

The divided life and the divine mother

By [Angie Mabry-Nauta](#)

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Parker Palmer [writes](#) of the divided life: having sensed that what's within us is somehow unacceptable, we live contrary to it. In so doing we snuff our own inner light and suffocate our soul.

American life seems divided about Mother's Day. Motherhood is a sacred institution, and Mom holds diplomatic immunity. One simply does not speak ill of her. Yet many of us are unsatisfied with what we got—or didn't get—from this most formative person in our lives. So Mother's Day stirs up a complicated cocktail of emotions.

Psychotherapist Jasmin Lee Cori [writes about](#) the emotional chasm that develops within a person who isn't mothered well. When Mom is absent, disengaged, abusive or neglectful, her children internalize their pain—and their emotional growth is stunted. Perhaps this is the genesis of what Palmer calls the divided life.

We carry scars into adulthood that manifest in low self-esteem or self-loathing, an insatiable hunger for love that makes us vulnerable to abuse, an inability to trust self and others, abandonment issues, a lack of personal boundaries, inappropriate sexual behavior and other self-destructive ways. It is a life divided to be sure, and we expend great energy validating our existence.

But we don't have to live this way. Palmer quotes Thomas Merton: "There is in all visible things an invisible fecundity, a dimmed light, a meek namelessness, a hidden wholeness."

The journey towards wholeness is not an easy one. While we cannot recover what is lost from our childhood, Lee Cori [writes](#) that "we can receive the nurture, care, guidance, protection, mirroring, and so on from others whom we now choose to put in these [mother] roles." She also suggests seeing God as a divine mother.

As a recovering under-mothered adult, I can attest to the divine mother's power to heal gaping mother wounds. God's revelation to English mystic Julian of Norwich morphed my God image—and permanently altered my life for the better.

Julian's *Revelations of Divine Love* is believed to be the first English-language book written by a woman. Julian's theology is uniquely marked by the motherhood of God. In addition to giving us life via creation, God lovingly took a greater step in bearing us to eternal life. Christ revealed himself to Julian as mother.

Christ is the mother who gave all of humanity new life through the labor pains of the cross, who nourishes and sustains us by nursing us with his own blood at his gouged side, who feeds us with his own body in the Eucharist. As we grow, Jesus wants us always to

behave like a child; for when it is hurt or frightened it runs to its mother for help as fast as it can; and he wants us to ... always naturally trust the love of him, our Mother, in weal and woe.

Indeed, Christ our mother fills every space our biological mother may have left untended. He is always at the ready to feed us and heal us. His "sweet, gracious hands are ready and carefully surround us" in the perfect embrace. In all this, Christ gives us his complete and unwavering attention, for his work is that "of a kind nurse who has nothing to do but occupy herself with the salvation of her child." Christ our mother wants us to love him and trust him, and he showed this in these gracious words: "I hold you quite safely."

No human mother is perfect; we all blow it. Those of us who are mothers could list myriad ways that we fear we've messed up our kids for life. Anyone who has a mom could add his or her own tales.

But the perfect mother does exist. And within him and his love for us is the power to bring out our hidden wholeness.