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Beautiful Risk: A New Psychology of Loving and Being Loved (Book Review)

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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,

Olthuis emphasizes that developing a caring, trusting relationship leading to a safe milieu in which therapists can work through past hurts, issues, and traumas is more important and more dynamic than therapeutic methods. He relates that techniques can be used to help guide or move the therapist through recalling areas of their life that they need to revisit or visit for the first time, but the techniques should always be supplementary to maintaining the caring, compassionate, and loving therapeutic relationship.

In the second part of his book, Olthuis discusses five important characteristics of a caring therapeutic relationship and the four stages one would go through in such a process. One characteristic that he emphasizes is welcoming, about which I think many therapists can learn a great deal more. Olthuis highlights the importance of being genuinely warm and inviting when beginning to work with therapists (105). He stresses that doing so can ease people's fears and possibly engender some hope that they might not have to go through their distress alone (107). Paying special attention to welcoming also presents an environment of openness and hospitality to the therapist that may aid in the development of a trusting relationship. Olthuis suggests that a warm welcome can lead to a blessing that calls for God's healing to be a part of the therapy. He further notes that it makes sense that therapists would want to bless those people they work with by lifting them up to God (109). Olthuis writes about the importance of paying attention to the physical environment of the meeting place and the use of open-ended questions in the beginning of therapy to allow the therapist to go where he or she needs to go.

Olthuis also writes about the "good-enough therapist" (117). This is a therapist who takes the risk of not always

being in control of what happens in the relationship, one who is not too pushy but will confront when necessary. Such a therapist is not an expert in all things but listens from the heart and does not criticize. She is real and does not act out a role but genuinely admits faults and challenges. I would suggest that all those who work in professional counseling capacities should check if they meet the requirements to be "good-enough" for those they work with.

I appreciated and was humbled by Olthuis' emphasis on God being the true healer and therapists being facilitators of an environment in which His mercy could be showered on the therapist. As I finished reading the book, I understood why the book's title is so fitting. It is indeed a "beautiful risk" to journey with a fellow human being on an unknown path in which there is hope of healing because God is love and the journey is a response to that love.

I found *The Beautiful Risk* to be a challenging read in that it pushed me to critically re-evaluate how I understand and practice psychotherapy. It also reminded me that God is the healer and that God uses the therapist's gifts to redeem His most precious creatures, his created people. I would recommend this book for both seasoned counseling professionals and those in training. I think it would be especially valuable as a springboard for consultation sessions about the therapeutic relationship. Additionally, some may want to share excerpts with therapists as a way of helping them break through difficult areas by relating to some of the therapists' stories that are detailed in the book. No matter how one utilizes this book, it is sure to challenge and re-form the reader's thinking about the beautiful risk that is the psychotherapy journey.

Karl Barth's Anthropology in Light of Modern Thought, by Daniel J. Price. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002. 322pp. Reviewed by Kevin J. Eames, Assistant Professor of

Psychology and theology have glared at one another across a chasm of suspicion ever since Freud's claim that religion is a manifestation of neurosis. Efforts have been made to bridge the gap, from the earlier pastoral counseling literature that uncritically adapted person-centered counseling methods to the more careful and scholarly works that have appeared in journals like Rosemead's *Journal of Psychology and Theology* or exemplified by the Jones and Butman work *Modern Psychotherapies: A Comprehensive Christian Appraisal* (1991). Daniel J. Price has contributed a unique volume to the corpus of "integration" literature with his book comparing the theological anthropology of Karl Barth with object relations psychology. It is an intriguing parallel that identifies the

human need for relationship as the defining anthropological construct derived from the *imago Dei*.

Price's central goal is to compare Barth's mature theological anthropology with elements of a cluster of neo-Freudian theories generally called object relations psychology. Price asserts that the comparison is important because "both give due attention to the relational matrix of human personhood" (9). Price highlights the importance of this overarching theme by describing the development of Barth's anthropology in its historical and intellectual context. He then describes the development of object relations psychology as both an extension of and a reaction against the reductionistic, mechanistic psychoanalysis of Freud. Price focuses on the theories of the