

give us new ways of seeing life, reshape our identity. By having to resolve the issues of how we were parented in order to parent them, our children help us grow up or come of age. Through caring for them, we learn about relationship, responsibility, commitment, discipline, determination, and faith. Children remind us to slow down our fast-paced lives to see the world with eyes of awe and wonder, as they see it.⁵ Children teach us gratitude and peace and joy. Through them we come to learn what love really is. As they grow, they teach us to fine-tune the balance between guidance and control, between responsibility and letting go. If we are wise, we learn to savor these opportunities for our children's and our own continual growth and to cherish and make the most of these precious years.

Postscript

All too soon the childraising years fly by. In retrospect, the children are gone so quickly. We realize the deep truth of Kahlil Gibran's statement that children "come through you but not from you, and though they are with you yet they belong not to you."⁶ After having learned so profoundly how to be in relationship, having learned to be a mother and to care so deeply and responsibly for our children every moment for so many years and years, we then have to learn to let them go—into their own lives, *not* under our care, for heaven's sake! Bit by bit, we have to divest ourselves of the myriad ways we have been so involved each day with our children and all aspects of their lives and replace these energies with different activities and ways of finding meaning. Once again, we mothers must go through a whole new process to remake our identities: who am I (now) if not mother? The concept of the empty nest does not begin to convey the changes that occur once the children are gone nor the changes that happen each time a child visits home again and is so different from who he or she was when last seen. Young adults change rapidly, and family relationships thus must be constantly reworked.

We hope that as our children depart from home, we will have the remembered joys of precious years so richly shared. We hope we will have deep satisfaction in our own generativity through bearing them, nurturing them over all the years as best we knew how, and launching them with our blessing into the world, to make it a better place because they are there.

Birthing and Mothering as Powerful Rites of Passage

Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore

"Giving birth is one of the most powerful rites of passage that women experience," observed a student of mine who was expecting her first child any day. Unfortunately, popular culture in the United States has lost a sense of the pivotal

and even sacred or spiritual dimensions of giving birth. This is true not only within secular society but also in many religious settings.

In society at large, medicine, technology, and the market shape prominent understandings of birthing just as they have shaped dying. Although many people lament the hazards of dealing with the funeral "industry" and the "American way of death," only particular organizations, such as Lamaze and the La Leche League, challenge the "American way of birth," focusing primarily on contesting medical control. Hospitals continue to define where and how birth will happen, largely restricting its meaning to physiological and emotional dynamics. The market further defines the moral and religious parameters of birthing by producing and promoting the material goods that one feels pressured to obtain to mark the entrance into parenthood.

Christian communities have done little to question these dominant cultural perceptions. The Christian tradition has a checkered history of mixed regard for sexuality and the body, sometimes identifying women as the temptress or the source of evil. In classic theology, women literally taint their children with original sin in the very act of generation and require purification following childbirth. Christianity has at the same time, however, sometimes equated female salvation with childbearing (1 Tim. 2:15) and defined women almost solely in terms of their destiny as mothers. In unfortunate ways, patriarchal religion has depicted female embodiment as either threatening, peripheral, or all-consuming. Through the symbols and rituals of baptism and eucharist, male priests have symbolically taken over the power of female biology, replacing the uterine waters with the "living waters of the Holy Spirit," baptizing children into "new life," and invoking the presence of a male God who gives his body and blood for his children. Activities central to birthing and mothering women find little affirmation in traditions that have only haltingly allowed the leadership of women, pregnant or otherwise. This omission leaves many parents without the means to claim the pivotal place that parenting plays in their own moral and religious development or without adequate pastoral care in moments of need. Although many churches focus on family ministry in a general sense, the sacred is seldom seen as residing in the everyday passages of women's lives, especially the physical event of childbirth and the concrete demands of rearing children.

Almost all women who have experienced pregnancy and birthed a child or become a mother through other avenues, however, know that these life-changing, body-altering processes have powerful moral and religious meanings. Moreover, in the past few decades, women have begun to influence both developmental and religious theory. Recent scholars dispute traditional views of mothering as the only avenue to fulfillment, on the one hand, and modern views of mothering as simply a leisure activity, on the other hand. Mothering plays an increasingly complex role in women's development that demands further study.

In this chapter, I will explore some of these new psychological, moral, and religious understandings of the role of mothering in women's development in

the United States, concluding with brief reflections on vocational implications. My immediate intent throughout is to present the complex problems and amazing possibilities of birthing and parenting as powerful religious rites of passage. My broader intent is to enrich the practice of pastoral care with women. As with the other topics addressed in this book, the history of pastoral care written from the perspective of men has not dealt with many developmental transitions of central importance to women. Women need support, pastoral and otherwise, to weather well the difficult demands of parenting and to realize its often hidden transformative potential.

Although I have particular interest in the revelations of pregnancy and child-birth, I do not want to restrict my remarks about parenting as a rite of passage to biological mothering alone. I believe that adoptive mothers encounter many comparable transformations as well as unique spiritual insights of their own. Partly as a result of my desire to include adoptive and "othermothers," I will not comment extensively on the acute physical demands of bearing and rearing children, such as alterations to the body, hormonal changes, fatigue, and so forth, except as they affect moral and religious aspects. Whereas a plethora of self-help literature elaborates the physical changes of pregnancy, sometimes month by month or even week by week, few sources attend to my central interest in this chapter—moral and religious changes.⁷

Changes in the Contemporary U.S. Context

Before proceeding, I want to note briefly the shifting contemporary context of birthing in the United States in terms of age, family situation, gender roles, and social status.⁸ First, only a few decades ago, most people assumed that women's development followed a single pattern: the heterosexual couple giving birth in their early twenties. Today, the age at which women give birth varies radically, with the extremes of early teen and late adulthood pregnancies. Such situations raise difficult ethical and political dilemmas. Minimally, they force questions about adult responsibilities toward children. Does a teenager, for example, have the maturity and other resources to care adequately for a child? Does the artificially-enabled birth of a woman in her fifties guarantee she will be able to provide for her child over the long term?

I raise these questions less to answer them than to illustrate that pluralism in childbearing underscores my central contention that complex moral and religious issues surround contemporary birthing and parenting. Birthing is even more of a moral activity than modern society has assumed. In between these extremes in age, a rich variety of patterns have emerged. Women still give birth in their early twenties, but more women wait until their mid to late thirties and forties, sometimes making pregnancy more difficult and infertility more likely. On the other hand, working-class women of diverse ethnic backgrounds sometimes have children at

an early age and then seek education and training. Political theorist Iris Young has pointed out the importance of recognizing the "plural childbearing cultures" in the United States when making public policy decisions.⁹

Second, women give birth in a variety of family situations. Children are not conceived only through heterosexual intercourse. Lesbian partners as well as heterosexual couples initiate pregnancy through medical technologies. Again, diversity and innovation only further demand that people grapple with parenting as a moral, political, and even religious event. Valuing lesbian experiences demands that the public begin to recognize the differences between heterosexual and gay and lesbian parenting. The very question of what term should be used to identify those who raise children, for example, is more complex from a lesbian perspective. Sandra Pollack advocates the use of "parent" rather than "mother" to include non-biological parents, such as coparents, step-parents, adoptive parents, and others responsible for raising children.¹⁰

Third and related to the first two observations on age and situation, in the first half of this century, gender roles of the dominant culture were rather rigidly prescribed. Many women adopted common roles of wife, mother, and possibly paid worker in sequential order. Today, most women attempt to combine several, sometimes conflicting, roles. Fewer women move in some straightforward, chronological fashion from one identity to another, from youth to adult, unmarried to married, wife to mother. Rather, people experience what one study calls "role proliferation," a coterminous, continuous, and additive combination of multiple, disparate roles (domestic, occupational, marital, parental) to which one has equally high commitments.¹¹

In addition to the profusion of roles, women also experience what Mirra Komzrovsky describes as the "scarcity of resources for role fulfillment" when combining work and family roles.¹² Headlines lament that women no longer believe they can "have it all." This kind of media coverage inadvertently encourages mothers with aspirations beyond having children to curtail their supposedly inordinate desires. Lesbian mothers face a double role rejection, finding themselves no longer a part of the childless, politically focused gay community but still not entirely welcomed by the mainstream.¹³

Many couples attempt to redefine conventional gender roles. New ground rules involve far more than role reversal and instead require a complicated process of role sharing. With less precedent and cultural support, gay and lesbian couples have an even greater range of options and challenges when exploring relational roles in family formation. Some studies show that gay and lesbian couples are quick to refrain from assigning either person the role of homemaker or economic provider.¹⁴ This role flexibility is increasingly true for heterosexual couples as well. In general, increasing numbers of women lead complex lives for which previous sex-role socialization has not prepared them. Given the increased diversity, women have fewer peers with whom to share similar experiences than women had in previous

eras. In some instances, negotiating the hurdles of childbearing and childrearing becomes a strikingly solitary enterprise for couples and partners, despite the greater visibility and participation of childbearing women and mothers of all sorts in public arenas.

One final area of cultural diversity and ambiguity is worth mentioning: the shifting social status of parenting as a "coming of age." All of these changes in the contemporary context challenge age-old cultural patterns of identifying the act of birthing as a critical movement into genuine adulthood, even if these changes do not fundamentally alter the patterns. Such cultural assumptions still hold enough sway that those who neither marry nor have children often have to find alternative ways to mark adulthood. Although the women's movement strongly contested the centrality of motherhood as an essential and singular means for womanly fulfillment, in some subcultures in the United States and certainly in many cultures outside the country, giving birth remains a prestigious sign of "coming of age" and a status symbol, even though the nature of women's status as mother remains subtly ambiguous.

In certain contexts, this premise goes hand in hand with the prizing of the birth of a male child to perpetuate the male family name and patriarchal lineage over that of a female child, a premise with a long religious history reflected as far back as early biblical traditions. Some subcultures continue to elevate fertility and birth in adherence to religious understandings that define the main purpose of sexuality as procreation. Certainly there are poverty-stricken cultures in which childbirth is more a liability than a gain. Yet even there women and even girls sometimes see motherhood as one means to secure love, security, and advancement, despite conditions that sometimes seriously jeopardize all of these desires. Although the remainder of this chapter attempts to examine birthing and mothering as important rites of passage, we must remain aware of the ambiguities that surround religious and cultural views of birth as a status symbol. It is within this complex context that we consider the ways in which mothering instigates and shapes women's development.

Psychological Dimensions

Of the many psychological dimensions of birthing and mothering, I will focus primarily on those that pertain to my thesis that birthing and mothering are powerful rites of passage. The intent is to be suggestive rather than exhaustive.

Anthropologists who have studied religious rites of passage in other cultural and religious contexts observe that they are characterized by three stages—separation, liminality, and reaggregation or reentry.¹⁵ Liminality is a potent term that captures the state of being suspended between former conventional expectations and social norms and new expectations and norms about one's identity and place. One is "betwixt and between," neither here nor there. Often other people do

not know how to regard those caught in liminality. Likewise, a person in a liminal state experiences disorientation in relation to self, others, and common social mores. Contemporary society cleaves to a few popular rites of liminality, such as the honeymoon, as a means to adjust to radical transformations in identity, in this case the shift in status from nonmarried to married. Other scholars of religion have depicted the ways in which religious rituals create sacred space and sacred time within the liminal phase. People experience a different flow of time; time may slow down or even stop, creating a sense of the "eternal now."¹⁶ Place and space as well as particular objects acquire sanctified power and meaning.

Pregnancy and birth contain many of these liminal elements in an acute fashion. Adoption has analogous, even if sometimes less obvious, liminal dimensions. From the moment of recognition of conception or news of a possible adoption, the perception of time changes. One begins to live with a sense of end time. Approaching the end time heightens awareness of time. During birth itself, time stops. The intense and prolonged pain of labor seems both instantaneous and eternal. One loses a sense of time; minutes become hours, and hours become minutes. The duplicity of one's identity is seldom as acute as when one is simultaneously one and two persons, containing in oneself the other almost but not yet born. Julia Kristeva identifies pregnancy as a publicly subversive state, "a continuous separation, a division of the very flesh." In the pregnant body the self and the other coexist. The pregnant woman is both herself and not herself, hourly, daily becoming more separate until what was a part of her becomes irrevocably "irreparably alien."¹⁷ Women have different reactions to entering the liminality of pregnancy. Some are eager to be recognized as one who is both one person and yet the beginnings of a second. Others choose to harbor the knowledge silently, even secretly, until the sheer protrusion makes the becoming of a second person visible. Some resent the disappearance or submergence of their own selfhood in the eyes of others who now attend only to the child.

Using Jungian psychology rather than anthropology, Kathryn Rabuzzi argues that birth is a powerful transformative spiritual event in a woman's life that men in religious realms have "stolen." For a variety of reasons, birth offers the potential for a genuinely ecstatic experience, a reality from which Christianity has shied away. Developmental psychology has, in somewhat analogous fashion, shied away from the complex interconnections between transformation in the mother and development in the child, choosing instead to focus on the latter, as if it could occur separately from the former.

However, as Rabuzzi recounts from her own experience, giving birth involves a "dying, 'being born,' and giving birth" simultaneously.¹⁸ Emotional preparation for birth also resembles processes of preparation for death. Some women experience an acute sense of life's finitude and an embodied awareness of the proximity of death. As Penelope Washbourn notes, the woman faces several kinds of literal death—the dying of the old self, the end of the relationship to the fetus, and the

transformation of prior relationships to others.¹⁹ Perhaps the biggest, and sometimes least suspected, change happens within the couple itself, as each person assumes a new role in relationship to the child, becomes absorbed to different degrees in the care of the child, and hence experiences new and sometimes disturbing dynamics in relationship to one other.

Biblical scholar Tikva Frymer-Kensky wrote *Motherprayer: The Pregnant Woman's Spiritual Companion* precisely out of her own existential distress and anger about the lack of childbirth literature that celebrates biological life processes as "occasions for spiritual growth and communication with the divine."²⁰ Her book seeks to retrieve the birth incantations from such sources as ancient Sumerian and Akkadian texts, the Jewish prayer tradition, and prayer books from eighteenth-century Italy, and includes prayers, meditations, and poems of protection, conception, and safe delivery. These texts confirm that modernist notions of birth as merely a medical condition are limited at best.

Alternative religious communities of women, perhaps most evident in Jewish circles, have begun to recreate rituals designed to acknowledge the fears, ambivalence, emotional turmoil, physical pain, and spiritual travail of pivotal passages of women's lives, including birth and mothering. Healing rituals incorporate expression of emotions such as anger, attend to women's spiritual needs, and affirm women's experiences. Some women have particular needs. For example, women with histories of sexual abuse might find that birth or parenting of young children activates disturbing unconscious or preconscious memories. For all women, however, giving birth and raising children can bring repressed material to the surface. The importance of these passages has yet to gain adequate expression in pastoral or ritual contexts.²¹

A great deal more can be said about the broader experience of mothering as a transformative experience than space allows. Adrienne Rich was the first to declare boldly how little is known about the experience of the mother compared to what we know about the "air we breathe, the seas we travel!"²² Much of what has appeared on mothering in the past two decades is merely a footnote to her pivotal treatise, *Of Woman Born*. There is perhaps no better treatment of the internal experience of motherhood and no steadier attack on its distortions as a social institution controlled by men. Suddenly, as if a veil had been lifted, gaps and omissions in the literature appeared where before they went unnoticed.

As I develop at greater length in *Also a Mother*, in developmental psychology in particular, mothering has not received adequate exploration as part of the adult life cycle.²³ In a book that seems designed more to be read by the popular parenting audience than to reshape the directions of psychological theory, Daniel N. Stern and Nadia Bruschiweiler-Stern contend that motherhood is a process of birth for the mother as well as the child. Early in the book, however, Stern is quick to admit that despite his training and work with children, this idea was entirely new for him, one to which others, including his wife, have had to alert him. In contrast to

prominent mental health views that motherhood requires only a "slight variation in the already existing mindset" and has little role in the development of children, Stern and Bruschiweiler-Stern argue that a woman "develops a mindset fundamentally different than the one she held before, and enters a realm of experience not known to non-mothers."²⁴

Few developmental theorists have attempted to explore and fit into their theories the many and varied ways in which bearing or adopting and raising children causes major changes in one's self-concept and relationship to others as well as one's moral and religious values. Many developmental theories in the psychoanalytic tradition, from Sigmund Freud to recent object relations theories, do not even look past early childhood to understand adult behavior, even though the theories of analysts such as D. W. Winnicott and Heinz Kohut might be used suggestively to identify the intrapsychic shifts required in mothers to attend to children. Freud actually derided the desire to bear children as one further demonstration of the woman's desire to obtain a penis and identified childbearing status as the best women could hope for developmentally, given their bereft state.

Theories who do move past childhood development—such as Erik Erikson's "eight stages of man" or Carl Jung's "stages of life" or, more recently, Daniel Levison's "seasons of a man's life" or James Fowler's "six stages of faith"—either simply do not include women or, if they do, fail to understand women as subjects, truncate expectations for women's development to complement male development, and generally give extremely limited space to the impact of bearing or raising children. Some life cycle theorists have actually treated childbearing as a parenthetical dimension of adulthood, implying that raising children is an activity that adults do on the side. Through these various theories, valuable as they are in other respects, we have learned a great deal about the development of such adult attributes as autonomy but little to nothing about the development of attributes crucial to securing the lives of the next generation.

For a variety of reasons, however, the latter concern was of earnest importance to Erikson. He gave the care of children greater visibility through his concept of "generativity" as an important stage of adult life in which one must choose between creativity and stagnation. He understood crises of generativity—"a biological, psychological, and ethical commitment to take care of human infancy" or "concern for establishing and guiding the next generation"—however, as arising in the second to last stage of the life cycle and as building on the resolutions of previous stages that seem more focused on the development of self-identity than on the evolution of relationships with others.²⁵

This conceptualization does not accord well with the lives of most women. Most women do not and cannot wait until later in life to resolve questions of generativity. Most women encounter acute questions of generativity at much earlier stages in life than Erikson supposed, during stages which he characterized as focused on the search for identity and intimacy.

For many women, the biological generativity of childbirth and childrearing often becomes a means to resolve what Erikson understood as earlier life crises of identity and intimacy. Moreover, the stages prior to generativity, as Erikson conceives them, focus on the development of values that do not necessarily enhance one's ability to care for a child—independence, autonomy, self-assertion, and so forth. This development of values fails to account for the emergence of the adult capacity to nurture children. By contrast, in studies of the development of girls and women, researchers have discovered that they tend to focus as much on the quality of their relationships as on the advancement of their own individual identity. Ultimately, as I have argued in *Also a Mother*, contemporary motherhood has developmental and cultural implications that reach beyond anything Erikson understood when he characterized the stage of generativity.

Fortunately, educational theorist Carol Gilligan's research on moral development (to be discussed in the next section) and the work on intellectual development of psychologists Mary Field Belenky, Blythe McVicker Clinchy, Nancy Rule Goldberger, and Jill Mattuck Tarule has opened fresh discussion of the impact of pregnancy and childbirth on women's growth. In the eye-opening book published by the latter group, *Women's Ways of Knowing*, several women whom they interview name attending to children as a practice that provides fresh categories of meaning. In order to grasp alternative modalities of knowing, the researchers intentionally interviewed women both inside and outside formal academic settings shaped by male assumptions. Hence, they talked with women in three different kinds of family agencies to determine how maternal practice shapes women's thinking and development. When asked about the most important learning experience, many women identified childbirth. For women who have been especially silenced by their particular life circumstances and by fear of external authority, the responsibilities of parenting have the power to move them out of silence and into a place of voice and mind. In a word, becoming a mother initiates an "epistemological revolution," dramatically transforming the way a woman thinks and responds.²⁶

Moral Dimensions

The rites of passage of pregnancy, birthing, adoption, and childrearing occasion at least two kinds of moral developments for women: the reorientation of self-love and love of others and the reassessment of justice in the distribution of domestic labor.

More than any other scholar, Gilligan has enhanced our understanding of the power of choice in pregnancy as a key factor in moral development. Her book *In a Different Voice* traces a shift in self-understanding from self-centeredness to other-centeredness to a third stage of interdependent care of self and care of others.²⁷ Granted, pregnancy, childbirth, and especially childrearing present acute

moments and prolonged situations of other-directedness, self-denial, and self-sacrifice. Yet each of these rites of passage also has the capacity to move women to the complex moral stage in which one sees the strong interconnection between sustenance of self and the flourishing of the other. Acknowledging oneself as a person with rights and choices—realizing that it is legitimate to consider the interests of the self—can initiate a dramatic moral shift in which women recognize that responsiveness to others and to oneself are not mutually exclusive. A pregnant woman in Gilligan's second stage, in which the "good" is seen as taking care of the other at one's own expense, disregards her own needs at the peril of both her own and her child's survival. The third stage of moral development emerges when a person recognizes the high costs, both to herself and to others, of ignoring her own needs. Rather, acting responsibly toward oneself and one's needs will sustain connections with others rather than impede them.²⁸ This realization can be amazingly helpful for women and mothers, even if it does not answer completely a further question encountered keenly by mothers about what to do when conflict arises between one's needs and those of the other.

As a pastoral theologian, Brita Gill-Austern has a greater sense of the importance of this question. She vividly depicts the hazards of love understood solely as self-sacrifice and self-denial. Socialized to give and give, women put the needs of others ahead of their own because they devalue themselves, economically depend on others, or even feel biblically compelled to submit. As a result, women are often more inclined than men to lose a sense of their own self and their unique God-given gifts, leading to resentment, anger, diminished esteem, overfunctioning, strain, and further exploitation. The solution is not to eliminate self-giving entirely, however, for raising children requires an inevitable degree of self-denial. Human fulfillment itself demands that one put trust in a purpose larger than oneself and one's desires. The key question is whether self-giving is life-giving or life-denying, that is, whether it enhances the "capacity for love and care for self and other" or reifies "patterns of exploitation and domination."²⁹

Gill-Austern stops slightly short of proposing a second moral development sometimes occasioned by childbearing and childrearing: the recognition and demand for a more radical justice in the distribution of domestic labor both within and beyond the private family. Mothering, women must recognize, is not merely a personal activity; it is a social and political activity essential to the survival of humankind, requiring fair allotment of its demands among family members and citizens. When pregnant, a woman experiences in an immediate and literal fashion the acute link between satisfying her own need for food and rest, and ensuring that she has met the need of the other within her. After birth, the ability to satisfy one's own needs while meeting those of the infant becomes ever more difficult. The mother faces daily conflicts between desire and need. Balancing her own sustenance with the prosperity of her child requires ongoing support from partners, wider family and neighbors, the religious community, and the work and political

community at large. Once the care of children enters the picture, talk between partners about accomplishing the labor internal to the household becomes even more critical and complex than before children.

According to economist Rhona Mahony, having babies creates a major crisis in negotiating domestic responsibilities equitably between mothers and fathers. Women tend to slide down the slippery slope from birthing children to assuming an ever-growing proportion of child-related tasks. In Mahony's economic terminology, the "headstart effect" of biology, pregnancy, attachment, breastfeeding, and immediate child care, on top of socialization and cultural expectations that child care is solely a female task, reduces a woman's bargaining power and initiates a process that eventuates in her heavier investment in children and house. Nearly all couples need some form of "countertipping." In effect, men need "extra time with the baby to catch up": the "more solo time with the baby . . . the faster he will move along his curve of emotional attachment."³⁰ Although Mahoney has a truncated theory of human nature as inherently competitive, and a limited understanding of the changes needed in social structures and cultural ideals, she has a clear grasp of the important pragmatic mechanics of fostering justice in the household.

Religious Dimensions

Exploring psychological and moral aspects of the rites of passage to motherhood thus far touches on various religious developments—the experience of the ecstatic, the ritual phases of pregnancy and birthing, the claim of a higher aim within which love of self and love of other are nurtured. This section will briefly identify two further religious components of the developmental transformations in parenting: evolving new God imagery and cultivating alternative modes of contemplation. Of course, neither of these is necessarily or exclusively linked with parenting. However, parenting might provide a ripe opportunity for these developments.

Theologians have used the term "cocreating" to describe the shared responsibility of human participation in God's divine action in the world. Parenting is a powerful experience of cocreating. In *Models of God*, Sallie McFague contends that becoming a biological parent is the closest most people come to an "experience of creation, that is, of bringing into existence" and of passing on life. The act of giving birth inspires a sense of having glimpsed the very heart of things.³¹ Parenting also provides grounds for developing a religious commitment to care and preserve life beyond oneself. Christian theology in particular has identified children as gifts who point toward the kingdom of God. This theological claim requires gratitude and respect for the child as well as proper perspective on the crucial, albeit largely transitory role parents assume in a child's care. An adoptive parent might have an even sharper sense of a child as a pure and unadulterated gift.

Moreover, the experience of parental cocreation evokes fresh revelatory metaphors for understanding divine action. McFague presents the model of God

as mother as a rich and neglected metaphor for rethinking Christian understandings of God's love, creation, and justice. Physical acts such as giving birth and feeding the young provide new ways to think about creation as issuing forth from the "womb" of the divine and about love as the desire to nurture the most basic needs of the other and to seek its flourishing.³²

By having children, women experience the twofold dynamic that Margaret Hebblethwaite describes as "finding God in motherhood, and finding motherhood in God."³³ Writing out of her own experiences as a mother of three small children, she shows "how God can bring meaning to the experience, and the experience can bring meaning to God." Regarding the latter, she finds her mothering experience evokes encounter with "God as female." Analogies from her own maternal knowledge reveal many new possibilities: through her captivation by the charming quirks of her children, she learns that God finds our very gaucheness endearing; through the weight of the child in her womb, that God is even closer to us than most other images presume; through the immense frustrations of daily caregiving routines, that God finds ways to bridge both the idealism of the past and the disillusionment of the present; through endurance of the inconsolable storms of a child, that God remains ever present despite our distress; and through her desperation in the midst of the demands of her children, that in God lies rest and refreshment.

Hebblethwaite turns from her thoughts on God to her thoughts about religious practice or the spirituality of motherhood, the second component on which I would like to comment briefly. Long traditions in contemplative practice have emphasized the role of silence and solitude. Although contemplation does not require retreat from the world and a few wise spiritual leaders have attempted to articulate models of the interaction of prayer and an active life, few have turned to motherhood as a model of contemplative practice in the midst of life. Yet the rite of passage into parenthood is full of potential for alternative contemplative practices waiting to be reclaimed. Parenting is the "ascetic opportunity *par excellence*," according to Elizabeth Dreyer. In a manner similar to, but distinct from, the monastic in seclusion, a parent encounters unexpected opportunities to practice the disciplined religiosity that lies at the heart of asceticism's loving self-denial: "A full night's sleep, time to oneself, the freedom to come and go as one pleases—all this must be given up. . . . Huge chunks of life are laid down at the behest of infants. And then, later, parents must let go."³⁴

Equally important, through the unpredictable and yet constant demands of mothering, one must learn to encounter God through conversation and relationship, and not simply through silence and solitude. Although parents find little guidance and support for spiritual practice that reclaims the chaos of family life as a viable source of encounter with God, this scarcity of guidance should not derail parents' pursuit of alternative contemplative modes or prevent future explorations of the prayerful potential of the parenting life.³⁵ Seeing a child grasp the power of language confirms the place of conversation alongside silence and connection

alongside solitude as vital sources of spiritual centeredness. Again, this experience is not unique to mothering but finds in mothering a paradigmatic instance of a broader tension in the conceptualization of spirituality.

Through long hours of arduous practice, mothers actually begin to acquire what Sara Ruddick identifies as an entire metaphysical "discipline of thought."³⁶ The discipline she describes has affinities with theological doctrines of creation and care that she does not note from her perspective as an agnostic philosopher. Genuine care of a small being demands finely tuned "metaphysical attitudes" that I would identify as significant moral and religious virtues long upheld by biblical and religious traditions: the priority of holding over acquiring, humility and a profound sense of one's limits, humor and resilient cheerfulness amid the realities of life, respect for people, responsiveness to growth, and ultimately the capacity for what Ruddick calls "attentive love." By this term, she refers to a loving without seizing or using that is akin to that of divine love for human creation.³⁷

Vocational Dimensions: "When the Minister Has a Baby"

An article by pastoral counselor Anne B. Abernethy, written from her own experience and study of the dynamics of women negotiating motherhood and ministry begins with "When the minister has a baby."³⁸ As with previous sections, this final section can only allude to some of the topics needing further exploration.

Helping professionals, such as those in counseling and ministry, must take seriously the impact of pregnancy or the adoption of a child. Psychology has the tools through which to analyze projections, transference, and countertransference issues. A study entitled *The Therapist's Pregnancy: Intrusion in the Analytic Space* describes the intensification of people's emotional projections onto the mother in response to her pregnancy.³⁹ The pregnant helper, in this case the therapist, arouses feelings of dependency, competition, envy, devaluation, idealization, and rage, depending on whether the image of her pregnancy evokes projections of the abandoning mother, the idealized disappointing mother, the sexually engulfing mother, and so forth.

Such strong reactions to the physical presence and broader implications of pregnant women in positions of authority previously occupied by men catch most participants off guard. Although more subtle, the minister, counselor, or professor who makes her adoption or her commitment to her children well known and part of her speaking, writing, and presentation of herself faces similar reactions. These are not reactions that people have learned to anticipate or have acquired the capacity to understand. In addition, self-disclosure of intimate sexual activity can hardly be avoided if one's own pregnant body displays the consequences. Considerable anxiety still surrounds maternal sexuality and maternal involvement in complex roles of paid work and mothering. Furthermore, as the expecting mother weathers physical fatigue, emotional extremes, and the self-absorption and

maternal preoccupation with embodied changes, she confronts head-on the limits of her empathy—that she “cannot be all available” to either her clients or to her own child.⁴⁰

Analogies between counseling, ministering, and parenting are both enlightening and troubling. Abernethy left her first parish exhausted by the challenges of combining responsibilities for her two young children and the requirements of ministry. Birth and mothering can lead either to “stress and a resulting fragmentation of self-identity and professional purpose” or “a more complete and less conflictual integration” of self, family, congregation, and God.⁴¹ For most mothers, the sheer physical and emotional exhaustion of parenting is a constant theme. In widening concentric circles from a woman’s body to family to congregation to connections with the divine, Abernethy describes the conflicts as well as some guidelines for making parenting work, gleaned through twenty-five interviews with women who became mothers while engaging in ministry.

How does one survive, on the one hand, internal dynamics such as role conflicts, contradictory and unresolved feelings about mothering, involuntary personal exposure, stress and the physical limitations of pregnancy and mothering, and heightened dependency needs? And on the other hand, how does one cope with external pressures on the part of the congregation, such as anxiety about desertion, repressed anger, denial of the implications of competition for the minister’s energy, and overidentification? Minimally, mothering ministers must be able to set limits and order priorities. Beyond this, successful integration requires several other components: open and honest communication, careful negotiation with one’s partner about domestic demands, planning for leave time, modification of expectations, creation of a wider support system, establishment of clear boundaries and a foundation of trust between minister and congregation.

Of course, some of these practical guidelines pertain not just to ministers who mother but to most mothers who resume any kind of paid employment, particularly service occupations in which one of the primary tools is the personhood of the mother herself. As important, however, one must remember that these are simply strategies. Although helpful, such strategies should not fool people into underestimating the difficulty of a broader ideological and cultural change they presume. The strategies contest the validity and the value of the age-old myth of the ever-present, unconditionally loving mother, and make the way for mothers who are “good enough,” present in realistic ways, and loving as they are loved.

Unfortunately, many congregations find this change in ideals as difficult as allowing adequate leave time for both men and women. Few role models exist for combining parenting and ministry (or other professions for that matter). All this occurs within the context of wider social and political structures that fail to support adequate parenting and families through governmental leave policies, health care benefits, child-care subsidies, and so forth. The United States lags far behind

other developed countries on each of these scores. And few congregations have seized the opportunity to act as political prophets for the sanctity of parenting and the centrality of social structures necessary to secure its success.

Ultimately, despite evidence of grave failures and serious disappointments in parenting, Abernethy ends where we began: the minister who is also a mother has the potential to draw on a powerful human experience as a source of encounter with mystery. As she concludes, childbearing is "not simply an experience of the body, but one of the soul as well. The miracle of birth, the embodiment of spirit, leads those who feel its power to rediscover the presence of the divine."⁴² A reinterpretation of pregnancy and mothering as rites of passage becomes an important step in claiming the goodness of the body and sexuality, the power of God as mother, and the grace of alternative modes of spirituality that emerge from the contemplative chaos of childrearing.

Chapter 9

1. First described in print in Carolyn Treadway, "Birth and Grace," *The Friendly Woman* 5, no. 2 (spring 1981).
2. Helen Reddy, "I Am Woman," Capitol Records.
3. For a fuller description of experiential or subjective knowing, see Mary Belenky et al., *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind* (New York: Basic, 1986).
4. For a fuller explanation of these concepts, please see Arthur and Libby Colman, *Pregnancy: The Psychological Experience* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1971). See also Penelope Washbourn, *Becoming Woman: The Quest For Wholeness and Female Experience* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), chap. 7.
5. See Bonnie Miller-McLemore, *Also a Mother: Work and Family as Theological Dilemma* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), chap. 7.
6. Kahlil Gibran, "On Children," from *The Prophet* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961), 17.
7. I have addressed some of the physical dimensions of mothering more thoroughly in *Also a Mother: Work and Family as Theological Dilemma* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), chapter 6.
8. These changes are not recent in the United States. See Nanette M. Roberts, "American Women and Life-Style Change," in *Christian Feminism: Visions of a New Humanity*, ed. Judith L. Weidman (New York: Harper & Row, 1984), 95–116.
9. Iris Marion Young, "Making Single Motherhood Normal," *Dissent* (winter 1994): 91.
10. Sandra Pollack, "Lesbian Parents: Claiming Our Visibility," in *Motherhood: A Feminist Perspective*, ed. Jane P. Knowles and Ellen Cole (New York: Haworth, 1999), 181–82.
11. Frank A. Johnson and Colleen L. Johnson, "Role Strain in High Commitment Career Women," *Journal of the American Academy of Psychoanalysis* 4, no. 1 (1976): 15–16.
12. Mirra Komzrovsky, *Women in College: Shaping New Feminine Identities* (New York: Basic, 1986), 253.
13. Eloise Stiglitz, "Caught between Two Worlds: The Impact of a Child on a Lesbian Couple's Relationship," in *Motherhood: A Feminist Perspective*, ed. Knowles and Cole, 107.
14. See Philip Blumstein and Pepper Schwartz's extensive study of thousands of couples, *American Couples* (New York: Morrow, 1983), 115, 324, cited by Susan Moller Okin, *Justice, Gender and the Family* (New York: Basic, 1989), 140.
15. See Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1969), 94–96, and Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, trans. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1960), 10–11. See also Robbie Davis-Floyd, "Pregnancy and Cultural Confusion: Contradictions in Socialization," in *Cultural Constructions of "Woman,"* ed. Pauline Kolenda (Salem, Wis.: Sheffield, 1988), 9–57.
16. See Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (New York: Harper, 1961).
17. Julia Kristeva, "Stabat Mater," in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1986), 166, 178–79.
18. Kathryn Allen Rabuzzi, *Mother with Child: Transformations through Childbirth* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana Univ. Press, 1994), vii. See also her earlier book, *Motherself: A Mythic Analysis of Motherhood* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana Univ. Press, 1988).
19. Penelope Washbourn, *Becoming Woman: The Quest for Wholeness in Female Experience* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1977), 97.
20. Tikva Frymer-Kensky, "Birth Silence and *Motherprayer*," *Criterion* (spring/summer 1995): 28. See *Motherprayer: The Pregnant Woman's Spiritual Companion* (New York: Riverhead, 1995).
21. See Thelma Aldcroft, "Childbirth, Liturgy, and Ritual—A Neglected Dimension of Pastoral Theology," in *Life Cycles: Women and Pastoral Care*, ed. Elaine Graham and Margaret Halsey (London: SPCK, 1993), 180–91; and Joan Laird and Ann Hartman, "Women, Rituals, and Family Therapy," in *A Guide to Feminist Family Therapy*, ed. Lois Braverman (New York and London: Harrington Park, 1988), 157–73.
22. Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1976), 11.
23. *Also a Mother*, chap. 2.
24. Daniel N. Stern and Nadia Bruschiweiler-Stern with Alison Freeland, *The Birth of the Mother: How the Motherhood Experience Changes You Forever* (New York: Basic, 1998), 5.

25. Erik H. Erikson, "Womanhood and the Inner Space (1968)," in *Woman and Analysis: Dialogues on Psychoanalytic Views of Femininity*, ed. Jean Strouse (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1985), 295; *Childhood and Society*, 35th Anniversary Edition (New York: Norton, 1963), 267.

26. Mary Field Belenky, Blythe McVicker Clinchy, Nancy Rule Goldberger, and Jill Mattuck Tarule, *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind* (New York: Basic, 1986), 27, 35–36, 142–43.

27. Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1982), 64–105.

28. For related comments, see Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, "Produce or Perish: Generativity and the Question of New Reproductive Technologies," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 59, no. 1 (spring 1991): 39–69; "Produce or Perish: A Feminist Critique of Generativity," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 43, nos. 1–4 (1989): 201–21.

29. Brita Gill-Austern, "Love Understood as Self-Sacrifice and Self-Denial: What Does It Do to Women?" in *Through the Eyes of Women: Insights for Pastoral Care*, ed. Jeanne Stevenson Moessner (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 316.

30. Rhona Mahony, *Kidding Ourselves: Breadwinning, Babies, and Bargaining Power* (New York: Basic, 1995), 106, 113–14. Emphasis in text.

31. Sallie McFague, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 104.

32. *Ibid.*, 105. See also Margaret L. Hammer, *Giving Birth: Reclaiming Biblical Metaphor for Pastoral Practice* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1994).

33. Margaret Hebblethwaite, *Motherhood and God* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1984), 1.

34. Elizabeth Ann Dreyer, "Asceticism Reconsidered," *Weavings: A Journal of the Christian Spiritual Life* 3, no. 6 (1988): 14.

35. For suggestive possibilities, see Wendy M. Wright, *Sacred Dwelling: A Spirituality of Family Life* (Leavenworth, Kan.: Forest of Peace, 1994).

36. Sara Ruddick, "Maternal Thinking," in Joyce Trebilcock, ed., *Mothering: Essays in Feminist Theory* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Allanheld, 1983), 215.

37. *Ibid.*, 217, 223–24.

38. Anne B. Abernethy, "When the Minister Has a Baby," in *Creative Ministries in Contemporary Christianity*, ed. Perry LeFevre and W. Widick Schroeder (Chicago: Exploration, 1991), 3–28.

39. Sheri Fenster, Suzanne B. Phillips, and Estelle R. G. Rapoport, *The Therapist's Pregnancy: Intrusion in the Analytic Space* (Hillsdale, N.J.: The Analytic Press, 1986).

40. *Ibid.*, 39.

41. Abernethy, "When the Minister Has a Baby," 6.

42. *Ibid.*, 18.

Chapter 10

1. In the United States in 1998, women's average life expectancy is eighty years, making a woman's fortieth year the demographic starting point of midlife. Midlife is variously defined, however, and years included in "midlife" by various authors range from thirty-five. In this essay, I am addressing what some authors call "early" midlife, approximately ages thirty-five to fifty.

2. By "wholistic" awareness and response, I mean awareness of and response to the compound connectedness of body/mind/spirit/relationship/culture/nature that gives rise to human being and experience. Wholistic awareness and response focuses less on the multiplicity of these domains and more on care for their interrelatedness. Therefore, wholistic awareness and response seeks to reconcile and knit together our knowledge about the multiple dimensions of human experience—body and mind and spirit and relationship and culture and nature and on and on—into wisdom for living whole lives together. Although many disciplines and professionals are responsible for specialization in one or another of these domains (for example, physicians are required to be specialists in the body, psychologists are required to be specialists in the mind, theologians are required to be specialists in the S/spirit, etc.), my assumption in this essay is that pastoral theologians and caregivers are called to study and nurture wholeness of life. Such an integration is so difficult that it at first seems unfeasible, but it has long been the special gift and responsibility of spiritual seekers and spiritual caregivers to identify such soulful, centering, collective wisdom. This chapter stands in that long tradition of soul care.