

BOOK REVIEWS



Robert C. Dykstra, *Finding Ourselves Lost: Ministry in the Age of Overwhelm*, (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2018), 165 pp.

F*inding Ourselves Lost: Ministry in the Age of Overwhelm* by Robert C. Dykstra is a remarkable collection of essays that can be read a number of ways. It is a hymn to the evocative work of Donald Capps, who was mentor, colleague, and friend to the author. It is also a refresher on Freud's assumption that sexuality is both the occasion for repression and the primary path to self-understanding. Thirdly, in addition to Freud and Capps, Dykstra has woven together a prodigious array of writers from diverse perspectives, including popular culture, in support of a lively pastoral theology that establishes the commensurability of psychological needs, divine authority, and mission leadership. The author also expands the creative interpretation of the Bible that was a central theme for Capps. Along the way, Dykstra uses his own story candidly to illustrate the human dilemma of shame and the longing to believe that "you are a source of delight to the Source of your delight."

Although the opening chapter about "finding ourselves lost" was initially addressed to a seminary audience, the material here and throughout the book is neither parochial nor apologetic. Pastoral care and pastoral counseling, Dykstra demonstrates, aim to help people claim their own uniqueness, feel better, and live more productively by liberating them from embodied symptoms of shame that imprison and isolate. The sacredness of individuality, drawn in part from the struggles of William James, is the foundation not only of tolerance and respect for others (because the goodness cannot be limited to one observer) but of self-tolerance as well (because the desires that bring us joy are seldom known). The ministries of

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healing care are essential for this work of 'unbinding' repressed souls and helping the lost be found. Although this book is not a clinical handbook, insights for the practice of care abound.

I am writing this review in the midst of a political standoff and consequent government shutdown that has put hundreds of thousands of government workers in financial and moral jeopardy. In considering fundamentalism in a chapter titled "Zombie Alleluias," Dykstra insists that we are all fundamentalists about something and then offers this timely and challenging question: "Can religious moderates and political democracies manage to contain the bullies without bullying in return?" (p. 30). He answers the question with three evocative images. (1) The ecumenical self, "a democrat in a world of fascists," embraces ambiguity and paradox within and difference and conflict without. (2) "The kind of love that accepts one as one already is, without need to change, is a love that finally allows the individual, from time to time, to be able actually to change" (p. 41). I once heard a wise man say that to love the world as it is to begin to change it. (3) Empathy transforms fear of the 'other' into the triumph of life over death. We need more empathy!

This is a remarkable book about how easy it is to become lost when childhood repression marginalizes or when desires are shamed or when we cannot speak what we feel. From his story and the stories of others, Dykstra shows that we are free to let the future in when we can let something forbidden out. My primary disappointment is that the tag line in the title—"ministry in an age of overwhelm," is not sufficiently developed. In response to the multiple overwhelmings that invade our lives by multiple means from every corner of the world, we are inclined to flee from life in order avoid being overcome by so much suffering. We require trusted companions, sturdy souls, and the practice of wonder to leave the door ajar long enough to release hidden desires of the heart and hear the world's pain without being overwhelmed by multiple overwhelmings.

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