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# Transforming Mutuality: The Jesus-Mary Relationship as a Model for Theology and Public Life

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**Abstract:** This essay explores the concept of "mutuality" through the relationship between Jesus and his mother, Mary, as a model for theology and public life. It presents female-maternal-embodied knowledge as a framework to understand the eight stages of the female maternal body, from birth to death. The essay highlights how Mary's consent, relational autonomy, and the Incarnation exemplify transformative and intergenerational mutuality. It examines key scenes in their relationship, showing the shifts in agency, power, and reflexivity, including the need for "mutual distancing" during Jesus' public ministry. The essay then applies this model to missiology, noting how it can inform discussions around power dynamics, financial dependency, and the challenge of "letting go" in Christian institutions. It also suggests the relevance of this model for intercultural communication, family life, congregational studies, and the one's individual path of transformation. Ultimately, the essay proposes that the relationship between Jesus and Mary serves as a profound example of transforming mutuality, which has the potential to invigorate theology, biblical studies, and practical applications for public life.

**Keywords:** Mutuality, Maternal-Thinking, Relational Autonomy, Jesus-Mary Relationship, Incarnation

## Introduction

The essay explores how the act of gift-giving reflects the nature of God, characterized by transformative and intergenerational mutuality. This is best understood through a maternal-thinking or thinking-with-the-womb philosophical lens, particularly in the relationship between Jesus and his mother, Mary. Motherhood is presented as an act of relational autonomy, where a woman freely engages her maternal body to create space for the development of another human being. Examining key scenes in the relationship between Jesus and Mary, the essay presents a model of eight stages in the life cycle of the female maternal body, female-maternal-embodied knowledge. This model was created as a theological and educational tool based on my own personal experience. I believe motherhood is a mystery, this model provides insights into the crucial concepts within mutuality, which has the potential to invigorate theology, biblical studies, pastoral, and practical applications for public life.

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## What is the World is Mutuality?

“Mutuality” best describes the quality desired within the ideal of the Christian narrative. While it is commonly used, it remains poorly theorized. A search in 2022 through theological and missiological dictionaries at the Stellenbosch Faculty of Theology Library confirmed this. I finally found a definition in *An A to Z of Feminist Theology*. Heyward (2016, 155) defines mutuality, "a relational process in which all persons or parties are empowered, thereby experiencing themselves as able to survive, affect others creatively, and make a constructive difference in the world around them." Heyward further notes, "[e]thically and practically, mutuality is a slippery concept, hard to define in practice, yet essential to right-relations." This definition is best understood with the female-maternal-embodied knowledge.

Croatian missiologist, theologian, historian and philosopher Ivan Illich inspired by the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) defines mutuality this way, “‘Who is my neighbor?’ . . . ‘He to whom you as a free human being establish your personal proportionality by turning to him in love and inviting him to the mutuality of love which is usually called friendship.’” (as told to Cayley 2021, 383). The relational theological concepts of “mutual submission”, “mutual understanding”, and “mutual dependence” are tied into mutuality. Grenz (2007) and Love (2010) expertly describe this flexibility within “social trinitarianism” which describes the mutuality which is embedded in the being-in-relation, the theology of the Trinity. This “trinitarian theology of participation” (Hagley, et.al., 2009) is key to grasping mutuality. The Trinity is an actual social reality in which we participate, which I link to Illich’s underlying argument in all his work.

Discussing Illich’s *Gender* (1983), Cayley (2021) summarizes this social reality as the “philosophy of complementary” with a compelling image of “mutual dependence” – understood as a world where one’s very existence is a gift from others. These theological and philosophical stances are implicit to female-maternal-embodied knowledge. Two related concepts, “relational autonomy” and “feminism of care” allow for a more nuanced view of mutuality.

“Relational autonomy” (Stoljar 2017) is a philosophical concept, particularly developed by females, which posits that love and freedom allow a human to submit to difficulties and pain. Biblical texts confirm this view such as Yahweh's self-revelation as a maternal figure in Third Isaiah--Is. 66:10-13 (cf. Rheinbolt-Uribe 2017). Relational autonomy challenges the notion of "self-made" individuals and the Enlightenment ideal of "emancipated, autonomous individuals" (Bosch 1991a, 267).

Some feminist theorists argue that traditional notions of autonomy often ignore women's experiences and the importance of relational ties. This concept addresses issues of power and inequality in personal and social relationships. It also links to motherhood, where one must accept various risks—physical, emotional, economic, and spiritual—which can potentially yield great rewards.

"Relational autonomy" defines Mary's acceptance of her role in the Incarnation, as “mutual submission”, “mutual understanding”, and “mutual dependence”. This is argued by Anglo-American theologian Amy Peeler in her book *Women and the Gender of God*. In the chapter “Honor and Agency” (2022, 65-88), Peeler emphasizes this point, introducing the chapter with a quote that succinctly states her conclusion: “The engendering spirit did not enter her without consent. God waited” (citing Levertov, 65).

Mary’s son, Jesus, expresses the same view of agency as relational autonomy in John 10:17-18:

> “*Because of this my Father delights in me,*
> *because I am laying down my life that I may receive it again.*
> *No man takes it from me;*
> *I am laying it down of my own will,*
> *for I am authorized to lay it down,*
> *and I am authorized to receive it again;*
> *this commandment I have received from my Father*.”

South African missiologist and theologian David Bosch (1991b, 207) highlights, “The broken Christ is the one who heals the broken world”.

"Relational autonomy" and "feminism of care" are concepts that can draw meaningful parallels within theological and missional implications, essential for theorizing mutuality. "Feminism of care" is preferred over "feminism of freedom" (Harrington 2023) and is built on the moral theory known as the “ethics of care”, which emphasizes the moral importance of human connections and reliance on one another. It recognizes being-in-relation, the social ‘glue’ that binds humans, especially in times of vulnerability. This approach suggests that how we treat and support those in need of care, as well as those providing it, is ethically significant.

"Transforming mutuality"[2] is exemplified in the Incarnation, representing the relationship between God and humanity. This concept is developed in Orthodox

[2] The term "transforming" is borrowed from Bosch’s classic, *Transforming Mission* (1991a), and used in the title of my dissertation, "Transforming Mutuality in a Theology of Mission" (Rheinbolt-Uribe 2023). Bosch describes "transforming" as an adjective depicting an essential feature of Christian mission, emphasizing its

theology as *Theosis*, where "God passed into man so that man might pass over to God." Anglo-American theologian Anna Case-Winters, in *God Will Be All in All: Theology through the Lens of Incarnation* (2023), builds her argument on the implications of the divine incarnation, emphasizing that "the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily" (Colossians 2:9).

"Mutual distancing" is an implicit theological concept (Lovelace 1980, 309-313) that this essay argues is necessary for a limited period as part of the shift in transforming mutuality. Transforming mutuality allows for delicate shifts in agency, power, and reflexivity, even with one's mother within a mutual understanding of the limitations within the cycle of life. This process underscores the potential need for mutual distancing to facilitate these shifts effectively; for example in the case of the mother-child relationship, if the mother does not allow the child to flourish on his/her own as an young adult/adult.

"Intergenerational mutuality" is what Annemie Bosch, Bosch's widow whom I interviewed extensively, addresses in the following statement. In personal email communication (June 2022), she adds: "*In spite of our warts and sins and 'human-smallness and frailties', a silver thread of grace, genuine love and good will binds us all together in a kind of mutuality as the one you thought you saw between David and his mother."* This idea of a "silver thread of grace" resonates with Martin Luther King Jr.'s notion of the "inescapable network of mutuality". It is undeniable and scientifically proven that the bond between a mother and child is powerful.

"Practices of mutuality" are the ways this 'glue' is applied in everyday life through bodily experiences within groups sharing a common identity or self-understanding. The term I use to describe how mutuality is practiced is "creating spaces", inspired by Ivan Illich's thinking and life experiences such as "conviviality" (Illich 1973). Mothers have historically been experts at creating spaces. For example, biological mothers share a 'space' in their bodies with a child; those involved in 'mothering' create space in their schedules and priorities; space is created in one's heart to forgive and accept one's child; and food is prepared and shared by creating space around a table. Transforming mutuality and intergenerational mutuality are implicit in many of these maternal practices of creating spaces.

purpose to transform reality (1991a xv). I apply this concept to "transforming mutuality", creating a theoretical framework that adapts Bosch's ideas.

## Female-Maternal-Embodied Knowledge

The collage above represents the cycle of life of a female maternal body. I worked on it parallel to developing the model shown below (2022). The eight stages are developed around the biological facts of the three basic stages of the life-cycle: birth, life, and death. Confronting the cycle of life is sobering but also insightful, when bodily life is understood as a gift with an expiration date. My realization is that the female body is more aware of this cycle of life, due to constant reminders especially around the menstrual cycle (such as: puberty, monthly menstruation, potential of pregnancy, and menopause[3]).

I especially find inspiration in Illich in his description of "embodied knowledge" (cf. Cayley 2021, 244-277). William (2018) describes this theologically as "thinking with our bodies", identifying the flexibility of movements between dependence, autonomy, and receiving. A female body has the potential to be extremely flexible. For example I have a petite body frame, but bodily space was created for twin boys. Obviously, the bodily flexibility allows a newborn to go through the birthing canal out of the womb and "into the world". Flexibility is an aspect of the gift received from God, understood in the Incarnation, "And The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:13).

[3] All these themes are intertwined within the biblical narrative from Genesis to Revelation.

Thinking with the body and embodied knowledge have inspired the following eight stages of female maternal body.

| | |
|---|---|
| 1. Birth | The Emergence of Embodied Space |
| 2. Young adult | Creating space for discovery |
| 3. Reproduction | Creating space in the womb |
| 4. Feeding & caring for newborn | Creating space for nurturing |
| 5. Mothering | Creating space for mothering |
| 6. Letting go | Creating space to make space |
| 7. Reversal of roles | Others create space for nurturing |
| 8. Death | The End of Embodied Space |

The above stages are quite straightforward and will be explained in the following section, applying them to Mary, the mother of Jesus.

Exploring Mary's Eight Stages of the Female-Maternal-Embodied Knowledge in the Jesus-Mary Relationship

It is beyond the scope of this essay to list all the interactions between Jesus and Mary that are narrated in the Biblical text. Most are in the Gospels, and one is in the book of Acts. This analysis assumes a resurrection from the dead, but this spiritual reality is beyond the scope of the argument.

## 1. Birth: The Emergence of Embodied Space

Mary is introduced in Luke's Gospel (1:26), and lived in Nazareth, a town in Galilee. The biblical narrative does not provide any specific details as to Mary's birth or childhood, although in some Christian traditions Anne and Joachim are named as her parents. Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist is her relative (Luke 1:36). The Gospel of Luke (3:23-37) details Mary's lineage from the line of David. An intergenerational mutuality is implied in her background, as she is blessed with that "silver thread of grace". "There is an intergenerational aspect of the Body of Christ, the spiritual family, that goes beyond space and time" (Sookhdeo, 2004:40). This is an aspect of the logic of intergenerational mutuality which Hebrews 12:1 reminds us "of these witnesses who surround us like clouds".

## 2. Young adult: Creating space for discovery

Mary is a young adult when she receives the invitation to engage in an embodied role in the Incarnation (Luke 1:26-38). Her exact age is not stated but she is probably a young teen. When she is introduced into the biblical narrative, she is already engaged to be married. This is the custom of her day. Childhood in the West is a different concept from Mary's culture.

"Mutual enjoyment" is a crucial aspect of mutuality, which I believe is the primary purpose of the female maternal body. This precious treasure is intended to be cherished through all our senses, as it reveals the splendor of the Almighty's handiwork in a reciprocal relationship with the Divine and all creation (including the human body). The answer to the first question of the Shorter Westminster Catechism is: "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever". The statement hints at the importance of enjoyment for a human being, understood within *imago Dei*. Cayley (2021) highlights mutual enjoyment within Illich's notion of conviviality.

## 3. Reproduction: Creating space in the womb

Peeler (2022, 32-64) correctly argues the embodied role of the female body in the Incarnation process in her chapter "Holiness and the Female Body". The following quote brings to the forefront the specific bodily aspects included in the Incarnation:

> '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 in the original).'

Jesus' birth experience included blood, passing through the birth canal, and being nursed at Mary's breast. This highlights his humanity, as from the very womb he was living what was common to most birth experiences. However, female-maternal-embodied knowledge goes beyond biological motherhood, encompassing the choices of adoption or fostering young children. The decision as to how to "use" the female

body could be driven by biological factors or by a decision to not use the female body for childbearing.

## 4. Feeding and caring for newborn: Creating space for nurturing

Every December, Mary and the nurturing care she provided for her son come to mind. The Christmas story clearly shows that despite numerous difficulties and challenges, she created space to care for him. The biblical text reveals many details about this stage, highlighting her immense flexibility in creating spaces for her son, including fleeing to Egypt in the middle of the night to protect him (Matthew 2:13-23).

To some readers, Mary appears passive in this narrative, seemingly moved along by Joseph. Peeler (2022, 48-49) offers a counterargument, stating, "She may be being acted upon, mostly directly by the self-sacrificial and costly protectorate of Joseph, but she is also acting. She does two things in Matthew's Gospel. She bears a child (repeated five times: 1:16, 21, 23, 25; 2:4) and mothers him, and these are no small things indeed."

The relationship with Joseph exemplified mutuality within the Incarnation. Peeler, citing Johnson (2022, 48), comments, "Joseph's action regarding Jesus came as a saving grace, providing a home and long-term commitment for this young mother and her child." Additionally, (citing Gaventa), Peeler notes that Joseph's continued commitment to marrying Mary "removes her and her child from the threat of scandal or even death." While this essay highlights mothers, it is evident that there cannot be a "mother" without a "father". Joseph's loving care for Mary and his parenting of Jesus reflect God as a Loving Father.

## 5. Mothering: Creating space for mothering

In many societies, including Mary's, mothering is a communal affair. Luke 2:40 depicts the parenting process: "But the Boy was growing and being strengthened in spirit and he was filled with wisdom and the grace of God was upon him." Certainly, the food Mary cooked, the love she lavished upon him, and her transmission of wisdom and common sense contributed to the following scene in Luke 2. Here, the 12-year-old Jesus is found at the Temple. As Mary and Joseph made their way home, they assumed Jesus was with their relatives and friends. After three days, they realized he had not joined them. This scene marks the beginning of a shift, of transforming mutuality, as depicted in the dialogue in Luke 2:48-51:

> And when they saw him, they marveled, and his mother said to him, "My son, why have you done this to us? Look, your father and I were looking for you with great anxiety." He said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Do you not know that it was fitting for me to be in my Father's house?" But they did not understand the statement that he spoke to them. And he went down with them and he came to Nazareth, and he was submitted to them; but his mother was keeping all these words in her heart.

The above scene is sandwiched between similar verses, the forementioned Luke 2:40 and Luke 2:52, "But Yeshua was growing in his stature and in his wisdom and in favor with God and the children of men." These verses make it more than obvious that Mary, Joseph, and their friends and relatives did a fine job of nurturing Jesus to adulthood.

## 6. Letting go: Creating space to make space

"Creating space to make space" means making space to love as the child transforming into their own unique self, as well as to accept and love those the child decides to love. Gibran (1951, 17) creatively expresses this shift:

> Your children are not your children,
> They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.
> They come through you but are not from you,
> And though they are with you yet they do not belong to you.

The scene at the Wedding at Cana described in John's Gospel (2:1-14) identifies Mary as opening the door for Jesus, which he walked through. Mary was important in his first recorded miracle by this invitation she offered to him . I am able to observe in their relationship what I describe as "making space to give space".

Peeler (2002, 175) notes:

> John commands respect for the character of Mary as she threads the needle. She neither disagrees with Jesus nor challenges him but goes to the servants. Moreover, she does not instruct them *to do* much of anything but only to go to the *right person*. "See that person over there. Walk over and see what he tells you to do. Whatever it is, do it." She remains hopeful that Jesus will grant her request, and she acts on that hope. She is persistent. At the same time, she gives Jesus the freedom to say anything. . . . He might act, he might not, but either way, she points toward *him* (emphasis in the original).

There are several interactions between Jesus and Mary where this shift continues to take place in their relationship. Another one to note is in the scene from Mark's Gospel (3:31-35), where Mary joins Jesus' brothers and sisters in their concern for Jesus' mental health. This is another example of how he continues to act upon a transforming mutuality. He creates boundaries for his own space and not under his mother's authority or influence. Mark 3:33 provides his shocking statement:

> He answered and said to them, "Who is my mother and who are my brothers?" And he looked on those who were sitting with him and he said, "Here is my mother and here are my brethren. For whoever shall do the will of God is my brother and my sister and my mother."

Throughout mission history some statements in the Gospels, such as Mark 3:33, have been misinterpreted as Jesus' disregard for his mother, encouraging congregants to do the same (cf. as to current teaching along these lines, Rheinbolt-Uribe 2023). Peeler (2022, 150) explains that Mark positions motherhood, even Mary's, as an act of faith rather than biology. Mutual understanding of this shift is crucial for grasping a relationship based on freedom, illustrating Illich's "mutuality of love which is called friendship". This agency reflects the nature of God, whose creation is meant to connect with freedom, not manipulation or compulsion.

The Gospels narrate a view of what I perceive as a mutual distancing in Mary and Jesus's relationship during much of his public ministry, but it was temporary.

## 7. Reversal of roles: Others create space for nurturing

At a first reading the logic of the eight stages does not hold at this point, as Jesus died before his mother did. But a careful reading along the lines of maternal-thinking brings a surprising result.

According to the four Gospels, Mary was present at the foot of the cross, unwavering in determination to be with her son until the very end. As a mother, she refused to abandon him, even in the face of the immense anguish she must have endured. In a remarkable display of relational autonomy, she chose to stay. Most of those close to him sought to escape the harrowing scene. powerless to alleviate his suffering or alter the tragic outcome; she remained steadfast, much as a mother is the sole individual who can bring new life into the world through the birthing process.

As we revisit the crucifixion, let us consider a different perspective. Jesus, the Son, endures intense suffering, pain, and challenges, similar to navigating a reversed "birth

canal" towards his own demise (cf. Uribe-Rheinbolt 2017 for the connection between birth and death). Just as his mother experienced a profound physical transformation to bring him into the world, he now follows her courageous path, mirroring her bodily experience with pain, blood and difficulty.

Amid this drama, he focuses on creating a space for his mother with his disciple and friend, John as viewed in John 19:25-27: 'But Yeshua saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing and he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son." He said to that disciple, "Behold, your mother." And from that hour that disciple received her to himself.'

Here, a man seeks to create space for his mother, paralleling the birthing process. Just as a woman faces the prospect of death to give life, Jesus embraced death with the hope of new life, an embodied mutual submission. This act exemplifies relational autonomy at its best. This maternal tension mirrors Illich's thinking. Cayley (2021) emphasizes the main thread of Illich's philosophy as the interweaving of renunciation and celebration. Biblical texts also describe this creative tension, Jesus in John 16:21 uses childbirth as a metaphor:

> When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because the day for her delivery has arrived, but when she has delivered a son, she does not remember the distress for the joy that a son has been born into the world. You also now have sorrow, but I shall see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man shall take from you.

Incarnation which allows for the view of embracing the pain of the process is essential to follow Jesus truly, living in mutuality, creating spaces, and navigating difficulties together. Jesus exemplified transforming mutuality and intergenerational mutuality with his mother up to his death.

## 8. Death: The End of Embodied Space

Luke's Gospel provides the most detailed accounts of Mary, who is also mentioned in Acts 1:14, along with her sons as part of the Jesus Movement. Many scholars believe she died in Jerusalem, while another tradition asserts that she accompanied John to Asia Minor and settled near Ephesus. Wilson (2020, 18) links Mary to Ephesus through the third ecumenical council in AD 431, which affirmed the title *Theotokos*, "God-bearer," to describe her maternal relationship with Christ, a term especially recognized in Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism. What we can assert with confidence is that at the end of her life, she bodily died.

## Creating Space to Make Space: A Missiological Vantage Point

How can the transforming relationship of mutuality between Jesus and Mary, resonate with us today, two millennia later? This enduring relevance lies in the freedom inherent within their relationship. This has been difficult to imitate in the last two thousand years.

Traditionally, mission and theology have utilized maternal language, such as "Mother Church-Daughter Church", "Holy Mother Church", "mission as spiritual 'reproduction'", and "mission and midwifery". One of the most persistent depictions of the connection between mission and theology emphasizes the maternal, stating that "Mission is the mother of theology" (Kahler 1908, cited by Bosch 1991a, 16). However, I believe this maternal imagery is limited to the initial stages, covering only birth, nurturing and mothering. It is crucial to expand this parallel beyond this initial maternal experience.

Missiology, as a field, has grappled with the intricate dynamics of power. Practitioners often find themselves caught between the perspectives of the "senders" in their home countries and the "receivers" of the gospel message. Some, like Bosch, have managed to align these two sides within a single geographical context, as seen in his denomination's work within South Africa. Bosch's seminal work, "Towards True Mutuality" eloquently addresses the delicate issue of "The Moratorium" that was at the forefront of missiology during the 1970s. This period was marked by a critical examination of the shifting agency, power, and reflexivity at play within international denominations and Christian organizations.

Half a century later, my research (Rheinbolt-Uribe 2023) uncovers that in certain denominations these issues continue. I continue to believe (Rheinbolt-Uribe 2013, 18, quoting Materson [1978]) that the issue at the heart of this discussion is that "The old truism still holds that the source of funds is the seat of authority". "From everyone to everywhere" the issue at the heart of the Moratorium is no longer an issue in the West but wherever funds are sent (i.e. Colombian, Brazilian, or Nigerian megachurch planting congregations in other countries).

British missiologist and theologian, Roland Allen's work from decades earlier was brought into this heated Moratorium debate between "mother" churches, "daughter" churches, and the mission practitioners caught in the middle. Allen's "three-selves concept" is simplistic but has a kernel of truth with links to this section. If a congregation is "self-supporting financially", and feels the agency to "self-govern" itself, then Allen states, the natural order as in the book of Acts, will be towards "self-

expansion”. I mention this formula as after years of research, I believe Allen was signaling the stage six, “creating space to give space”.

I link Allen’s insights with a surprising finding in interviewing congregants of a Colombian congregation (Rheinbolt-Uribe 2023) which reveals the precise moment when a son feels independent from his mother's influence. This occurs when he starts earning his own living, often as early as 13 years old, even though he continues to reside at home until marriage, in line with cultural traditions. Additionally, I observed that the relationship between both sons and daughters with their mothers, now as grown individuals, can be likened to the transformative bond between Jesus and Mary – a relationship of mutual understanding. Some participants highlighted a transitional phase characterized by a brief period of mutual distance, followed by a shift in the dynamics, leading to a relationship of transforming mutuality. Further investigation is necessary to explore the interconnection between the observed mutual distancing and their perception of Jesus' life and teachings.

The Moratorium plea essentially called for a halt to the flow of funds and resources from the West, allowing recipient congregations to define their Christian identities within their unique cultural and financial landscapes. The goal was not to sever ties but to end the control associated with financial dependency. The West often practices distinct forms of independence, such as leaving home at a particular age, which contrasts with the findings in Colombia. Bosch highlights subtle shifts in agency, power, and self-awareness around the theme of mutual understanding which respond to the sentiments of Global South Christians. He pleads with his Western audience to remember when the younger churches from the Global South helped them recognize one another as siblings (1978, 291), urging them, "Send us brothers and sisters, not missionaries and missions!"

Extensive research is needed to uncover the fundamental issue within Christian institutions regarding the challenge of “letting go” and “making room to allow space”. Although the biblical example of the transformative mutual relationship between Jesus and Mary serves as a model, this remains arduous to emulate. I believe this is linked to Smith’s (2010, 89) assertion that the definition of self can extend to a ‘legal person’, with corporations in the United States being recognized as “legal persons” since 1886. This implies substantial implications for denominations, churches, and mission agencies as legal corporations, suggesting an implication of boundlessness. This contrasts with the finite cycle of life understood through female-maternal-embodied knowledge. Illich’s definition of mutuality, based on proportionality and context, suggests that the final stages—creating space, the reversal of roles, and death—might not be fully comprehended in current Christian organizations. The “age

of systems" since the 1980s further complicates the identification of relational realities, making transforming mutuality and intergenerational mutuality challenging to embrace in a context of perceived limitlessness.

## Intercultural Communication, Pastoral Studies, Family Life, and Personal Walk

The previous section explored how female-maternal-embodied knowledge can help grasp complex issues within missiology. Institutions of all types—Christian, secular, or governmental—could reflect on this model to gain insights that might be difficult to observe in our current age of systems in the following areas.

Intercultural communication could be enhanced by developing material around this model, aiding discussions within institutions. It could guide conversations between individuals with distinct cultural values, allowing for the identification of differences in dependence and independence within personal spaces. These customs likely influence the laws and regulations within each culture, as observed in the area of maternal leave, comparing practices in Colombia and the United States (cf. Rheinbolt-Uribe 2024).

Interreligious dialogue in areas of intercultural contexts could use this example of Jesus and Mary as it is almost universally respected beyond the boundaries of the Christian tradition. Specific examples in their relationship, within the eight-stage model, could provide a template for discussions in areas seeking such dialogue, for example where there has been an influx of immigration.

Family life as a subject of research would benefit from making a greater emphasis on identifying the dynamics around the relationship between mother and adult children. The previous example of the relationship between Mary and Jesus identified within transforming mutuality is vital to address these particular contexts in church communities but also in public life.

Pastorally, the essay brings topics to the forefront that are difficult to discuss, in some circles, such as the bodily impact of the Incarnation. This brings theological and biblical study into the realm of everyday ordinary life. Also, acknowledging that the Christian God came to the world in a male body, and through a female body, is a beautiful image and empowers both males and females towards relational autonomy and ethics of care. It provides questions for examining family relationships in congregations, as to how transforming mutuality means "creating space to give space" with adult children. The next paragraph offers a template of the questions for these types of conversations.

Personal walk is at the heart of this essay, which deals with delicate issues of agency, power, and reflection in relationships. Key questions include: Which relationships need to shift towards transforming mutuality? How can this transformation occur? When, where, and to what extent? Three examples from Bosch's life illustrate the applicability of these concepts beyond the mother-son relationship, showcasing their robustness.

Bosch clearly understood from a young age that in his context, as an Afrikaner he personally sought a transforming mutuality with black people in South Africa.[4] Bosch provides two robust examples himself (1979, 72). The first is a scene when a black minister in Johannesburg grabs a white man by the collar, "shook him violently while at the same time pouring a torrent of accusations on him and all white people for what they were doing to blacks." The white man soon realized that he had been involved in an "act of mutuality". The black man felt he could let go of his pent-up fury to one of the few white men he truly trusted.

The second scene Bosch provides (1979, 73) is when four black ministers had table-fellowship with four white ministers, where the former were overcome with emotion as sorrow was communicated through stories of daily experiences of apartheid in South Africa, but, in a context of fun and laughter. Bosch continues, comprehending that being allowed into that space was, [A] "sign of acceptance and mutual dependence". In these examples he perceived the fruit of a lifetime pursuit (alongside Annemie) of creating spaces for transforming mutuality in his own context.

The final scene is a postmortem view. It relates to Bosch's death in a car accident in 1992 on a rural road in South Africa. He was left to bleed to death as the emergency headquarters assumed he was a black man and did not send the ambulance designated for white people. The ambulance for black individuals arrived too late. It is said that he died as he lived, embodying transforming mutuality with the black community of South Africa.[5]

## Summary

Bosch was not able to experience personally the nonviolent dismantling of legalized apartheid in 1993. But his personal path described above is needed today as much as

[4] Refer to Rheinbolt-Uribe (2023:143-145) for the transcription of Annemie's interview discussing a quote from her writing, which connects his personal journey with the influence of his mother, Hester Helena Bosch (née Swanepoel). Bosch (2011, 37) points to his father's encouragement which pushed him to excel, while his mother's love and his teachers' motivation provided the emotional security necessary for his talents to develop fully.

[5] This view I first read is a book and then confirmed in interviews with two of Bosch's family members.

ever in South Africa and around the world as a guide to continuing to dismantle the delicate issues of agency, power, and reflection in relationships from the inside out. This is the lifegiving message at the heart of this essay. It seeks to explore mutuality creatively, focusing on the relationship between Jesus and Mary, as a reflection of the Incarnation and the transforming mutuality inherent in the Godself. Presenting the model, female-maternal-embodied knowledge, a detailed biblical study of Mary's life cycle is applied. Transforming mutuality is evident in the relationship between Mary and her son Jesus. The essay points to the final three stages and especially the sixth stage – "creating space to give space" to urge awareness, specifically in missiological issues. It argues that identifying and reflecting on these final stages can be invigorating and transformative such as in the areas of intercultural communication, congregational studies, family life, and personal walk.

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