

# Psychobiography and the Psychology of Religion: A Tribute to the Work of Donald Capps

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**Abstract** This article examines Donald Capps's work on the psychology of major religious figures and the social forces that informed their psychic lives, spiritual worldviews, and teachings. Drawing on four texts that were published between 2000 and 2014, the essay explores Capps's views on the importance of psychobiography to the study of religion and the specific contributions his thinking has made to a greater understanding of the historical Jesus. The article considers Capps's analysis of Jesus's illegitimacy and his role as healer within the society in which he lived and preached. Building on Capps's work, the article also expands on feminist and postcolonial theories that offer insight into the psychosocial development of religious figures whose teachings and beliefs emerged out of their individual life circumstances and the larger socio-political culture in which they lived.

**Keywords** Donald Capps · Psychology of religion · Psychobiography of religious figures

Between 2000 and 2014, Donald Capps published four books that focused on the importance of psychobiography for the study of the psychology of religion: *Jesus: A Psychological Biography* (2000); *Young Clergy: A Biographical Developmental Study* (2005); *Jesus the Village Psychiatrist* (2008); and *Erik Erikson's Verbal Portraits: Luther, Gandhi, Einstein, Jesus* (2014). These books cover an expanse of religious figures whose beliefs and social roles are examined through the psychological forces that informed their inner lives and the social-psychological experiences that shaped their ministry and teachings. Within this field of research, the majority of Capps's scholarship focuses on studies of the historical Jesus. As such, this article will primarily explore Capps's scholarship in this area.

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To foreground his biographical work on the psychology of Jesus, my discussion will begin with a brief overview of his monograph, *Young Clergy*, which addresses the biographical development of religious figures. Coming between his two books on Jesus, *Young Clergy* represents a bridge between Capps's larger and more comprehensive volume on Jesus' psychobiography and his later and more particularized interest in Jesus' role as healer and therapist.

### ***Young Clergy***

*Young Clergy* examines the childhood and young adult lives of Phillips Brooks, Jonathan Edwards, John Henry Newman, John Wesley, and Orestes Brownson. At the conclusion of this analysis, Capps (2005) offers five models of professional formation that highlight the significance of the years between the middle and late 1930s as the critical time period in which religious innovators and leaders either accomplish their goals or fail to achieve success. The first model, "advancement within a stable structure" (p. 217), is typified by early success upon graduating from seminary, a well-balanced ministry style, an independent but respectful relationship with church authorities, and a motivation to succeed in light of lost opportunities. The second model is "decline or failure within a stable life structure" (p. 220). This model is characterized by errors in judgment, mistreatment by one's congregation, a diverse set of difficulties both inside and outside the pastor's community, and the pastor's reluctance to take risks. The third model, "breaking out" (p. 223), creates a new life structure that, according to Capps, has characterized the Christian ministry for centuries. This model includes the religious leader's dissatisfaction with church authorities, a lack of personal advancement, and a strong desire for change.

In the fourth model, "advancement leading to major changes in life structure" (p. 226), Capps identifies the importance of risk-taking behaviors, the willingness to make changes in ministerial style and place, and the effects of emotional deprivation on the religious leader. Finally, the fifth model, that of "instability," describes a ministerial career that is marked by impulsivity, imbalance, and the cleric's overemphasis on one problem or issue to the exclusion of a broader-based vision. In the epilogue to *Young Clergy*, Capps observes that "biographies enable us to track the vacillating rhythm of death and life instincts from birth to death" (p. 242). His insight on the value of biography to the psychology of religion frames Capps's immense scholarly career and provides a good starting point from which to review his provocative and in-depth research on the psychobiography of Jesus.

### ***Jesus: A Psychological Biography and Jesus the Village Psychiatrist***

In his compelling text *Jesus: A Psychological Biography*, Capps considers the relationship between Jesus' psychological life and his construction of God the Father; his role as healer; and what Capps characterizes as Jesus's "utopian-melancholic personality." In the first of these psychological profiles, Capps situates the historical Jesus within the "hidden years" of his early childhood, which while unaccounted for in the Gospels, have become the subject of a great deal of interest and speculation among scholars. Within this body of literature, Capps explores the diverse and sometimes contradictory scholarship on Jesus' father, citing both those scholars who accept Joseph as his biological father and those who are more convinced of his illegitimacy. In the first case, he draws on the work of Miller

(1997), who portrays Jesus as having a loving and positive relationship with Joseph. It is this father–son bond that shapes Jesus’ experience of God and his understanding of the divine through a frame of loving paternalism and fatherhood. In particular, Miller cites Jesus’ use of the word “Abba” (the term for *father* within the Israelite community) and the importance of fathers in the biblical parables as evidence that Jesus’ emotional construction of God was modeled on his early childhood attachment to Joseph. Further, Capps discusses Miller’s view that Joseph died when Jesus was an adolescent. Following the death and loss of Joseph, his baptism by John served as a “second birth” in which God replaces the biological father in the consciousness of the grieving son. Thus, Capps writes, “Miller pre-supposes that Jesus’ experience of God as father was congruent—not dissonant—with his experience of his natural father. In renewing contact with God... he also re-established his bond with Joseph” (p. 135). Within this psychological portrayal of Jesus as the bereft son, Joseph’s death is understood as the impetus for the conversion experience that led to his missionary life.

In contrast to this psychological biography of Jesus, which draws on William James’s understanding of religious conversion and experience, Capps then turns to the work of Schaberg (1987). In stark contrast to the “death of the father” interpretive framework, Schaberg constructs a far different and more controversial portrait of Jesus as the illegitimate son of Mary. Situating the infant son in a society where illegitimacy would have been a source of shame and stigma, Schaberg’s theory helps to explain the secrecy within the early Christian community surrounding Jesus’ early years. Noting that Matthew’s genealogy does not explicitly state that “Joseph, the husband of Mary, begot Jesus” (p. 138), Schaberg interprets the Gospels’ silence surrounding Jesus’ biological father as indicative of his illegitimacy. Further, as Capps elaborates on Schaberg’s work, he focuses on the dilemma that faced Joseph. Aware that he was not the father of the child that Mary was carrying, he could either seek a divorce or bring Mary to a public hearing in which rape or seduction would have to be proven. This interpretation of the historical Joseph is especially interesting because it portrays Joseph as a sympathetic figure who “agonized” over the options that were before him in responding to the angelic message he received to marry Mary, to whom he was betrothed. In the narrative that Schaberg presents, Joseph chose to marry and then to quietly divorce Mary. This version of the historical Jesus’ conception and birth suggests that Joseph believed her to be a rape victim and thus acted in a more compassionate way. In this reading of Jesus’ life, the meaning of a virgin birth is also considered through the frame of Jewish understandings of the relationship of God to the act of conception, a view that supports the notion that because the divine spirit is present in every conception, “the holy Spirit empowers this birth as all births are divinely empowered” (p. 143). According to Capps, Schaberg then makes a case for Jesus’ illegitimacy, Joseph’s decision to protect Mary, and the later virginal interpretation that derives from Matthew’s readings of Jewish theology.

Capps next brings his own perspective to Schaberg’s thesis, offering his views on the historical Joseph and Mary. He situates the couple in the rural Nazareth culture where women were especially at risk of seduction, exploitation, and/or rape. As Capps explains, it was not uncommon for women of peasant classes to be compromised and exploited within the master–servant relationship. Within the power structure of agrarian societies, peasant fathers and husbands were limited in their ability to protect women or protest their treatment without putting themselves and their families in danger. Thus, Capps supports the view that Mary was likely a victim of the sexual violence that lower-class women often experienced and that Joseph, to whom she was betrothed, “lacking the requisite patronage, had little choice but to proceed with the marriage” (p. 147). Assuming that Mary was most

likely a victim of sexual assault and that Joseph had no choice but to marry her, Capps maintains that the set of circumstances surrounding Jesus' birth had psychological consequences for the young boy who, in effect, grew up fatherless.

## The Fatherless Son

In this final discourse on Jesus' hidden childhood years, Capps turns to Van Aarde's (1997) socio-historical analysis of family structure in ancient Mediterranean culture and especially the laws and rules governing marriage and temple worship during the period of the Second Temple. To determine the social status of children in Israelite society, Van Aarde refers to the laws governing ritual attendance and the reading of sacred scrolls. According to Van Aarde, the permission to participate in sacred worship was determined by one's birth status, with full Israelites on one end of the continuum and non-Israelites on the other end. Altogether, Van Aarde identifies seven categories of status in ritual participation that includes illegitimate children of priests, converts, fatherless individuals, and heathens. Within this classification, Van Aarde places Jesus in the fifth category, that of bastards, the fatherless, and foundlings. Here Capps cites Van Aarde's description of Jesus as the fatherless child: "The image of Jesus as the fatherless carpenter, the unmarried son of Mary, who lived in a strained relationship with his village kin in Nazareth, probably because of the stigma of being fatherless and therefore a sinner, fits the ideal type of the fifth category" (p. 149). In this narrative, Jesus' baptism by John becomes the means through which he is absolved of the sin associated with his undetermined birth. Through the symbolic act of baptism, he becomes the son of God, engaging in a rite of purification that also changes his fatherless status.

What is important in Van Aarde's socio-historical perspective is not whether Mary was raped or seduced but the claim that Jesus came into the world as a fatherless child whose status and identity could not be shaped or legitimated by a patriarchal figure or familial tie. Van Aarde further makes the case that because Jesus lacked a male with whom he could identify, he more strongly identified with his mother, taking on the qualities of a nurturing and maternal self that was evident in his nonaggressiveness and nonviolent teachings. In bringing together the scholarship of Schaberg with that of Van Aarde, Capps offers a third possibility with respect to Jesus' hidden childhood years, that of Jesus living in the household of Joseph as an outsider within the family. In this narrative of Jesus' life, Joseph is not recognized as his biological father nor does he legally adopt him. Rather, Jesus lives on the margins of family life, essentially fatherless, since it is supposed that Joseph would not have performed the traditional functions of fatherhood associated with the religious and professional training of sons, including the discipline that was a sign of "a father's love" (p. 159). In support of this alternative scenario, Capps offers evidence that Jesus had siblings (children born of Mary and Joseph) and that he was not given the status or rights typically accorded a firstborn son, a position that went instead to James, the firstborn child of Joseph and Mary. The portrayal of Jesus as the fatherless son, living within his mother's home as an outcast child, underlies Capps's psychological explanation for Jesus' conceptualization of God the Father.

"What was it that Jesus sought in a father and believed that he found in 'Abba?'" (p. 159), Capps asks. He answers by looking to the ancient Palestinian model of the idealized disciplinarian who both loves and chastises his children. Because such a father was unavailable to Jesus in his early life, he envisions a notion of a divine paternalistic

figure that possesses the qualities of the ancient Palestinian father. As the paternal disciplinarian, Jesus' spiritual father sends his son to the desert to test his physical strength and moral courage, which, in effect, acts as a rite of passage to manhood. Through these trials, not only did Jesus become the son of God but a man in the tradition of Jewish patriarchy. Thus, through his relationship with the divine "Abba," Jesus realizes his need and longing for a father.

In the concluding chapter on the hidden and mostly unknown years of Jesus' boyhood, Capps argues that the speculations on the young historical Jesus are important not only because they help to illuminate the psychological motivations that inform prophetic transformation but also because they reveal and expose secrets that are meant to conceal truths that others wish to suppress. This final discussion, of secrecy and repression, adds a particularly valuable perspective to historical Jesus studies. As Capps suggests, the act of hiding, obscuring, and/or sacralizing the birth and childhood of the young Jesus contributes to an alienation both from the man/prophet and from the religious and spiritual meanings that he brought to the world. In trying to situate Jesus' birth and early life within the social milieu into which he was born and the norms and values of the society in which he was raised, Capps, along with other scholars, provides a window into the roots of Christian thought. Through an analysis of the psychological needs of the young Jesus, Capps considers the inner life of a boy who bore the pains of social and moral stigma and who, in his relationship to God, sought a paternal ideal that would fill the void left by his "fatherless" upbringing. In expanding on the interrelationship between Jesus' prophetic mission and the socio-political conditions of his life, Capps goes on to examine Jesus' psychological biography within the framework of the "utopian-melancholic personality."

## Utopian-Melancholic Personality

In a further examination of Jesus' psychological portrait, Capps turns to the work of Freud (1957) and the characterization of the melancholic personality within psychoanalytic theory. According to Freud, melancholia is a pathological response to a deep loss that is suffered by an individual. Unlike grief, melancholia is not resolved through the normative dynamics of mourning but is experienced as a source of self-recrimination in which the individual holds himself or herself accountable for the loss, and thus suffers feelings of abandonment and self-blame. The manifestations of this form of pathology are varied and detrimental to the psychological well-being of the melancholic who perceives himself or herself as undeserving of love and with a self-loathing that leads to a delusional assumption of guilt and presumed punishment. Within this psychoanalytic paradigm, the individual turns his or her feelings of abandonment away from the lost love object and toward the self. The end result is that the internalization of the lost object results in two harmful psychological consequences: self-hatred and punishment through the feelings that accompany the pathology (Capps 2000; Freud 1957).

Against this backdrop of Freud's depiction of melancholia, Capps takes the bold step of linking this form of pathology to the psychological biography of Jesus. He presents his case for Jesus as a melancholic personality through an analysis of three aspects of male culture in the lower Galilee, each of which contributes to states of psychic ambivalence and inner psychological struggles surrounding the loss of the mother. The first of these interpretative frameworks involves a discourse on "food and table." Here Capps focuses on Jesus' open approach to those with whom he shared his table. The sharing of meals, where norms of

gender and class separation were intentionally violated, represents a symbolic and revolutionary act in which the table symbolized the “new Kingdom of God” where all are welcome and co-exist together. Capps links this approach to commensality (sharing food) to the mother who, from infancy on, is associated with feeding and nurturance. According to Capps, commensality is not unlike the relationship between mother and fetus in which there is a sharing of food with no harm either to the mother or fetus. Ultimately, however, open commensality, as it is construed through a psychoanalytic framework, is replaced by unconscious anxieties that center around the dangers inherent in such a dependent relationship. Thus, Capps concludes that the decision to include women at the table “was psychodynamically rooted in male melancholia, itself originating in the struggle with and against the mother for life itself” (p. 244). This explanation of Jesus’ turn toward inclusivity brings a unique psychoanalytic perspective to the underlying anxieties that informed his longing for maternal nurturance, a longing that took shape in a vision of a divinely inspired utopia.

Following his discussion of the table, Capps looks to the stories and sayings that also reveal male melancholia in first-century Galilee. Among these are the “missing mother” parable and other sayings that derive directly from Jesus’s teaching. Noting the ambivalence with which Jesus speaks and preaches about women and the maternal, Capps argues that his allusions to the absent mother, homelessness, and women’s place in the Kingdom of God are all indicative of male melancholia. For Capps, Jesus’ vision of the Kingdom of God is tied to unresolved maternal anxiety. Here Capps explores the concept of ambivalence toward the mother and the expression of this ambivalence in utopian desires. Capps suggests that Jesus’ utopian vision is driven by a longing to repair the estrangement between mother and son. Not only for Jesus but for all boys of the lower Galilee, the Kingdom of God offers the promise of a spiritual home where the desire for reunification is fulfilled. The transcendental motif therefore represents the unconscious longing to repair the maternal break in the psychic life of young boys. Drawing on the Gospel of Thomas, “For my mother gave me falsehood, but my true mother gave me life,” Capps locates the vision of the Kingdom of God within a Freudian psychoanalytic framework in which a spiritual utopia symbolizes the unconscious attempt to resolve the loss of the mother who gives man the ability “to make something of himself, to change his fate” (pp. 248–249).

Within this mother-centered understanding of spiritual utopia, Capps also makes reference to the notion of a transcendent home where man can reunite with the mother of his dreams who fulfills his every need. The Kingdom of God thus provides a possibility of a return to the maternal source of life and nurturance and, as a utopian vision, is an expression of the melancholia from which Jesus may have suffered. Because melancholia is associated with the loss of the mother in the male psyche, this loss may have been all the more meaningful for Jesus because of the circumstances of his birth and his possible rejection by Joseph. Under these psychological conditions, Jesus may have experienced a deeper separation from his mother who, in his conscious as well as unconscious mind, bore the blame for his emotional as well as social suffering. The turn to utopianism, as imagined in the notion of a Kingdom of God that exists within the individual, can therefore be explained as the desires of a melancholic male persona who seeks a “mythical place where one is safe, secure and well nourished” (p. 250).

It is interesting to note that Capps’s understanding of Jesus as a melancholic personality originates out of Freud’s object relations theory. This theoretical perspective, as compared to the oedipal crisis, focuses on the pre-oedipal stage of development in which the mother, as the first object of attachment, becomes the focal point around which the male psyche develops and around which the experience of loss is first known. In the case of

melancholia, the psychological tensions that arise out of this first experience of maternal loss are never resolved. As a mother-oriented interpretation of melancholia, Capps's work can be linked to feminist theories of maternal attachment (Chodorow 1978) in which male development is viewed through the lens of the self in relation. This theoretical paradigm, which further interrogates the role of the mother in male development, postulates that because of gender differences between mothers and sons, mothers initiate a psychoemotional separation from sons in the pre-oedipal stage. According to Chodorow (1978), boys are pushed out of the "preoedipal nest" sooner than girls, thus experiencing a loss of the mother from which they never totally recover. This early separation creates particular psychodynamic stresses for boys that are intensified by a patriarchal family structure that positions fathers as secondary and more remote nurturers of children. As Capps's analysis suggests, in Jesus' case the limited role of the nurturing father is doubly problematic. Given Capps's view that Joseph, in effect, abandoned Jesus within the family, Jesus would have been even more emotionally dependent on his mother as the sole source of nurturance. Mary, however, engaged in her own psychic process of differentiation from the male child, pushes her son away, thus leaving the young Jesus without a secure psychological home. That Jesus may then have experienced melancholia and a longing for an emotionally comforting utopia, embracing both a spiritual loving father and "real" mother, can be explained within the self-in-relation paradigm that highlights the psychological consequences of patriarchal family relations, especially for a boy who suffered the psychic loss of both the mother and the father in early stages of development.

## Jesus as Healer

Lastly, Capps considers Jesus' role as the village healer. His work on this aspect of the historical Jesus is included in two monographs, *Jesus: A Psychological Biography* and *Jesus the Village Psychiatrist*, in which he considers the underlying mental illnesses that can cause somatic responses to anxiety and stress, including paralysis, blindness, and seizures. Capps contends that Jesus' ability to heal stems from the psychosocial origins of the diseases that were common among the Jewish peasant populations in this historical time period. Importantly, Capps suggests that Jesus' ability to cure, which he and other scholars believe to be authentic, can be explained through psychoanalytic theories of somatic responses to psychological suffering. The origins of this suffering are understood to have multiple causes that include macro-level influences such as the socio-political conditions of a colonized people, as well as micro-level causes such as the inner psychological tensions surrounding parental attachment and disconnection. Capps notes that most of the afflicted, as described in the Gospels, suffered from one of two types of somatoform disorders, as classified in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. The two types he cites are those that come under the definition of undifferentiated somatic form disorders and conversion disorders. While the former refers to unexplained physical complaints, the latter encompasses somatic symptoms that affect sensory and motor functioning but which have an underlying psychological cause. In a path-breaking approach, Capps turns both to Freud and to postcolonial theory to provide a clearer picture of the psychic origins of somatic disorders among his followers and his role as the miraculous healer of the Gospels.

First, let us consider the socio-political milieu of the lower Galilee under Roman occupation. As a colonized people, the Jews living at the time of Jesus would suffer the

psychological effects of colonization that, according to theorists such as Fanon (1967) and Memmi (1957), result in the pathologies of the oppressed.<sup>1</sup> While Capps draws only minimally from Fanon, his inclusion of a postcolonial perspective allows for a broader discussion of both Fanon and Memmi and their theories of the “colonized psyche.” For Memmi, the pathology of colonization resides in the psychological spaces that exist between the consciousness of the colonizer and the self-construction of the colonized. Memmi argues that to successfully enact the part of the colonizer, the dominant class must construct a portrait of the dominated that dehumanizes and devalues the colonized subject such that their oppression is rationalized as legitimate. Such constructions, embedded in the power relations of colonial domination, then become part of the internalized self-representation of a colonized people who suffer from the psychological consequences of the power of the colonizer to define the colonized subjects. By comparison, Fanon roots his understanding of mental illness and colonization more directly in Freudian theory, drawing on Freud’s view of the importance of trauma in the psychological life of the individual. Here Fanon situates the psychic suffering of the colonized within the traumatic encounters that colonized subjects experience in their everyday relations with the colonizer. These interactions, which devalue and humiliate the powerless, threaten the ego and self-integrity of the colonized subject. Noting that traumas such as these are “enacted every day in colonized countries” (Fanon, p. 145), Fanon attributes the symptoms of psychopathology to the repression of trauma within colonial societies. Following Fanon, Paul Hollenbach, as discussed by Capps, then suggests that in the case of the colonized Jew, “mental illness can be seen as a socially accepted form of oblique protest against, or escape from, oppression” (1981, 317), a form of coping that arises out of the conditions of powerlessness and the suffering of the oppressed. Thus, somatized mental disorders such as paralysis or seizures may have their origins in the traumas and anxieties of a dominated people and, for example, can account for the symptoms of the possessed boy that Jesus heals through exorcism (Mark 9:14–29).

In this spirit-possession narrative, a father brings his son to Jesus to be healed from a type of possession that in modern medical terms might be described as a seizure, the symptoms of which include loss of speech, rigidity of limbs, and foaming at the mouth. While Fanon might conclude that the seizure is a response to a traumatic encounter with the colonizer, Capps adds an additional socio-cultural interpretation that situates the illness within the micro-level social relations of the Galilean family, where fathers were assumed to be the disciplinarians of adolescent boys. In this scenario, the boy’s illness emerges out of the feelings of hatred that the boy has only recently developed toward a harsh and punishing father who, in the boy’s unconscious, has replaced the earlier loving father of his childhood. Conflicted by feelings of aggression that overwhelm him, the somatic symptoms act to immobilize the son against his own wish to destroy the father/oppressor. By invoking the name/image of a caring father, “Abba,” in the rite of healing, Jesus rekindles the boy’s unconscious connection to the loving father of his childhood, thus ameliorating the feelings of aggression that are at the root of the boy’s illness. Additionally, the invocation of the healing father acts to unconsciously satisfy Jesus’ own longing for the ideal paternal figure through whom he speaks and cures.

<sup>1</sup> In discussing theories of mental illness in relation to oppressed or colonized peoples, Capps was aware of the sensitivity that such topics engender. In including these theoretical points of view here and elsewhere in my paper, I too am aware of the ways in which such scholarship can be used to legitimate anti-Semitic and racist constructions of an oppressed or colonized minority. The intent here is to show the destructive psychological consequences of persecution and colonization. This important perspective is not intended to pathologize a people or to “blame the victims” for the circumstances of their illness.



A second form of miraculous healing attributed to Jesus is that of curing the blind. Here Capps looks to the theory of conversion disorders to help us better understand the psychological underpinnings that may result in the loss of sight. In particular, he is interested in how the somatic effects of anxiety become manifested in physiological symptoms that represent an unconscious psychological conflict. In the case of blindness, he turns to the common belief in the “evil eye” superstition that was pervasive in Mediterranean societies. Capps suggests that through blindness, men might avoid the harmful consequences attributed to the gaze of the “evil eye,” perhaps believing that “if I cannot see the evil eye of the others, I protect myself from their evil intentions” (p. 210). Blindness then acts to reduce anxiety for those who fear they may be hurt by the harmful gaze of others. At the time of Jesus, such fears would not be uncommon. According to Capps, village life would be rife with envy and class antagonisms that could motivate evil wishes against a neighbor, employer, or even a more successful family member. Fanon, on the other hand, might argue, as might Gilman (1993), that Jews would especially fear the gaze of the Roman colonizers who traumatize, humiliate, degrade, and threaten with their look of disdain and menace. Under these oppressive circumstances, blindness would act as a defense against the colonizer and perhaps invoke pity and sympathy from the more powerful as well. In healing the blind, Jesus tells the man that his “faith has made him well” (Mark 10:46–52). Thus, through faith, God the father is also the protector, reducing the anxiety of the blind who have been afraid to see and to be seen.

Lastly, we turn to a somewhat different expression of somatic illness, that of the hemorrhaging woman. Unlike the other two examples discussed above, this miracle story (Mark 5:24–34; Matthew 9:20–22; Luke 8:42b–48) focuses on the female body and uncontrolled bleeding rather than on paralysis, immobility, or sightlessness. It is of some significance that this healing narrative appears three times in the Gospels, suggesting perhaps the importance of Jesus to suffering and outcast women. Although the focus of Capps’s interest in the healing parable is on the psychoanalytic dimensions of the cure, it might also be useful to frame the discussion of the cure within the psychological cause for the disease, that is, the internalized anxiety of the bleeding woman. My explanation of her illness is situated in the biblical fear of bodily emissions and the female body. These fears, which were prevalent in the Galilee, centered on the polluting nature of women’s blood. Accordingly, Jewish law and custom sought to protect men from the dangers of women’s bodily emissions during birth and menstruation (Biale 1995). Within this fear-based religious mentality, hemorrhaging may then have been a symptom of internalized female anxiety which, within psychoanalytic theory, would be connected to the loss of the father by the daughter during puberty, the time period in which her status changed from harmless child to potentially dangerous woman. The psychological causes for uncontrolled bleeding can then be construed through the lens of unresolved conflict over the woman’s hatred of a body that has betrayed and stigmatized her and that also bears the blame for her early rejection by her father in adolescence.

Within this interpretive framework, Capps’s explanation for the power of Jesus to heal is especially compelling. Citing the Gospels, he focuses on the energy that passes from Jesus to the woman when she touches his garment and he pronounces the cure: “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace” (Mark 5:24–34). Capps compares this scenario to the process of transference wherein the patient (that is, the afflicted woman) “drew upon the healer’s own strength” (Capps, p. 216), leading to a powerful transfer of emotion between Jesus and the diseased woman. Rather than rejecting or chastising the woman who touched him, Jesus assumes the role of the loving and spiritual paternal caretaker who alleviates the wounds of her somatic suffering and who assuages the pain of the daughter’s

loss of the father. In this way, his healing replicates the transference of love between doctor and patient—father and daughter—and provides the psychological explanation through which this miracle can be explained.

More than a decade after Capps completed *Jesus: A Psychological Biography*, he revisited the importance of the Galilean setting to Jesus' ministry in his book *Erik Erikson's Verbal Portraits*, most specifically in the chapter "Self-Reconciliation: Portrait of Jesus of Galilee." While much of Capps's previous work on the historical Jesus was grounded in Freudian theory, this analysis draws on Erikson's concepts of the "I" and "we" to further elaborate the psychosocial dimensions of Jesus' appeal to his followers and the psychological nature of his curative powers. As conceptualized by Erikson, the "I" is a composite of "various selves" that is derived from perceptions of one's personality, body, and social roles. The "we," by comparison, is a collective identity that emerges out of the shared experience of time, space, language, faith, and culture. The question that Capps addresses is how the ministry of Jesus created the psychological conditions under which the "I" became the "we" in the lower Galilee, creating a new faith perspective that challenged the existing religious order.

According to Capps, Erikson looked to the Gospels to place Jesus within an agricultural society that gave rise to the social and psychological conditions that informed Jesus' ministry and relationality. Capps describes the way in which the parables provide a landscape portrait of Jesus' travels across an agricultural terrain as he moved from village to village, healing and preaching to those who would listen and follow his teachings. The parables invoke images of Jesus and his followers walking through bucolic settings of the lower Galilee, attracting crowds that witness his miracles. The scenes that are portrayed in the Gospels are evocative of a prophetic outsider to whom the people of the Galilee turn in their longing to experience the miraculous and perhaps be touched by prophecy and wisdom. For Capps, such portraits of Jesus are important insofar as they help to explain the connective bonds that Jesus developed both to the individuals with whom he spoke and to the larger crowds that he addressed. It was his ability to speak to "one" and to "all" that bridged the space between the separate identity of "I" and the newly forming collective identity of "we" among the Galileans.

To illustrate this shift in consciousness, Capps returns to the parable of the hemorrhaging woman and Erikson's discourse on Jesus' message to her: "Your faith has healed you." What is important about this saying is the way in which Jesus uses language as a therapeutic tool, communicating to the woman that she has an active role in her own healing and that her power to heal herself resides in her relationship to God, which is heightened by her connection to Jesus as God's healer and spiritual prophet. Once again, Capps reminds us that Jesus' ability to heal is rooted in a process of transference that is evident in the elements of trust and touch that characterize the scene between Jesus and the afflicted woman. Through the reciprocity between the healer and the healed, the "I" is, in Erikson's view, "invigorated," while the "we" emerges out of the shared experience of the witnesses to the miracle (Erikson 1996). In hearing Jesus' words and in observing the woman's cure, the crowds also receive the message that they can be powerful actors in the life of faith that Jesus espouses. Capps's more recent work on Erikson thus incorporates post-Freudian theories of individual and collective identity formation. Moving beyond the inner psychic struggles of Jesus and his followers, Capps encourages us to embrace a wider understanding of the relationship between the particular qualities of a historically situated ministry and the emergence of a religious movement that could speak both to the individual and to the larger society in which it flourished.

## Conclusion

Taken together, Capps's works on the historical Jesus synthesize a vast array of scholarship on Jesus' hidden childhood years, his psychological suffering, and his therapeutic role as healer in an anxious society whose religious laws regulated the lives of its members under an oppressive Roman regime. Although we can never truly know the interior life of the young Jesus, Capps has given us new and important ways to think about how the circumstances of one's birth and the socio-cultural milieu of biblical societies provide fertile ground for the psychological development of a prophet whose ministry would transform both the culture in which he lived and the future of religious belief more universally. In responding to and interpreting Capps's ideas and theories for this publication in his honor, I have gained an even greater appreciation for the depth of his thought and for his ability to challenge traditional paradigms and to humanize Jesus within a psychological–historical framework. Through an extensive examination of the multiple ways in which Jesus may have suffered psychically as an outsider both in his family and community, Capps offers a window into the psychosocial forces that shaped his ministry, his teachings, and his role as prophet and healer. Further, his work provides a much needed social–psychological context for understanding Jesus' appeal to the distressed, oppressed, and marginalized. Capps is that rare scholar who can clearly and perceptively integrate the work of others while bringing his own perspectives and theoretical insights to bear on diverse and wide-ranging fields of research. His work has fundamentally changed the way in which we approach and appreciate the role of psychology in the study of religion and religious figures.

### Compliance with Ethical Standards

**Conflict of interest** The author declares that she has no conflict of interest.

**Human and Animals Rights** This article does not contain any studies with human participants or animals.

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