



The Gift of Birth: Discerning God's Presence During Childbirth

Susan M. Windley-Daoust

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Is the process of giving birth a medical problem to be solved, a hurdle to be overcome on the way to motherhood . . . or is it something more? Could it be, as Susan Windley-Daoust proposes, that giving birth is a gift from God, laden with signs that speak to women about their identity, their calling, and their destiny? If so, then learning to read those embodied signs during pregnancy and labor could transform the way women experience childbirth. These signs reveal that God is not only powerfully present in the whole birthing process, but desires to actively work with women to bring forth new life. Drawing on insights from spiritual direction literature, the Bradley Method, and Pope John Paul II's *Theology of the Body*, Susan Windley-Daoust provides expectant (and veteran) mothers with a spiritual retreat aimed at learning to see the signs of God's presence in their pregnancy and childbirth. Reflection exercises, prayers, and meditations guide the reader in preparing for and exploring her own experience of giving birth. In learning to cooperate with "the Lord, Giver of Life," the reader receives a sacred gift to be opened not only in childbirth, but in her whole life. Susan Windley-Daoust is a Catholic theologian, spiritual director, and award-winning author of *Theology of the Body, Extended: The Spiritual Signs of Birth, Impairment, and Dying*. She teaches theology at Saint Mary's University in Winona, Minnesota, where she lives with her husband and five children.

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