



Religion, Science, and Maternity in Early America

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Hoagie Carmichael Room, Morrison Hall

In early America, maternity spanned the life course: from giving birth to a lifelong commitment to children, family, and others. Beyond these physical realities, motherhood was also an experience in which early Americans could glimpse God's direction and engagement in human life. The maternal body often served as the locus for understanding both complex theological ideas (think, for example, of the "new birth") and God's role in human experiences of pain, recovery, conversion, redemption, and death. Scientific and political changes in this era affected ideas about maternity, including the importance of nursing, education, and morality. Alongside these shifts, however, longstanding Protestant views of motherhood and redemption persisted. This talk describes this persistence in the religious realm while also highlighting how the religious weight of the maternal body was adapted and made "natural" in new scientific and political writings.

Philippa Koch is Assistant Professor of Religious Studies at Missouri State University, where she teaches courses on religion in America, health and the body in American religions, and sexuality and religion. She is currently revising her book, "Persistent Providence: Healing the Body and Soul in Early America," for publication, and her work has previously appeared in *Church History*, *Notches*, *The Atlantic*, and *Sightings*. Her article, "Experience and the Soul in Eighteenth-Century Medicine," *Church History* (2016) received the Sidney E. Mead Prize of the American Society of Church History. Her research has been supported by the Charlotte W. Newcombe Foundation, the McNeil Center for Early American Studies, the Martin Marty Center, among others.



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