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## Communicating for Life: Christian Stewardship in Community and Media (Book Review)

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# Book Reviews

*Communicating for Life: Christian Stewardship in Community and Media*, by Quentin J. Schultze. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000. 191 pp. Reviewed by Kenneth Boersma, Vice-President for Student Services, Dordt College.

John Newton, an Anglican cleric in the eighteenth century and the author of the well known song "Amazing Grace," was once informed by a colleague that the latter intended to criticize another minister for his lack of orthodoxy. Newton responded by saying that although he believed that his colleague was on the side of truth, he desired that he would be more than a conqueror and would triumph not only over his adversary but also over himself. Newton went on to advise the minister to consider the potential impact of his criticism upon his opponent, the public, and himself, and cautioned him to exercise gentleness and moderation and in meekness seek to instruct the one he opposed, not strive against him. Newton concluded by writing the following:

If you can be content with showing your wit, and gaining the laugh on your side, you have an easy task; but I hope you have a far nobler aim, and that, sensible of the solemn importance of gospel truths, and the compassion due to the souls of men, you would rather be a means of removing prejudices in a single instance, than obtain the empty applause of thousands.

I was reminded of this letter "On Controversy" from John Newton as I read Quentin Schultze's book *Communicating for Life: Christian Stewardship in Community and Media*. Schultze has written a book that is valuable for both Communications Studies scholars and the layperson who is striving "to communicate deeply in a broken world" (14). Schultze is concerned about the same issues that John Newton confronted with his colleague centuries earlier. Schultze notes, "everyone who communicates also co creates culture and affects the life of others" (98). Communication, according to Schultze, should be a means to move toward shalom, toward establishing a community of peace and justice. He writes, "When we communicate faithfully, we experience a taste of heaven on earth" (26).

Schultze examines and evaluates communications theories and systems throughout the book. He insists that such theories and systems be examined in the light of God's grace and faithfulness. We are co-creators of culture, and we use the gift of communication to imitate God's own creative ability. Schultze defines culture broadly as referring "to all human values, practices, and artifacts, and to the context within which these values, practices and artifacts operate" (21). Schultze also warns that we should recognize that we are limited in our ability to be co-creators and that when we communicate we

can contribute good or bad pieces of culture to the world.

Furthermore, our communication contributes to the co-creation of culture through four types of relationships. First, we "collaborate with God—or God co-creates through us" (21). Second, we co-create with our neighbors. Schultze defines neighbor broadly to include the economic, political, and religious communities of which we are a part, for "every person with whom we interact becomes our neighbor" (21). Third, we co-create by "having a dialogue with creation" (22). Fourth, we co-create by communicating with ourselves. Acknowledging that this is a mystery, Schultze states that "somehow we introspectively dialogue with our own thoughts, ideas, and feelings" (22). Each day, we co-create ways of life shaped by these four relationships as wise (and, at times, foolish) stewards of God's creation.

Schultze also claims that we are called to be symbolic stewards of God's creation. He writes, "we define ideas and objects by using vast vocabularies of verbal and non-verbal symbols that subtly represent (or misrepresent) the reality of God's world" (23). Our task is to "anchor our symbolic reality in God's truth" (25). We are gifted to represent the Creator on earth. The core of God's truth is the gospel, and it is "when the gospel forms our communication that we become a community of truth" (26). It is this faithful communication, when we listen to God, which produces a taste of shalom. We are also called to invite others to join us as we seek to create communities of shalom.

Schultze is very aware of the difficulties and challenges of successfully creating such communities. He recognizes the result of sin in our world and the corresponding corruption of creation. He examines transmission and cultural communications theories in light of this recognition. According to Schultze, transmission communication theories employ quantitative methods, assume human passivity, and conceive of culture as fairly static and formal. Cultural theories, on the other hand, focus on qualitative methods and assume that culture is highly dynamic and organic, even ritualistic. Schultze acknowledges that in the real world of communications studies both theories are applied and combined. While recognizing its limitations, Schultze argues that the cultural theory is the better map to understand communication because of its ability to explain human complexity. Schultze cautions that any model must continually be tested, modified, and held up to the light of God's word.

I found *Communicating for Life* helpful and valuable. Schultze provides a careful and thoughtful critique of communications studies and offers a biblically based and reformed understanding of the value and limits of human communication. As a practitioner in the field, he writes in a way that both challenges his peers but also engages and informs the uninitiated. He recognizes God's rule in the field of communications and our role as co-creators. He is particularly effective in challenging the Christian community to understand the value of communication, the dangers of its misuse, and the "radical responsibility"

for the Christian communicator to develop shalom. He provides practical and valuable suggestions for becoming more effective communicators. Just as John Newton challenged his colleague to consider the impact of his communication on his audience, Schultze challenges us to examine how we communicate. He concludes, "perhaps the most revolutionary aspect of a Christian view of communication is that Jesus calls us to love God and our neighbor with all our mind, heart, and soul" (165). We therefore use communication to "claim the entire world in the name of Jesus Christ" (165).

*The Beautiful Risk: A New Psychology of Loving and Being Loved*, by James Olthuis. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001. Reviewed by Carl Dragt, Instructor of Social Work, Dordt College.

As someone who has practiced the art of psychotherapy for more than ten years and now has the opportunity to teach and share it with students, I found Olthuis' work to be a timely blessing. While reading *The Beautiful Risk*, I found myself on several occasions exclaiming "Amen," because I have experienced psychotherapy in the way that Olthuis is suggesting it should be experienced. This work was very affirming because Olthuis articulates in this book what I have often felt to be the true nature of constructive counseling and because most of my work fits well in his model of "Spiritual Psychotherapy" (62). In contrast, I also found this book difficult to read at times because it forced me to look at the mistakes I have made. I had to acknowledge to myself that there have been times when I have put myself in the way of God's healing ministry by engaging people as if I were an "expert in healing," one who could fix their personal struggle or problem through the therapeutic skills that I had developed. In reading the book, my impression was that this work speaks most directly to experienced psychotherapists, but I believe it would also be valuable to use as a supplemental resource in the training of counselors of Christian faith. Particularly valuable is Olthuis's understanding that to provide a spiritual psychotherapy of compassion is to do redemptive work in God's creation.

*The Beautiful Risk* challenges the North American psychotherapy establishment, the elite in the field, and all the major contemporary paradigms of psychotherapy established over the last one hundred years. In the first half of the book, Olthuis outlines a model contrasting the "cure model" that is common in the therapies of today. He invites the therapeutic community to revise its approach and take a risk to work alongside people who come for help instead of "treating clients." He writes about a "care model" of therapy that is rooted in compassion (39). Olthuis further explains that he is encouraging professional counselors to "be with" their clients

when providing services (48). He notes that the word "with" is used in the Bible to describe covenantal relationships. Olthuis wants the reader to understand the importance of caring for, honoring, and loving help-seekers rather than controlling and manipulating them.

Olthuis moves on to introduce the main theme of the book, an account of a new model for psychotherapy that he calls "spiritual psychotherapy":

An integrally spiritual psychotherapy begins from the conviction that there is only one reality, a creation that is thoroughly spiritual all the way down. In fact, creation exists only as spiritual – a cosmic process of connections and interconnections that hold together in the love of God. Life is a matter of relationships – trees with stars, animals with flowers, humans with rivers, people with people, all creatures with God. Life from beginning to end, in its breadth and height, its depth and length, is life-with-God (55).

This type of psychotherapy focuses on building and strengthening relationships with people and God rather than developing more self-sufficiency and independence. The therapy process is one of sharing and caring together as therapist and client, not the therapist directing and the client following (59). Consequently, he suggests that we need a more fitting word than *client* or *patient* for those who come for help. Olthuis suggests the word *therapeut* as an alternative because it suggests a two-way caring relationship between therapist and therapist (61). This is a remarkable deviation in perspective from what most counselors are taught about the therapeutic relationship. He is quick to note that he is not suggesting a relationship without boundaries, but rather one that is less prescriptive and authoritative.

I found this discussion refreshing to read because I have always preferred to work collaboratively with people but have often felt that I was not being true to the counseling training I had received that focused on methods and techniques for treating people's symptoms. In his book,