

education. The influence of mother and grandmother, for example, so central to her mother's life history, is conspicuously absent from Lenskyj's life history.

The tone and writing style change in part two as Lenskyj interlaces life history with increasingly academic discourses of feminist pedagogy, diversity, positionality, and anti-oppression. As a university distance education teacher, I also have learned to declare my "subject position" (156)—White, middle-class, heterosexual woman in my case—and I appreciated Lenskyj's personal positioning that introduces her stories of the promise and perils of confronting questions of difference (race, ethnicity, sexuality) in the context of teaching women's studies by teleconferencing. Her final reflections emphasize diversity issues in the present education of girls and women in Australia and Canada, without specific reference to her own or her mother's life histories.

I was disappointed that Lenskyj did not take up the life history focus that she promised in her Introduction and integrate her mother's life history with her own through the theoretical lens that is prominent in part two. It occurred to me that an academic analysis of difference on the basis of the subject position of "mother" would have effectively integrated the experiential and theoretical dimensions of this book and the distinctive tones of the two parts, allowing a tighter weave of the mother-daughter life histories that purport to be at the centre of this book.

## **Spirituality in the Mother Zone *Staying Centered, Finding God***

Trudelle Thomas  
New York: Paulist Press, 2005

### **Reviewed by Colleen Carpenter Cullinan**

Trudelle Thomas opens her powerful and wonderfully practical book with an anecdote instantly recognizable to anyone who has ever tried to balance a desperate and sincere desire for prayer time with the far more worldly demands of a wiggling preschooler. As her readers will no doubt know, there are no good solutions to that conflict, and the frustration and resentment it engenders are not exactly conducive to anything approaching a joyful, peaceful, blissfully transcendent worship experience. Yet as Thomas points out, despite such conflicts, becoming a mother leads many women to a "deeper, more passionate faith" (3)—just not one that can be contained in the structures of most Christian churches. And it is not just worship time that is often child-unfriendly and mother-unfriendly, Thomas argues, but more basically the theology and spirituality of traditional Christianity.

Luckily for Thomas, she was introduced early in her mothering to the writings of Elizabeth Johnson, a Catholic feminist theologian whose magisterial *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* is a brilliant corrective to patriarchal understandings of Christian faith that are almost entirely inaccessible to “the tired mother who craves spiritual food but must squeeze reading time between packing lunches and late night runs to the convenience store for milk” (4). Johnson’s book enabled Thomas to see the connections between her faith and her mothering, between the bodies and bloodiness that had suddenly become an everyday reality for her, when the Body and Blood of Christ that had nourished her for so long suddenly seemed painfully out of reach. With the help of Johnson’s insights and the wise and kind presence of Sister Miriam, an elderly nun (and the mentor we all dream of), Thomas struggled through the enormous changes in faith and practice that accompany the major life crisis called *matrescence*, or becoming a mother for the first time (27). Her reflections on that difficult and amazing journey are the heart of her book.

Thomas’s book is divided into three sections: “Beginnings,” which deals with the crisis of *matrescence* and the dangers women face navigating this major life change; “Clashes,” which looks at the conflicts between (patriarchal) social expectations and the lived reality of mothers and children; and “Imagining a Different Future,” in which Thomas both envisions a new environment in which to raise children and helps it come into being through reflections on new (female) images of God, spiritual practices that make sense for mothers and children instead of celibate males in community, and her hopes for child- and mother-friendly churches. Each section is rooted in her own experience, deeply practical in terms of what other mothers and mothers-to-be can take away for their own lives, and filled with spiritual wisdom. Finally, the bibliography at the end is an absolute treasure trove for both mothers and scholars interested in the connections between women’s spirituality and mothers’ lived experience.

Spirituality is a relatively new field of study in the academy; it is neither the study of religion nor the study of theology, and its methods and subject matter do not line up easily with its nearest scholarly relatives. Thomas’s central academic contribution here is the precise and beautiful way she has integrated the often social-scientific study of motherhood today with cutting-edge theological work on God-language, gender (human and divine), ecclesiology, ethics, and liturgy. I highly recommend her work for women’s studies courses, women and religion classes, courses in contemporary spirituality—and church-based women’s book groups. *Spirituality in the Mother Zone* would also make an outstanding gift for any mother, church-going or not, who is struggling to connect the day-to-day busy-ness of her life with something she identifies as Meaning, Mystery, or Spiritual Truth. It is invaluable both as reassurance to mothers who feel alone in their struggles, and as a rich theological reflection on mothers, motherhood, and the bodiliness of human living.