

**A CRITICAL ESSAY; An evaluation of James H. Olthuis' *The Beautiful Risk: A New Psychology of Loving And Being Loved.* (2001)
Grand Rapids: Zondervan**

By Arnold De Graaff

Introduction

The title of this evaluation is "a critical essay". It is critical because the subject matter deserves our careful consideration. What is at stake is the development of a more integral view of psychology and a more holistic model for the practice of psychotherapy. In view of the many schools of psychotherapy integration is the need of the hour. Olthuis presents an integral model primarily from a spiritual point of view.

In this book Olthuis offers us a "spiritual psychotherapy", or, more accurately, he offers us a *christian* view of therapy. Although his presentation reflects a very positive and respectful spirit, and although his motivation is to achieve a genuine integration, nevertheless his approach "spiritualizes" psychotherapy. In the following sections it will become evident what this means. There is no doubt that Olthuis lives his Christian faith and that he is deeply committed to his faith. And there is no doubt that he approaches his clients with sensitivity, honesty and skill.

1. The blurring of boundaries

In spite of his good intentions, however, he repeatedly interchanges faith categories with psychotherapeutic concepts. This mixing of categories from two very different kinds of human experience leads to a great deal of confusion, and in the end, to the spiritualizing of psychotherapy. Many times, in reading this book, we get the impression that we are reading a book about spiritual counseling. References to God and the christian scriptures appear on numerous pages. He repeatedly blurs the boundaries between faith and feelings, between theology and psychology. (1) Moreover, in order to validate his approach he makes use of a contested interpretation of the Old and New Testament scriptures and makes universal claims that purport to hold for all times and all cultures.

Early in his presentation Olthuis already blends the spiritual and the psychological. As he asserts, "...the psychological way is a spiritual way, and the spiritual is psychological..." (p.53) Again, "...I am advocating a radically spiritual psychotherapy...", and "...psychotherapy and spiritual direction (or pastoral counseling) can indeed be twin ministries of care and compassion." (p.55) To quote once more, "...psychotherapy and spiritual direction are *both* spiritual exercises." (p.56) In fact, "...every human action ought to be therapeutic and ought to be permeated by a caring disposition." (p.50) All specialized therapeutic ministries (legal, financial, social, physical counselors, etc.) "...have their purpose and meaning only as ministries of care." (p.57) In

this way the many different kinds of counseling become spiritualized and their uniqueness blurred.

If he means to say that all counseling ought to be life-enhancing in response to the normativity of life, we can only agree. However, would he say to a non-Christian financial advisor that does her work with great dedication and an awareness of her clients' total life situation, that she is involved in a ministry of care? Or if a group of Humanist lawyers that are involved in developing an alternative, community-based restorative justice system, would he say that they are involved in a ministry of care that is not really much different from Christian pastoral counseling? We don't know.

What we do know is that after distinguishing psychotherapy from faith counseling (a focus on a person's sense of identity and emotional health vs. a person's life of faith), he immediately erases the uniqueness of each kind of counseling by stating: "...*both* the psychotherapist and the spiritual director attend to *both* self-identity and faith." (p.57). He concludes "As you can see, there are no hard and fast boundaries here." (p.57)

2. The spiritual or "ultimate" side of therapy

As a student of religion, faith, worldviews, and the ultimate dimensions of life, it is perhaps not surprising that he has eyes only for the ultimate dimension of all the various aspects and inter-relationships of psychotherapy. In this context "ultimate" means that we are at the boundary of what we can explain sociologically or psychologically, or any other way. For example, a person may re-live a depth of abandonment, loneliness and grief in the course of therapy that can only be expressed through poetry or music or in spiritual images. The loneliness can be so total and unbearable that it feels like the whole universe is filled with emptiness and devoid of any presence. No one, anywhere. Then it feels like all the oceans weep and all the trees cry out: "where are you? why have you abandoned me?" But there is no answer, only a deadly silence. Broken-hearted we give up. This is the place where we search to give meaning to the ultimate questions of life. At this edge we peer into the darkness and try to discern and imagine what meaning this life can have. Is there an ultimate sense to suffering and pain, to shame and guilt, to fear and terror, or even to love and joy? A concept like post-traumatic-stress-disorder (PTSD) does not begin to touch or explain such re-experiencing, not to mention the original traumatic experience.

We can readily agree with Olthuis that the entire process of therapy has its ultimate or depth dimension. However, when the concrete therapeutic situation is reduced to one of its many dimensions, then the result is a spiritualistic approach. Usually reductionism refers to a downward motion, to a "nothing but" approach. Here it is an upward motion. In this process psychotherapy becomes very spiritual and very precious: therapy is "nothing but" a ministry of compassion. In the end, the description of therapy becomes ethereal and unreal. It is hardly a down-to-earth human activity and relationship anymore. At times we no longer know whether we are in church or in the therapist's office. For Olthuis it seems there is very little difference between the two...

3. A new dualism?

His approach means that the details, the intricacy, and the uniqueness of the psychological processes become spiritualized, for they are immediately placed in the light of faith or the ultimate dimension of therapy. They are not described in their own uniqueness, in fact, they are placed in opposition to the faith dimension. The result of this approach is yet another subtle dualistic view of therapy.

Olthuis can only maintain this perspective by throwing all (secular) therapies on the "garbage heap" of modernism. Later, when nobody is looking, he goes "garbage picking", shines up a number of therapies he favors, and baptizes them with a Christian varnish. In his view, modernism as a worldview breathes a spirit of rational control, technical mastery, and individualism. As a result he sees secular psychotherapy as "...modernism's therapeutic arm, the method designed to extend our mastery of the external world into mastery of the internal one." (p.30) All modern psychotherapies share "...a fixation with method and cure." (p.30). Their goal is the self-actualization of the independent, self-sufficient individual. All have a "...treatment-techniques-expertise-cure model." (p.31)

Throughout his book, he places cure over against care, control over against attunement and interaction, treating symptoms over against the healing of the authentic self, personality disorders over against response patterns, clients over against therapists, and so on. In this way every therapeutic concept is translated into general spiritual language. As a result the depth or faith dimension of therapy comes to stand over against all the other structural moments of our psychic life. "Structural" in this context means that there are many aspects to our emotional functioning and not just a spiritual aspect. Sometimes the expressive moment comes to the fore, when we share our feelings. Sometimes it is our entrusting, when we are vulnerably open and taking in. Sometimes it is our awareness, when we sense a difference or that something is happening, and so on. All these fluid moments together make up our psychic functioning which is an integral part of our total way of functioning. We can call them "structural" moments because they are recognizable and abiding in the midst of all the flow of our sensitivity and emotional responsiveness. For Olthuis the spiritual aspect becomes the whole of our psychic functioning.

He can do this because he sees modernism only from the viewpoint of its spiritual dimension. In his view it is the disintegrative spirit of our times, rather than a complex historical phenomenon, perhaps a historical epoch. (2) Post-modernism on the other hand seems to be a little closer to the "Kingdom of God" and is referenced uncritically (see pp. 34-36). Ironically, most post-modernists would reject Olthuis' "foundationalism" and assumptions about "universal truths" with an appeal to the scriptures.

As it is, both modernism and post-modernism no doubt have questionable spiritual sides, but they also offer many valuable insights that need to be honored, retrieved and integrated in any alternative perspective. By setting up a straw man, Olthuis has made it easy for himself. It excuses him from carefully analyzing the special contributions of the different kinds of therapy and to retrieve what they have seen more clearly perhaps than some other forms of therapy. Without doubt every school of psychotherapy has its own presuppositions and (underlying) worldview, including a view of human nature, trauma, healing, growth, integration, and so on. Nor is there any doubt that every aspect of therapy has its ultimate or depth dimension. An analysis of the embeddedness of specific psychotherapies in a particular worldview along with their presuppositions might have helped us to understand better both their contributions and their limitations. Such an analysis would help us to see the richness and complexity of our psychic functioning.

By seeing all other secular therapies as contaminated by the spirit of modernism, Olthuis now faces the problem of how to retrieve those other aspects that he has left on the garbage heap as part of the modernistic therapies. Later on in his book, when he needs to account for some of the other aspects of therapy, he quietly borrows from the discarded therapies. Perhaps he hopes that no one will notice or he is unaware of the turn-about he makes at those points. He borrows freely from body-oriented psychotherapies, from self psychology psychoanalysis, from Rogerian psychotherapy, etc. without explaining how some of those approaches and insights are not contaminated or how they can be retrieved and placed within a different frame of reference. His small vignettes reveal what he has taken over from other kinds of therapy without explaining, for example, why holding up a pillow for someone to kick is good therapy, and particularly, good spiritual psychotherapy.

Ultimately this seems like a "dishonest" practice. Many of the insights of other therapies can be incorporated within another perspective, however one must be careful not to confuse categories and concepts. Each specific concept must be understood in the light of the over-all theory and compared to comparable states of affairs and concepts in other psychotherapeutic theories. Apples must be compared to apples and not to oranges. A "covenanting metaphor", (3) for example, remains a faith category that cannot be transferred as such to psychotherapy. "Covenanting", "being with" and the therapeutic relationship as a "with-ing" or "a-meeting-in-the-middle" cannot all be equated and be placed on the same level. However valuable, understanding something of the ultimate dimensions and presuppositions of a certain kind of therapy does not make for better therapy. In this case, when a philosopher-theologian-ethicist theorizes about psychotherapy, it is therapy that is short changed.

4. The many sides of our emotional life

Of the over 300 different kinds of therapy there are maybe 8 or 10 major groups of therapy, each making use of a particular dimension of life. For example, the "imaginative" therapies like art therapy, music therapy, dance therapy, psychodrama, biblio-therapy, narrative therapy, guided imagery, etc., all make use of our imaginative ability. Imagining, in one form or another is employed to "get in touch" with core feelings in an immediate, spontaneous, creative way. Feeling received and understood in one's self expression starts a healing process of self-acceptance, self-healing, and self-integration. In this way the "imaginative" therapies can be as effective as any other approach. What is true for the "imaginative" therapies is equally true for the other major types of therapy. Even the best of the cognitive-behavioral therapies require a high degree of empathy, inter-relatedness, etc., and they can be equally effective.

These major schools of therapy, each making use of a different dimension of life, could have alerted Olthuis to the fact that there is more to therapy than its ultimate dimension. They illustrate the richness and complexity of our emotional functioning. Our sensory perception, feelings and emotions refer or anticipate every other dimension of our human functioning. To come back to the "imaginative" therapies, the expressiveness and suggestiveness of our emotions anticipate our artful activities. The subtle variations in our facial expressions, based on the underlying muscle and neural connections, allow us to "read" one another's faces on a pre-cognitive level. Our facial flexibility helps us to "suggest" a great variety of feelings and emotions that allows us to communicate with each other. These expressions are learned and specific to our time and culture. (4)

When the famous contemporary portrait painter, Daniel Greene, lays out dozens of slightly different shades of a few main colours in preparation for a painting, he makes use of these finely tuned facial expressions that suggest certain feelings. He does so, not just to reproduce a realistic likeness, but based on the facial expressiveness of his subject, to capture something of the model's personality. His portraits, although very realistic, become an imaginative rendering of the person's character.

To give one more example of the difference between sensitive expressiveness and aesthetic imagination, it is instructive to look at the portraits by Frans Hals (1582-1666) a well-known Dutch painter from the Golden Age. Based on these same subtle differences in facial expression, he is able to capture the personality of his subjects with a few strokes of his brush. Sometimes it even allows him to poke fun at the self-importance of a rich dandy without the person realizing it. He was also able to use the finely-sensed variety of different kinds of "black". By means of dozens of different kinds of "blacks" he imaginatively expressed the extravagance in dress these sober, reserved, Calvinist merchants and officials allowed themselves, with expensive lace and brocade and all.

These distinctions are not just interesting theoretical matters, but they are of great importance in psychotherapy. It allows younger children, for example, to

tell their story by choosing a sequence of cards with different facial expressions. It helps them to name and communicate their feelings. Likewise, people with mild autism or with Asperger tendencies often cannot "read" facial expressions and gestures. They can be helped to "mimic" the therapist and thus slowly learn what is appropriate in social interactions and find their place in society. These examples could be multiplied by many others.

We have just highlighted one of the structural moments (the imaginative) of our psychic functioning, that is, as much as we understand of it at this point in our history and culture. There are many other moments that anticipate and refer to our other ways of functioning, like our formative activities, our cognitive distinguishing, our communicating, our social interactions, our intimate relations, as well as our ultimate trusting. It is this rich variety of moments that make up our psychic life. Olthuis tends to focus primarily on the ultimate moments and identifies those moments with ultimate religious trust. Psychic openness and entrusting is of a very different order than ultimate trust. One can have a strong faith and yet be guarded and held back in relating to others. Vice versa, one can be very open and trusting and yet be at a loss spiritually or with regard to one's values. (5)

5. Consequences

When Olthuis makes becoming our "authentic self" the goal of therapy, and sees our "adapted self" or our "false self" as the result of sin, therapy is once more spiritualized. Maybe in an ultimate sense the "adapted self" can be seen as the result of sin (the result of an ultimate fear and lack of trust), although even then one can raise serious questions. Don't different situations require at times that one be "reserved" and less "open" for the sake of caring about the other person? Being authentic requires different qualifications. Social authenticity is of a different nature than spiritual authenticity or the openness of an intimate relation, etc. Being socially authentic means that one is trustworthy and has integrity in that particular social situation. Likewise when it comes to integrity at the work place or in business dealings; each situation requires its own kind of openness..

Becoming our "authentic self" can at best be only one goal of therapy if it directly serves becoming more sensitive to our life situations. In general, it is more important that clients be helped to let their feelings and emotions give vibrancy, intensity and motivation to all their actions and inter-relations, so that they can be moved in the face of injustice, or poverty, etc., or more deeply committed to their partner, etc. Can our feelings and emotions become the vibrant undercurrent of all that we do, that is the key issue. Can we become free enough, in spite of (childhood) trauma and degrees of authenticity, to be more sensitive and caring and responsive to life. In view of that, being our "authentic self" can easily become another perfectionistic and moralistic goal, especially if that is so strongly contrasted to our "adapted self" or "false self". When all these things are drawn into the ultimate dimension or when the boundaries are blurred, these issues become confused and distorted.

By reducing all the key concepts to their depth dimension, he is in danger of seeing all trauma, defenses, adaptations, ways of surviving abuse, etc. as the direct result of sin and brokenness. Consequently they need a basic turn-about and healing. The emphasis on becoming one's authentic self makes this even more urgent. If one cannot achieve this great goal, then a sense of failure and judgment is not far away. Here we are not far from "faith healing". Do people who cannot quite let go of their defenses lack faith? If we are not able to be our authentic self are we then living lives of delusion and inauthenticity? Of course this is the last thing Olthuis would want to imply, but that is the implication of seeing everything in terms of faith. (p.226) This is what happens when the various psychological accounts cannot be considered in their own right and are immediately reduced to their ultimate dimension. In this same context he talks much too optimistically and unrealistically about the possibilities of healing. There is no indication of the deep imprinted nature and degree of trauma that leaves life-long scars. At best such people learn to live with the remaining pain. One can only admire their courage to respond, in the best way they can, and in spite of their painful scars, to the call of life and love

In a general practice most therapists need a variety of approaches and methods. One model does not serve everyone. Our "toolbox" needs many approaches to help different people with different kinds of problems. Art therapy does not work for everybody, no matter how skillful the therapist, nor do body orientated therapies or talk therapies, or particular christian therapies. So, why "baptize" some approaches and not others? Historically, christians have appropriated one school of therapy after the other, from Transactional Analysis (I'm OK, you're OK), Gestalt therapy, Rogerian therapy, Jungian therapy, Self Psychology psychoanalysis, Reality therapy, to Existential therapy, and so on (see the issues of the Reformed Journal of the last fifty years, or the journals of Practical Theology, etc). With so many schools of therapy and so many different emphases, retrieval of valuable insights and integration in a broader perspective is the need of the hour.

6. Needed: an ecumenical approach

What would have been helpful if Olthuis had tried to bring to bear a more integral philosophical anthropology on the many detailed aspects and processes of therapy and engaged in a comparative study. Such a challenge would require the efforts of many people from many different schools of therapy and from many different faiths and visions of life. He might have made his contribution to such a joint effort. Such a contribution would involve a detailed comparative study of the helpful insights imbedded within the many theories of psychotherapy.

To give some small examples, how does the understanding of the so-called schizoid personality disorder of self psychology differ from that of bio-energetic psychotherapy, Jungian psychotherapy, cognitive-behavioral therapy and the DSM-IV, to mention just these few. Or, to give another example, what specific role does analysis, understanding, interpretation, and recognition of self-injury and self-fragmentation play in self psychology as compared to other types of therapy. Or how does Rogers' understanding of

empathy differ from that of self psychology or cognitive-behavioral therapy, and so on. And how do all these accounts reflect the “social construction” of our society? To what extent do they serve the current (neo-liberal) power structures? In what way do all the forms of therapy need to be incorporated in radical, alternative therapy to make a fundamental difference? These examples could be multiplied by the dozen, especially since most schools of therapy have developed separately and to a large extent work independently.

What could a more integral philosophical anthropology informed by the christian faith contribute to such discussions? Theoreticians with such an integral perspective, and in dialogue with practitioners, no doubt could make a very valuable contribution. They could do so all the more if they are mindful of the "authoritarianism" and "absoluteness" of previous generations. There is a great need today for a more "ecumenical" approach to theorizing and research within the psychotherapy community. What would be helpful is the establishment of a study or work group made up of interested practitioners and theoreticians from different backgrounds and views of life.

Olthuis offers us the outlines of a christian spiritual psychotherapy. Is it good psychotherapy? We don't know, because he uses mostly faith categories to describe his therapy and does not enter into the very fabric and details of the therapeutic process. It may seem he does, but he does so primarily in spiritual terms. Nowhere does he carefully analyze and compare the psychological concepts he makes use of. Even the "formative" activity of the therapist and the "self-forming" of the client is described in spiritual terms and contrasted to the technical control of modernism.

To describe the process of therapy is a precarious business at any time. Therapy is a complex, existential human activity and interaction which is difficult to convey in words and to catch in concepts. Most theories, therefore, limit themselves to describing a number of basic concepts, or they present case studies. Olthuis' description reflects the extent and limits of his particular therapy, dealing primarily with a specific group of urban clients in a large urban setting. His comments about other therapies reveal the limits of the tools he uses.

For example, his reference to brief therapy (p.173) reveals that generally he does not have a great need for such an approach. If so, he would have carefully considered the many kinds of brief therapy and noted that some of them work with one issue of the presenting problem in depth. Such an approach is extremely helpful when clients are not used to therapy, which is often the case in other settings, or when they cannot afford therapy for any length of time. Likewise, it is significant that he does not mention couple therapy which requires its own unique approach and does not easily fit in his account of the therapeutic process. Likewise, his references to cognitive-behavioral therapy speak volumes. (p.32;60) He presents such a prejudiced view of this form of therapy as an expression of the spirit of modernism, that he is unable to imagine that someone could work in depth with something like the Mind over Mood Workbook and touch the very core of their trauma.

We could multiply these examples. Primarily they show the limits of his approach. Again, approaches that he has no need of, he leaves on the garbage heap of modernism together with the pearls of insight and experience that can be found in them..

7. The appeal to faith and scripture

By reducing the therapeutic process to a journey of faith, he can easily be seen as "imperialistic", especially with his appeal to the Bible. It creates the impression that in doing therapy christians have an advantage over non-christians. When describing "being with" a client with empathy and genuine understanding, Olthuis calls it a "with-ing" (his own word) and defines it as "...a healing dance in the wild spaces of love..." (p.130). Earlier he described it as "...a normative calling, relating appropriately in love..." (p.63). For him "being with", is a spirituality of compassion and a participation in God's ministry, "...trying to choreograph dances that become conduits of God's love." (p.63) Elsewhere he states that christian therapists do more than join a suffering client, they give expression to God's anguish at pain and personify a word of God for hope and healing (p.199). As therapists, meeting in the middle, "...we give ourselves over and are given over – even abandoned – to God's love." (p.226) In doing so, we are sojourning with God in the wild spaces of love.

Does all that hold for non-christian therapists as well, and if so, is it that they just don't know it? Or aren't they able truly to be with the other person? Either way, many would consider this an "imperialistic" christian stance and, at times, quite offensive. What is my secular, humanist, non-christian colleague to think of statements like, "...I believe that love and the God of love are bigger than any tradition." (p13). Somehow people of other faiths – never mind those who don't belong to any faith - are assumed under the umbrella of the christian God, whether they like it or not. "Healing, when it comes, is a gracious gift – a miracle of God's love." (p.230); whether my colleague knows it or not. Christian therapists have no corner on the truth and their christian faith does not give them an advantage in being an agent of healing, in fact, the opposite may be the case at times. Countless non-christian therapists follow some of the same basic principles of empathy, inter-relation and authenticity as Olthuis. How would he account for this?

Finally, in Olthuis' christian psychotherapy the bible functions as a kind of "textbook" for psychotherapy. Passages are quoted as general, universal truths without regard for their specific context or their larger historical, cultural and social setting or their particular literary genre. In pages 43 to 49 he presents the biblical basis for his christian psychotherapy, with "proof texts" . Beginning with Genesis 1 (God's compassion) and ending with 1 John 4:8 (God is love), and with many other references (1 Corinthians, Exodus 34, Luke 6, Matthew 25, Romans 8, Colossians 1), he seeks to validate his (universal) christian worldview and vision of therapy. This tendency is also true for Olthuis' other articles and books. (6) Instead of a book of faith, the

scriptures start to function as a textbook for philosophical anthropology, the philosophy of religion and world views, philosophical theology, and now for a spiritual psychotherapy. In the end such an (ab)use of scripture is not very different from the older "proof text" method to prove the validity of certain christian doctrines. Isolated texts are quoted and treated as universal statements and truths.

The New Testament besides many passages about love and compassion also contain many anti-Jewish texts that historically became (and are?) the roots of anti-Semitism with its racist ideology. This hatred against Jews came to an unspeakable climax at Auschwitz and many other extermination camps and places of execution. In John 8: 44 we read: "You (Jews) are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning..." There are many other texts that convey similar messages: "...you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they (the churches in Judea) did from the Jews, who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out, and displease God and oppose all men ... to fill up the measure of their sins. But God's wrath has come upon them at last! " (1 Thessalonians 2: 14-16). Or consider: "But their minds were hardened; for to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil (of Moses) remains unlifted...whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their minds..." (2 Corinthians 3: 14,15). These kinds of texts have their own specific historical context, but nevertheless they played their role and had their effect historically. Then those final words that have played such a terrible role in the history of christianity: "And all the people answered, His blood be on us and on our children! " (Matthew 27: 25) The Jews have murdered Jesus and therefore they have suffered persecutions, humiliations, banishments, torture, deprivations, murder, and pogroms throughout the centuries. God's punishment, often executed by christians. After all this, how could I recommend this kind of book to my Jewish clients? Theology after Auschwitz, including quoting from the christian scriptures, requires a very different approach.

Given his faith perspective, Olthuis has to present a complete "theodicy" , that is an account of God's presence and working in the world, and, very directly and personally, in the lives of individual people. Throughout, he speaks confidently about God coming near; God being present in our suffering; God's process of love happening in the world; all of us participating in the on-going suffering and compassion of God; love being first and not evil; evil will be overcome; God's love is the oxygen that sustains the universe of creation; and so on. (see pp.43,62,69,74,157,199,226,236;etc.) Was God present and suffering at Auschwitz too when Elie Wiesel heard someone say: "Where is God now? Here he is – He is hanging here on this gallows...." All the prisoners had to walk by and look at a young boy dying an agonizing, slow death when he was hanged because he was too light to die quickly. (7)

Starting with a certain view of scripture, there is no way out of this difficulty of accounting for God's presence in the world in the face of evil and disaster. A popular way out today is to focus on God's weakness and his suffering. Olthuis has made a clear choice with regard to these questions. At the same

time these questions are intensely debated these days. It is always amazing to see how much theologians seem to know about God, for example, when we see how the doctrine of the trinity is again being discussed today. (8)

8. Conclusion

It is an illusion to think that we can develop a distinctly christian psychotherapy. All we can hope for and be challenged to is to contribute with many others to more integral forms of therapy that are life-enhancing. Christians have no corner on the truth in this regard. What we can do is listen faithfully, along with many others, to the "evocativeness of life" or the "societal principles that hold us and call us" (Zuidervaat) and try to hear and recognize some of those "principles" that make for good therapy for our times and in our particular cultural setting.

For a while, perhaps for a long time, we might not be able to discern clearly the expressions of faith in the christian scriptures and the confessions of faith of later generations, since they have been covered over by many centuries of doctrinal, historical and culturally conditioned interpretations. None of this even begins to take into account the claims and contributions to these issues of other faiths and the appeal they make to their holy writings. Compare, for example, the Buddhist influenced emphasis on compassion, lovingkindness and mindfulness. (9)

Meanwhile the contributions of christians to the development of good therapy is only at its beginning, primarily because of dualistic tendencies (faith over against therapy), the spiritualizing of psychotherapy and making universal claims that hold for all times and all cultures. Whenever this is the case, or to the extent this is true, christians have been more of an offense than a help. Unfortunately, because of his approach, Olthuis has not been able to push this process of contributing and integrating forward.

Given the above, I certainly could not recommend this book, especially not to people that have been alienated from the church or to non-christians who are the majority today. The book can best be seen as standing in the tradition of spiritual counseling with its many varied representatives from Tournier, to transpersonal counseling, and various forms of christian counseling. My interest in Olthuis' book was to see how he would account for the depth or ultimate dimension of all of our experiences. If life is more than meets the (reductionistic) eye, then how do we account for this openness of every experience to something larger or deeper, to the sacredness or spirituality of life? How is it that at the boundaries of our existence we search the universe for answers to the ultimate questions of life. Regrettably Olthuis has not helped us in this search, or would it be more accurate to say that he had his answer from the start, from his view of the scriptures and from his philosophical frame of reference?

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(1) Compare his earlier paper where the distinction between theology and psychology is clearer: "Straddling the Boundaries Between Theology and Psychology; The Faith/Feeling Interface", (1983) Toronto, ICS

(2) See F.R. Ankersmit, "Postmodernisme en Geschiedbeoefening", and H.W von der Dunk, Bestaat er een 'postmodernistische' geschiedbeoefening? ; commentaar op F.R. Ankersmit." In Akademische Beschouwingen Over Het Postmodernisme, (1993), Amsterdam, Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen.

(3) Olthuis, J.H. (1989) "The covenanting metaphor of the Christian faith and the self psychology of Heinz Kohut". Studies in Religion 18, 313-324.) and Olthuis, J.H. (2006) "With-ing: a psychotherapy of love". Journal of Psychology and Theology, Spring (March 22)

(4) See among many others, Carroll E. Izard, (1977) Human Emotions, New York, Plenum Press.

(5) I made use of this distinction long ago in a chapel talk to reassure troubled students. "Don't Worry", in Arnold De Graaff, (1977) Views of Man and Psychology in Christian Perspective; Some Readings, Toronto, ICS.

(6) See my forthcoming article on "Religious Faith And Visions Of Life; A Critical Retrieval Of Kuitert's Anthropological Foundation of Faith And Theology."

(7) Elie Wiesel, Night, (1960/1982) New York: Bantam

(8) See James K. A. Smith and James H. Olthuis, eds. (2005) Radical Orthodoxy and the Reformed Tradition, Grand Rapids, Mich., Baker Academic. And Willem Maarten Dekker, (2008) De relationaliteit van God. Zoetermeer, Netherlands, Boekencentrum. M. Wisse, "De uniciteit van God en de relationaliteit van de mens" (2006) NTT.60/4, 310-328. Henry Jansen, Relationality and the Concept of God (1995) Amsterdam: Rodopi.;and many others.

(9) Paul Gilbert, ed. Compassion: Conceptualizations, Research and Use in Psychotherapy, (2005) London: Routledge , Paul Gilbert, The Compassionate Mind, (2009)