avoid repeating the mistakes of the West.

Maternal-thinking concludes this article with this important thought from the book of Isaiah 66:13: “As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you.” We are in the hands of a comforting Parent; and, if we allow, we can be comforted and spread that comfort. This maternal view of the *missio Dei* emphasizes a Creator whose reach is beyond the ethical constraints found in the market logic of managerial missiology in the Age of Systems. My underlying desire is that Christians continue to embrace the God-image of a comforting Godhead in all aspects of their lives, whether they live in the West or the GS. Every corner of our world yearns for more comfort.

References

- Angulo, H., Webster, F. & Rosseau, S. (2021). Colombia expands family leave, pregnancy bias protections. Mercer. <https://www.mercer.com/en-us/insights/law-and-policy/colombia-expands-family-leave-pregnancy-bias-protections/>
- Armas, K. (2021). *Abuelita faith: What women on the margins teach us about wisdom, persistence, and strength*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press.
- Baker, D. P. & Priest, R. J. (eds.). (2014). *The missionary family: Witness, concerns, care*. Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library.
- Borgall, S. J. (2016). *The emergence of Christ groups in India*. Oxford, UK: Regnum Books International.
- Bosch, D. J. (1978). Towards true mutuality: Exchanging the same commodities or supplementing each others' needs? *Missiology: An International Review*, 6(3): 283-296. <https://doi.org/10.1177/009182967800600303>
- ____ (1991). *Transforming mission: Paradigm shifts in theology of mission*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis.

- Castellanos, F. M. (2011). *Historia institucional de la Iglesia de Cristo Internacional en Colombia (Institutional history of the International Church of Christ in Colombia)*. Fundación Universitario Seminario Bautista Internacional.
- Cayley, D. (2005). *The rivers north of the future: The testament of Ivan Illich*. Toronto, CA: House of Anansi Press.
- Cayley, D. (2021). *Ivan Illich: An intellectual journey*. Univ. Park, PA: The Penn St Univ Press.
- Chilisa, B. (2020). *Indigenous research methodologies* (2nd ed.). Los Angeles, CA: SAGE.
- Claassens, L. J. (2012). *Mourner, mother, midwife: Reimagining God's delivering presence in the Old Testament*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press.
- Escobar, S. (1991). A movement divided: Three approaches to world evangelization stand in tension with one another. *Transformation: An International Journal of Holistic Mission Studies*, 8(4): 7-13. <https://doi.org/10.1177/026537889100800409>
- Freeks, F. E. (2018). Views of mothers on the fundamental role of the Christian father as mentor in a nuclear family environment. *In die Skriflig/In Luce Verbi*, 52(1): a2365. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ids.v52i1.2365>
- _____ (2023). Genderbased violence as a destructive form of warfare against families in South Africa: A practical theological response. *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, 79(1): a8969. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v79i1.8969>
- Forster, D. (2022). Living more decently in an indecent world? The virtues and vices of a public theologian. Prof Dion Forster – Inaugural Lecture 16 August 2022. Stellenbosch University. <https://blogs.sun.ac.za/inaugural-lectures/event/prof-dion-forster-2/>
- Jenkins, P. (2008). *The lost history of Christianity: The thousand-year golden age of the church in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia--and how it died*. New York, NY: HarperOne.
- Giambarba, A. (1988). *Bent on conquest*. Self-Published.
- Gutiérrez de Pineda, V. (2000). *Familia y cultura en Colombia: Tiplologías, funciones y dinámicas de la familia. Manifestaciones múltiples a través del mosaico cultural y sus estructuras sociales (Family and culture in Colombia: Typologies, functions and dynamics of the family. Multiple manifestations through the cultural mosaic and its social structures.)* (5th ed.). Medellín, CO: Editorial Universidad de Antioquia.
- Hofstede, G. (ed.) (1998). *Masculinity and femininity: The taboo dimension of national cultures*. Thousand Oaks, CA; London, UK; New Delhi, IN: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Hrды, S. B. (1999). *Mother Nature: A history of mothers, infants, and natural selection*. New York, NY: Pantheon Books.
- Illich I. (1981). *Shadow work*. London, UK; New York, NY: Marion Boyars.
- _____ (1983). *Gender*. London, UK; New York, NY: Marion Boyars.
- Jacoby, D. & Jacoby, V. (2002). The women's role reconsidered - special focus: sisters on staff.

douglasjacoby.com. <https://www.douglasjacoby.com/wp-content/uploads/WOMEN%20II%20rev.pdf>

- Jonas, P. (2022). *The evangelists*. Stellenbosch, SA: DR Church Archives.
- Kiboko, K. (2001). Sharing power: An autobiographical view, in N.J. Njoroge and M.W. Dube Shomanah (eds.), *Talitha Cum! Theologies of African women*. Pietermaritzburg, SA: Cluster Publications, 207-221.
- Lowinsky, N. R. (2009). *The motherline: Every woman's journey to find her female roots*. Sheridan, WY: Fisher King Press.
- Narvaez, D., Gettler, L., Braungart-Rieker, J., Miller-Graff, L., & Hastings, P. (eds.) (2016). *Contexts for young child flourishing*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Nielsen, W. C. (2022). *Motherless creations: Fictions of artificial life, 1650-1890*. New York, NY and Oxon, UK: Routledge.
- O'Reilly, A. (2021). *Matricentric feminism: Theory, activism, practice* (2nd ed.). Toronto, CA: Demeter Press.
- Peeler, A. (2022). *Women and the gender of God*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Co.
- Spivak, G. C. (2003). *A critique of postcolonial Reason*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Rheinbolt-Urbe, R. (2015). "She did what she could, when she could": Different paths chosen throughout the ages by missionary mothers. Masters thesis. Lincoln Christian University. https://www.academia.edu/106976568/She_Did_What_She_Could_When_She_Could_Different_paths_chosen_throughout_the_ages_by_missionary_mothers_2015
- ____ (2017). "As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you": Implications of Yahweh's self-revelation as a maternal figure in Third Isaiah -- Is. 66:10-13. Masters thesis. Lincoln Christian University. https://www.academia.edu/106979933/As_A_Mother_Comforts_Her_Child_So_Will_I_Comfort_You_Implications_of_Yahwehs_self_revelation_as_a_maternal_figure_in_Third_Isaiah_Is_66_10_13_2017
- ____ (2018) Mini case study: Complexity of applying ethical code for transnational mission practioners. Self-published. https://www.academia.edu/107083795/Mini_Case_Study_Complexity_of_applying_ethical_code_for_transnational_mission_practioners_2018
- ____ (2023). *Transforming mutuality in a theology of mission: A missiological evaluation of a Colombian congregation case study* [PhD dissertation]. Stellenbosch University. <https://ocrpl.org/theses/transforming-mutuality-in-a-theology-of-mission-a-missiological-evaluation-of-a-colombian-congregation-case-study/>
- Robert, D. L. (1997). *American women in mission: A social history of their thought and practice*. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press.

- _____ (2019). *Faithful friendships: Embracing diversity in Christian community*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing.
- Ruddick, S. (1995). *Maternal thinking: Towards a politics of peace* (2nd ed.). Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Serrano, E. (2016). *Por que fracasa Colombia?: Delirios de una nación que se desconoce a si misma* (*Why is Colombia failing?: Delusions of a country that does not know itself*). Bogota, CO: Grupo Planeta.
- Taylor, L. (2020). Making room for the *missio Dei* in missiological research. *Mission Studies*, 37(1): 52-77. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15733831-12341696>
- U.S. Department of Labor (n.d.). Family and Medical Leave (FMLA). U.S. Department of Labor. <https://www.dol.gov/general/topic/benefits-leave/fmla>
- Vaughan, G. (2015). *Homo Donas: For a maternal economy*. Milan, IT: VandA.ePublishing.