

Special Issue on the Group for New Directions in Pastoral Theology: In Memory of Donald Capps (1939–2015), Part Two

Nathan Carlin¹ · Robert C. Dykstra²

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This issue of the journal continues the second of a two-part series on the Group for New Directions in Pastoral Theology. Both of these issues are offered in memory of Donald Capps, who, as noted in the previous issue of the journal, died from injuries sustained in an automobile accident on August 26, 2015. Lewis Rambo, editor of *Pastoral Psychology*, has been exceedingly kind in permitting the Group to publish in this journal over the years. Papers from previous conferences have been published as articles in the December 2010, June 2011, August 2012, October 2013, December 2014, October 2015, and October 2016 issues.

The articles in this issue mainly consist of papers that were delivered at Princeton Theological Seminary in Princeton, New Jersey, from October 14–16, 2015. The theme, derived from a conversation among all of the participants of the conference at the close of the October 2014 gathering, was “Creativity, Imagination, and Method in Pastoral Theology.”

In the conference invitation, participants were encouraged not so much to engage in a discussion on or dialogue with the writings of their predecessors or teachers but instead to reflect on their own creative work and what it reveals about their method. The invitation also noted that although creativity typically involves solitude and introspection, it is also often a surprisingly communal process. Many famous artists, for example, have had studios in which their students or colleagues collaborate on a painting, musical or dance composition, or sculpture (see Shenk 2015). Thus, participants were invited, if so inclined, to reflect in their papers on their roles as teacher, minister, counselor, or colleague and how these roles impact their understanding of method.

✉ Robert C. Dykstra
robert.dykstra@ptsem.edu

Nathan Carlin
Nathan.Carlin@uth.tmc.edu

¹ McGovern Center for Humanities and Ethics, McGovern Medical School, 6431 Fannin Street, JLL 410, Houston, TX 77030, USA

² Princeton Theological Seminary, P.O. Box 821, Princeton, NJ 08542-0803, USA

This issue consists of a number of imaginative essays on method in pastoral theology. Topics cover the place of narrative in pastoral theology, visual practices in pastoral care and counseling, embracing gender-creative pastoral sensibilities, and the intricacies of navigating intercultural paradigms. The issue concludes with an essay by Donald Capps, likely his last to be published in this journal, in which he offers a pastoral theology of work.

Work was very important to Capps. His generativity over decades was unparalleled in the field of pastoral theology, and even on the day of his death he was proofreading what would become among the last of his dozens of books, this one on William James's *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (Capps 2015). Although Capps realized that work for some can be onerous, he preferred instead to emphasize its liberating effects. In this regard he was influenced by James E. Dittes, his professor at Yale Divinity School and later colleague and friend. Writing in a *festschrift* on the occasion of Dittes's retirement, Capps reflects on a passage in Dittes's (1987) *When Work Goes Sour: A Male Perspective*, which Capps (2003) identifies as his "own favorite passage from [Dittes's] writings" (p. 47). Dittes wrote:

Give two schoolboys the two ends of a rope with a knot in the middle. Draw a line on the ground in front of each boy. Tell the boys, "You get a nickel every time you can pull the knot across your line." For you and for me and for most boys we know and were, this becomes competitive tug-of-war. We assume a scarcity of nickels. We assume that for me to get my own nickel I must keep you from getting yours. So we strain and compete. We work. I may drag the knot across my line a few times, working against your best efforts, and vice versa. In ten minutes maybe one boy wins five nickels and feels triumphant, and the other boy wins four nickels and feels defeated. That's the way work is. (Dittes 1987, p. 83)

But then Dittes imagines a different pair of boys who, with the same rope and the same line, envision the offer as a form of play rather than as a tug-of-war with the other. They begin eagerly sawing the rope back and forth across the line, as a kind of dance for passersby:

They assume plenty of nickels, they assume a "user friendly" assignment, and they assume collaboration and partnership. It never occurs to them to make the assumption... of competition, the assumption that we must wrestle an unwilling and unfriendly piece of work to yield something of personal value....It doesn't occur to them to "work" with the rope. (p. 84)

Reflecting on this passage, which he describes as a parable "worthy of Jesus himself," Capps (2003) writes, "James Dittes teaches us many things, but, for me personally, the greatest of these is how to be a liberated worker. Or, as his parable suggests, if there's men's work to be done, get a couple of boys at heart to do it. You are likely to find them hanging out with the others in the basement of the Church of the Full Gospel of Relaxation" (pp. 47–48).

It seems appropriate to us to conclude this *festschrift* edition for Capps with his essay on work and to conclude this preface with his reflections on work's liberating potential. This is, after all, how many of us have experienced our work together in the Group for New Directions in Pastoral Theology, a scholarly conference Capps co-founded in 2009. A single handwritten post-it note left on his desk the day he died contained a Bible verse from Philippians 2:12: "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling." We think of this as excellent parting advice. And so with fear and trembling, along with hope and gratitude, we continue striving to work out our salvation, seeking new directions in pastoral theology while rejoicing in the creativity and imagination of our beloved mentor and friend, Donald Capps.

References

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