Introduction to a Special Forum on Caring for Boys and Men

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Among the numerous subjects Donald Capps researched and wrote about during his long career was the topic of the developmental, psychological, and religious attributes and sensibilities of boys and men. In light of this, Capps chatted with his friend and colleague, Robert Dykstra, regarding the possibility of gathering ten male scholars to present papers on matters having to do with boys and men. Why ten instead of twelve men or some other number? Dykstra later told me that he thought Capps chose *ten* because it rhymed with *men*, which would fit Capps's penchant for humor and bad poetry. Regardless of the number, Capps and Dykstra believed that scholars in the areas of pastoral theology and psychology of religion could do more in terms of exploring and understanding diverse facets of the experiences and development of boys and men.

As with the Group for New Directions in Pastoral Theology (whose papers also are published in this journal), Capps and Dykstra invited to the conference a diverse array of both younger and more seasoned scholars. Capps had registered for the event and likely had an article in mind, but tragically he died in the aftermath of a car accident in August of 2015, ten months before a group of us met at the Presbyterian Historical Society in Philadelphia for several days in early June of 2016. Because he had touched each of us in different ways, his presence was felt during our deliberations and when we gathered for meals.

Those who chose to attend the conference had been invited to pursue their own scholarly interests with regard to boys and men, which led to wide-ranging and creative discussions of the various papers. Nathan Carlin explored author Patrick Ness's young adult novel *A Monster Calls* about a boy whose mother is dying of cancer. In particular, Carlin uses Freud's work "On Dreams," along with lessons from the life of Jesus, to interpret scenes from the novel. He argues that such a reading can help caregivers deepen their understanding of the emotional lives of teenagers.

Following Carlin's article is Robert Dykstra's article, an introspective meditation on what William James described as the "fallible utility" of introspection. Drawing on his own and

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James's stories of childhood struggles, Dykstra encourages boys and men "to practice a more generous self-acceptance, particularly of forbidden homoerotic interests, as their path to greater tolerance of idiosyncratic others."

Greater or more generous self-acceptance and tolerance of others are obstructed, Jaco Hamman contends, by the socialization of hypermasculine males. In his article, Hamman argues that Western culture and imperialism have produced hypermasculine males who are fearful of vulnerability and intimacy while embracing identifications that are "competitive and aggressive, strong, independent, dominant, powerful, rational, sexist, homophobic, and generally disconnected from [their] own sense of self and the self of others." This hypermasculine male, a representation integral to colonization, is present and produced, Hamman observes, in certain current video games. Relying in part on the work of feminist psychoanalyst Nancy Chodorow, Hamman argues that the decolonization of hypermasculine males can be an opportunity to *rehumanize* men, which will lead to the rehumanization of all people previously *dehumanized* by the practices of hypermasculine males.

Hypermasculinity is also evident in the warrior ethos of the U.S. Army. Ryan LaMothe considers the interrelation of the warrior ethos, warriorism, and mourning. In particular, he explores and describes how a young man moves from warriorism to being an unconventional warrior who, while remaining attached to the warrior ethos, is critical toward a government that uses its military to further the aims of political and economic elites. To understand this partial conversion, LaMothe relies on psychology of religion perspectives, in particular a work on religious mourning by Nathan Carlin (2014).

Phil Zylla's essay completes this issue. Most of the other articles deal with loss and struggles with mourning, whether in Carlin's focus on Ness's novel depicting the grief journey of a young boy or in Hamman's and LaMothe's articles that attend to forms of hypermasculinity. Zylla's article is an apt coda. Here, he explores recent research on men and mourning to understand the experiences of grief in works of C. S. Lewis, Nicholas Wolterstorff, and Henri Nouwen. Zylla concludes by identifying and describing mourning strategies for men, pointing to the eventual transformation of grief into solace.

Reference

- Carlin, N. (2014). *Religious mourning: Reversals and restorations in psychological portraits of religious leaders*. Eugene: Wipf & Stock.