



# **A Pleasing Birth: Midwives and Maternity Care in the Netherlands**

*Raymond De Vries*

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Women have long searched for a pleasing birth, a birth with a minimum of fear and pain, in the company of supportive family, friends, and caregivers, a birth that ends with a healthy mother and baby gazing into each other's eyes. For women in the Netherlands, such a birth is defined as one at home under the care of a midwife. In a country known for its liberal approach to drugs, prostitution, and euthanasia, government support for midwife-attended home birth is perhaps its most radical policy: every other modern nation regards birth as too risky to occur outside a hospital setting. In exploring the historical, social, and cultural customs responsible for the Dutch way of birth, Raymond De Vries opens a new page in the analysis of health care and explains why maternal care reform has proven so difficult in the U.S. He carefully documents the way culture shapes the organization of health care, showing how the unique maternity care system of the Netherlands is the result of Dutch ideas about home, the family, women, the body and pain, thriftiness, heroes, and solidarity.

"A Pleasing Birth" breaks new ground and closes gaps in our knowledge of the social and cultural foundations of health care. Offering a view into the Dutch notion of maternity care, De Vries also offers a chance of imagining how Dutch practices can reform health care in the U.S. not just for mothers and babies, but for all Americans. Raymond De Vries is Professor of Sociology at St. Olaf College and Visiting Professor at the Center for Bioethics, University of Minnesota. He is the author or editor of seven previous books, including, "Birth by Design: Pregnancy, Maternity Care, and Midwifery in North America and Europe".

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