

**I'M NOT OK -- YOU'RE NOT OK
BUT THAT'S OK...JESUS CHRIST IS MORE THAN OK!
Romans 3:9-18**

Written by psychiatrist Thomas Harris, *I'm OK--You're OK* is a book whose title remains widely known. Although not as popular as in earlier years, this book has many psychological ideas that are alive and well among both secular and "Christian" psychologists.

The author seems to hold out a glimmer of hope when he acknowledges the wide dissatisfaction with modern psychiatry:

"In recent years, there have been many reports of a growing impatience with psychiatry, with its seeming foreverness, its high cost, its debatable results, and its vague, esoteric terms. To many people it is like a blind man in a dark room looking for a black cat that isn't there." (13)

There is also apparent promise in this writer's initial emphasis on personal responsibility, contrasting with the ever popular "victimization" psychology of our culture (and church):

"It is realistic in that it confronts the patient with the fact that he is responsible for what happens in the future no matter what has happened in the past. Moreover, it is enabling persons to change, to establish self-control and self-direction, and to discover the reality of a freedom of choice." (14)

This approach is one that supposedly "works at its best in groups" and allows counselors to treat "four times as many patients as before" (17). Group treatment is claimed to reduce both the cost and the time required to complete therapy, so that most people can afford it (237-238). It "has given patients a tool they can use" (17). It is used in *pastoral* counseling (17). This use affirms the *religious* nature of counseling; later we will see that Harris has much to say about religion. Among those thanked for their contributions to the book are a Presbyterian pastor as well as a minister of the First Unitarian Society of Sacramento (18).

Harris seeks to divide the inner man into three essential components--the Child, the Parent, and the Adult. It is the third aspect, the Adult, that this author applauds and wishes to strengthen in counseling. The Parent is discarded as dangerous to

one's mental health. This method is thus fundamentally *rebellious* at its root, rejecting any ultimate authority beyond man. Despite occasional quotations of Scripture, and acknowledgment that *values* cannot be separated from counseling, this author rejects the God of the Bible who consistently reveals Himself as *Father*. We must examine his presuppositions, his analysis of man, as well as the methods and goals of his counseling approach. When we do, we will see that it falls far short of honoring God and His Word.

Sin and the Nature of Man

Psychologists are unable to escape the reality of sin, despite their uniform rejection of God, who alone *defines* sin in His Word. This author is no different:

"Throughout history one impression of human nature has been consistent: that man has a multiple nature." (21)

This nature, Harris notes, has been seen in terms of a conflict between good and evil, between the lower and higher natures within man, or between the inner man and the outer man (21). He steps into obviously *religious* territory when he begins to cite both biblical and secular individuals:

"Moses saw goodness supremely as justice, Plato essentially as wisdom, and Jesus centrally as love; yet they all agreed that virtue, however understood, was consistently undermined by something in human nature which was at war with something else." (21)

Early in the book, we can see that Harris fails to understand the character of God, who is supremely just and righteous, yet loving and merciful without any compromise of His justice (Romans 3:26; 1 John 4:8). Moses and Jesus are by no means opposed as they appear in this quotation; love is not absent from the writings of Moses in the first five books of the Bible, and Jesus affirmed God's law as presented in the Old Testament scriptures.

Free will? The dreary determinism of Freud gives reason to pause and ask about the ability of man to change the course of his life:

"The pure determinist holds that man's behavior is not free and is only a product of his past. The inevitable conclusion

is that man is not responsible for what he does; that, in fact, he does not have a free will." (86)

Looking to evolutionary theory rather than Scripture, Harris wants us to believe that man *can* change:

"The evidence of evolution--and of personal experience--convincing us that man has become more than his antecedents." (86)

Harris will tell us much about how the past supposedly holds man in bondage, but he wants to look at other causes for man's behavior:

"The answer lies not in refuting the cause-and-effect nature of the universe or of man's behavior but in looking elsewhere than in the past for cause." (87)

The author suggests that in addition to the past, "man's ability to contemplate the future" contributes to his behavior (88). This observation, however, fails to say much about man's unaided *ability* to change. God is left completely out of the picture in this system, where man is the sole judge of truth as well as the sole agent for change.

The inner man. Harris divides the inner man into three distinct components. He believes that these three states--parent, adult, and child--exist in all people (39). These are not "roles" but rather "psychological realities" (40). One state or the other is produced by playing back the recorded data of past life events (40). This analysis of the inner man sets the stage for this author's solution, a method which analyzes the "transactions" between persons in terms of his three main characters. As we look at the three major characters and their interactions, as well as four "life positions" proposed in the book, we will see how Harris redefines sin and sanctification.

Transactional Analysis: The Characters

Eric Berne, author of *Games People Play*, defines a basic "unit of social intercourse" as a "transaction" involving two or more people. Transactional Analysis analyzes these encounters, including the "transactional stimulus" and the "transactional response" (33). This method seeks to determine whether it is the

child, the parent, or the adult who is speaking in any given "transaction" between two people. In order to critique it, we must first examine the definitions attached to each of the three inner characters.

Parent. Here is the least favorite of Harris. The "parent" within is defined by presupposing that the human brain accurately records and later replays the events of the past. Citing research by others, Harris believes that the brain records experiences much like a high-fidelity tape recorder, along with the associated feelings, so as to be able to replay them as vividly as the original experience (32). Many currently popular concepts, including "inner healing" and "repressed memories," are based on similar assumptions, even though more recent research has exposed the flaws in such an approach; human memory is fallible and subject to much change.

Harris defines the parent with an emphasis on *recorded information* from the past:

"The Parent is a huge collection of *recordings* in the brain of unquestioned or imposed external events perceived by a person in his early years, a period which we have designated roughly as the first five years of life." (40, emphasis added)

A dash of Freud is thrown in when the author speaks of *internalizing* one's actual parents:

"The mother and father become internalized in the Parent, as recordings of what the child observed them say and do." (41)

This "internalized parent" consists primarily of a set of rules and regulations from early childhood:

"In the Parent are recorded all the admonitions and rules and laws that the child heard from his parents and saw in their living." (42)

According to Harris, all of this legal data is permanently engraved in the inner man:

"The significant point is that whether these rules are good or bad in the light of a reasonable ethic, they are recorded

as *truth* from the source of all security.... It is a permanent recording. A person cannot erase it. It is available for replay throughout life." (43)

The child, he claims, is unable to critique this "truth" in any meaningful manner:

"The situation of the little child, his dependency, and his inability to construct meanings with words made it impossible for him to modify, correct, or explain." (42)

According to Harris, there are huge implications for the later years of one's life:

"The effect in later life may be ambivalence, discord, and despair--for the person, that is, who is not free to examine the Parent.... A person whose early instructions were accompanied by stern intensity may find it more difficult to examine the old ways and may hang onto them long after they were useful, having developed a compulsion to do it 'this way and no other.'" (44)

As we will see later, the "hope" that Harris offers is based on the "adult" within, rather than any reliance on God, *who reveals Himself as a loving Father*, and His Word, which requires our obedience. There is a rebellion evident in this method, because man looks only to himself for answers. The description of the "parent" is one that looks negatively upon external rules. There is a dim reflection of truth, in that each individual needs to know and understand God's Word, rather than to merely receive it *without understanding* from others. At the same time, God has given parents the responsibility to instruct their children carefully in His Word (Deuteronomy 6:4-9), and He has solemnly instructed believers to preserve and pass on the sound doctrines of our faith (2 Timothy 2:2).

Child. In contrast to many modern theorists, Harris is not a champion of the "wounded" inner child, although he does see creativity and curiosity as positive aspects of the "child" state (49). Nevertheless, he contributes to the existence of the widespread inner child *concept* that exists today.

While the external actions of parents are being recorded, so are *internal* events simultaneously recorded (47). Again, this

supposedly occurs from birth to age five (47). Later, the person can reproduce what he saw, heard, felt, and understood (47). The "child" is primarily *feelings* (48):

"The predominant by-product of the frustrating, civilizing process is negative feelings. On the basis of these feelings the little person early concludes, 'I'm not OK.'" (48)

The author explains that "when a person is in the grip of feelings, we say his Child has taken over" (49). Today's "inner healing" therapies, as well as the popular "inner child" concept, perpetuate this focus-on-feelings orientation.

Furthermore, the author sees this "not OK" self-estimate as characteristic of every child:

"This permanent recording is the residue of having been a child. Any child. Even the child of kind, loving, well-meaning parents. It is the *situation of childhood* and *not* the intention of the parents which produces the problem." (48)

This makes *everyone* a victim, not merely those who were actually abused. Thus Harris and his theories contribute heavily to the victimization culture that is blossoming some thirty years after the initial publication of his book. He is perhaps even more emphatic about abusive childhood influences than some of the more recent voices:

"When the children of 'good' parents carry the NOT OK burden, one can begin to appreciate the load carried by children whose parents are guilty of gross neglect, abuse, and cruelty." (49)

There is certainly no intent here to ignore or minimize the tragedy of child abuse. It is a grievous *sin* against both children *and* God. However, the hope Harris offers is not a biblically based hope, and he fails to lead those who suffer out of the pit of despair. He asks a good question:

"If, then, we emerge from childhood with a set of experiences which are recorded in an inerasable Parent and Child, what is our hope for change?" (50)

The answers offered, however, arise solely from within man. There is no redemption from sin, no reconciliation with God, no growth in the image of Christ. All Harris can hold out is the "adult" within to combat the errors of the "parent" and "child." Thus it is a system where *self* is savior, and that can only lead to disaster.

Adult. Harris explains his theory that "...in each decision there are three sets of data that must be processed," namely Child, Parent, and Adult (79). The "adult" data is the present external reality coupled with accumulated past data of the "parent" and "child" (79). The agent for change in counseling is this inner "adult" because:

"Only the Adult can look objectively at *all* the data and proceed to look for more." (81)

This "adult," Harris claims, begins to develop even during the first year of life. At about 10 months of age, the child "is able to do something which grows from his own awareness and original thought. This self-actualization is the beginning of the Adult" (51). The "adult" state is based on a "thought concept" rather than a "taught concept" of life (51). The "adult" processes information based on past experience, in contrast to the "parent," who is "judgment in an imitative way" based on standards borrowed from others (52). The "adult" can evaluate the "parent" data to determine whether it is true and applicable, as well as the feelings of the "child" to see whether they are appropriate (53). Earlier "recordings" are not erased, but may be "turned off," according to the author (54). Note here how man remains the ultimate judge of truth. Self judges self, and there is apparently no room for external authority, including God Himself.

"Probability estimating" is another "adult" function (55). The author claims that "unexamined probabilities can underlie many of our transactional failures" (56). Furthermore, the adult can be disabled and fail to serve its function:

"Under sufficient stress, however, the Adult can be impaired to the point where emotions take over inappropriately. The boundaries between Parent, Adult, and Child are fragile, sometimes indistinct, and vulnerable to those incoming signals which tend to recreate situations we experienced in the helpless, dependent days of childhood." (56)

It seems that the agent for change, the "adult," is hardly reliable, unless, of course, one secures the assistance of a therapist in order that his "adult" may take charge of his life.

What is the Problem? What is Sin?

Harris has no clue as to the nature of sin (transgression against a holy God), but he offers his own explanation of problems that occur in the adult years of life:

"Unrealistic, irrational, non-Adult responses are seen in a condition referred to as traumatic neurosis. The danger, or 'bad news' signal, hits the Parent and the Child at the same time it hits the Adult. The Child responds in the way it originally did, with a feeling of NOT OK. This may produce all kinds of regressive phenomena." (56)

Similarly, prideful attitudes toward others are "explained" away in terms of external factors rather than man's sinful heart:

"This is how prejudice is transmitted. *For a little child, it may be safer to believe a lie than to believe his own eyes and ears.*" (59)

Note how neatly this "explanation" coincides with much popular psychology today. Man's sin is explained as caused by external events, and the basic problem is viewed in terms of seeing *self* as "not OK." Scripture, on the contrary, urges us to acknowledge and confess our sin, to see ourselves as "not OK," that we might be cleansed and forgiven (1 John 1:9; Psalm 51).

In his chapter entitled, "How We Differ," Harris summarizes his basic view of sin--not by the actual use of that word, but in his own terminology. He begins with the presupposition that everyone has a Child, Parent, and Adult, but we differ in terms of content and functioning (123). The "adult" is supposedly "contaminated" by "dated, unexamined Parent data which is externalized as true" (124). This, according to Harris, is how prejudice develops (124). His solution is not to examine the sin in one's own heart, but rather to dare to challenge one's parents:

"The only ways to eliminate prejudice are to uncover the fact that it is no longer dangerous to disagree with one's parents

and to update the Parent with data from today's reality."
(125)

The "adult" may also be "contaminated" by the "child," through fear, delusions, and hallucinations (125). There may also be a "blocking out" of either "child" or "parent," another form of "contamination" that Harris calls "exclusion" (126-127). The "blocked out" Parent can result in a person without a conscience (128). According to Harris, this occurs in those whose real parents were brutally abusive (128):

"His behavior is dominated by his Child, which, through the contaminated Adult, manipulates other people to his own ends." (129)

The only consequences this person considers have to do with getting caught, rather than the welfare of others (129). But Harris wants to explain this lack of concern for others in terms of failure to receive love earlier in life:

"Although there may be exceptions, the general rule is that we do not learn to be loving if we have never been loved. If the first five years of life consist totally of a critical struggle for physical and psychological survival, this struggle is likely to persist throughout life." (129)

Scripture says that we love because *God* first loved us (1 John 4:19), not because of what did or did not happen during the first five years of life.

The absence of shame, remorse, embarrassment, and guilt feelings is supposedly an indication that the Parent has been blocked out (129):

"The treatment of such a person is difficult. One cannot evoke a Parent where one does not exist." (130)

Biblically, this is an indication that *God and His truth* have been "blocked out" *in unrighteousness* (Romans 1:18).

The only hope this author sees is to develop a very strong Adult capable of gaining the approval of others (130). However, where the Adult is "decommissioned" and not functioning, the person is out of touch with reality, and there is a confused

mixture of Parent and Child data from the past (130). This is how Harris explains "psychosis." He goes on to explain the "manic-depressive personality" as a periodic blocking out of Parent, Child, or Adult (133). During the "manic" phase, the Parent's restrictive influence is absent, but in the "depressive" stage the Parent returns with stored-up criticisms (134). Harris explains both the "omnipotence of the manic phase and the unworthiness of the depressive phase" as "*feelings* which are recorded in the Child...responses to archaic recordings in the Parent" (135). The solution, according to this author, is to examine the "original transaction" (135). Usually, he claims, the "manic-depressive" has a strong Parent with conflicting commands and permissions recorded from early life (135). There may also be alcohol and drug abuse, or "religiosity (excessive, excluding, mystical religious preoccupation)" (136). Because of the confusion, "the child may give up on an intellectual elaboration of the structure of causality (it doesn't make sense anyway I look at it) and may instead come to regard what happens to him as a matter of *time* instead of the relationships of objects and events" (135).

It appears that whatever the problem, Harris can squeeze the facts to fit his theory. In speaking later of diagnosis, he rejects much traditional diagnostic language, preferring to use the language of his system (231-233). For example, he may speak of a "parent-dominated person with a blocked-out Child" (232). But even more revealing is the manner in which he claims to explain, to even say something *new*, about the problem of sin and evil:

"I believe it is possible from the data at hand to say something new about the problem of evil. Sin, or badness, or evil, or 'human nature,' whatever we call the flaw in our species, is apparent in every person.... I believe the universal problem is that by nature every small infant, regardless of what culture he is born into, because of his situation (clearly *the* human situation), decides on the position I'M NOT OK--YOU'RE NOT OK, or one of the other two variations on the theme: I'M NOT OK--YOU'RE OK, or I'M NOT OK--YOU'RE NOT OK. This first retaliatory effort demonstrates his 'intrinsic badness'--or original sin--from which he is told he must repent. The harder he fights, the greater his sin, the more skillful become his games, the more ulterior becomes his life, until he does, in fact, feel the

great estrangement, or separateness, which Paul Tillich defines as sin." (259)

He is right about one thing: sin is *universal*. But he is seriously off the biblical track in his claim that sin is rooted in a decision to take the position that "I'M NOT OK." "Sin" in this system is the acknowledgment of one's sinful nature! In the Bible, this is called *confession*. But Harris has redefined this biblical term as well. Referring to Paul Tillich, a modern theologian who views God as merely the "ground of all being," he says that "sin" is a *state* (described in terms of being "OK" or "NOT "OK") before it becomes an *act* (262). Thus "it is the *position* [as opposed to a series of *actions*] which we must 'confess,' or acknowledge, or comprehend" (262). This "confession," Harris claims, must be accomplished by the Adult (rather than the Child), who "can make a critical assessment of where change is possible and then follow through. *Confession without change is a game.*" (262)

Scripture defines sin as the transgression of God's law, noting also that the sin of the first man, Adam, brought sin and death to all mankind. Harris has no answer for this predicament, so he must redefine "sin" in order to give "hope." The Bible, however, tells us the truth about both sin and redemption, offering the one true hope: Jesus Christ, whose righteousness is imputed to believers so that they are "OK," to use Harris' term--actually holy and blameless, to use the language of Ephesians 1. Man is separated from God by sin, but reconciled to God by the blood of Christ. Confession is not accomplished by some fractional aspect of the inner man, but the whole person. Confession is not done in a vacuum, but *before a holy God* (Psalm 51) who offers hope, forgiveness, and reconciliation. Harris drifts far from biblical truth and hope, although he cannot escape the stark reality of sin.

Transactional Analysis: The Positions

Four different possible "life positions" are proposed by Harris (66):

1. I'm not OK -- you're OK.
2. I'm not OK -- you're not OK.
3. I'm OK -- you're not OK.
4. I'm OK -- you're OK.

The author insists that every child assumes the I'M NOT OK--YOU'RE OK position, regardless of how "happy" his childhood may be (60). This position is claimed to exercise great power over the child's future actions, at least until he understands and determines to change it:

"This position, I'M NOT OK--YOU'RE OK, is the most deterministic decision of his life. It is permanently recorded and will influence everything he does. Because it is a decision it can be changed by a new decision. But not until it is understood." (60)

After tentatively choosing the first position during the initial year of life, the author believes that by the end of the second year, either the child confirms this position or moves into the second or third (66). But again, the particular chosen position supposedly directs the child's life:

"Once finalized, the child stays in his chosen position and it governs everything he does." (67)

Harris advocates assuming the fourth position--thus the title of his book. Meanwhile, the dangers of the other three positions are explained.

I'M NOT OK--YOU'RE OK. It can hardly be overemphasized that Harris views this position as the *universal*, automatically assumed position of every child:

"This is the universal position of early childhood, being the infant's logical conclusion from the situation of birth and infancy." (67)

Harris acknowledges some differences with Freud, along with an admiration for Adler, when he proposes this position of *inferiority* as man's fundamental problem:

"Adler's break with Freud was over this point: sex was not at the basis of man's struggle in life, but rather feelings of inferiority, or NOT OK, which were apparent universally." (67)

Harris sees two potential resolutions. One is despair, leading ultimately to suicide, the other is to constantly seek the approval of others, particularly those with a "big Parent" who can supply needed "strokes" (69). The hope he offers is to understand and analyze the transactions of this inferior "inner child":

"I believe that acknowledging the NOT OK Child in each of us is the only sympathetic, thus curative, way games can be analyzed." (67)

I'M NOT OK -- YOU'RE NOT OK. This position is perhaps the most hopeless, according to the way Harris presents it:

"Life, which in the first year had some comforts, now has none. The stroking has disappeared. If this state of abandonment and difficulty continues without relief through the second year of life, the child concludes I'M NOT OK--YOU'RE NOT OK. In this position the Adult stops developing since one of its primary functions--getting strokes--is thwarted in that there is no source of stroking. A person in this position gives up. There is no hope." (70)

Determinism is again evident when the author explains that "...once a position is decided, all experience is selectively interpreted to support it" (70).

To someone who does not know Christ, who does not understand the gospel and its implications, this position would naturally be the most hopeless. *But for the believer, it is the most hopeful.* In our natural, unregenerate state, we are "not OK." Not one is righteous--not even one (Romans 3:10-18). No one seeks God. No one fulfills the law of God so as to deserve His love and goodness. But the marvel of the gospel is that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 8:5). We are all "not OK," but we receive the free gift of eternal life through faith in Christ, whose perfect righteousness is *imputed* to us (Romans 5:12-21). God is gracious and merciful, even though we are "not OK."

I'M OK -- YOU'RE NOT OK. Here is another dangerous position, but responsibility is quickly shifted away:

"A child who is brutalized long enough by the parents he initially felt were OK will switch positions to the third, or criminal position: I'M OK--YOU'RE NOT OK." (72)

This child, according to Harris, gives himself strokes by "licking his wounds" after being battered by parents, experiencing comfort by being alone (72). A strange sort of perseverance develops:

"Such a little person has experienced brutality, but he has also experienced survival. What has happened can happen again. I did survive. I will survive. He refuses to give up.... Hatred sustains him although he may learn to conceal it with a mask of measured politeness." (72-73)

Harris explains that the person in this position fails to look inward, instead looking to others to assign blame, operating "without a conscience" (73), and frequently seeking "strokes" in a manipulative manner:

"Such a person may develop a retinue of 'yes men' who praise and stroke him heavily. Yet he knows they are not authentic strokes because he has had to set them up himself, in the same way he had to produce his own stroking in the first place." (73)

Harris has painted us a picture of sin here, despite his attempt to blame others. What he describes is a *sinful response* to living in a fallen world and being sinned against by others.

I'M OK -- YOU'RE OK. The first three positions, according to Harris, are *unconscious* and grounded in *feelings*. The fourth is a verbal, conscious decision based on "thought, faith, and the wager of action" (74). This position can incorporate "the abstractions of philosophy and religion" (74).

In addition, Harris distances himself from much of the feeling-oriented psychology when he asserts that he is advocating a *position* on which to base interactions with others, rather than a mere *feeling* that you are "OK":

"It is essential to understand that I'M OK--YOU'RE OK is a *position and not a feeling*. The NOT OK recordings in the Child are not erased by a decision in the present. The task at hand is how to start a collection of recordings which play OK outcomes to transactions, successes in terms of integrated actions which make sense, which are programmed by the Adult,

and not by the Parent or Child, successes based on an ethic which can be supported rationally." (76)

Sin, too, is not a *feeling*. But while the Bible urges us to see our own sin from God's perspective, Harris urges us to view ourselves as "OK," apart from God's standards or the work of Christ and His Spirit:

"Fortunate are the children who are helped early in life to find they are OK by repeated exposure to situations in which they can prove, to themselves, their own worth and the worth of others." (74-75)

This is not God's way. No man can prove his own worth. Rather, man's hope for change is dependent on the mercy and grace of God.

Communication: Transaction or Edification?

This system makes much of interpersonal communication. It is apparently the great *key* to proper living. Harris speaks in terms of "transactions," analyzed according to which of the three main characters is speaking. A "transaction" may be child-to-child, parent-to-parent, adult-to-adult, child-to-parent, adult-to-parent, or any other combination of these three major players.

Harris entitles one of his chapters, "Analyzing the Transaction." Basically, this analysis is concerned with our communications with one another. He begins the chapter by quoting the apostle Paul in Romans 7: "I do not understand my own actions" (80). But Paul understands far better than Harris! Harris fails to understand that sinful communication proceeds out of the *heart* (Matthew 15:18). He elaborates on the definition of "transaction" and explains his initial procedure in counseling:

"The transaction consists of a stimulus by one person and a response by another, which response in turn becomes a new stimulus for the other person to respond to. The purpose of the analysis is to discover which part of each person--Parent, Adult, or Child--is originating each stimulus and response." (89)

The author offers a multitude of physical and verbal cues related to each of the three states (90-92). Use of the words "should" and "ought" are ordinarily evidence of the Parent state,

particularly the *unthinking* use of these terms, but occasionally the Adult state (90). Critical blaming and fault finding is attributed to the "parent" state:

"When we blame and find fault, we replay the early blaming and fault-finding which is recorded in the Parent, and this makes us feel OK, because the Parent is OK." (93)

To explain his analysis, Harris gives us to the first "rule" of communication in Transactional Analysis:

"When stimulus and response on the P-A-C transactional diagram make parallel lines [parent-to-parent, child-to-child, or adult-to-adult], the transaction is complementary and can go on indefinitely." (95)

He sees a failure, however, in efforts of child-to-child communication where no one receives any "strokes":

"It becomes readily apparent that there are very few game-free complementary Child-Child transactions. This is because the Child is a get-stroke rather than a give-stroke creature.... Without Adult involvement in the transaction, no stroking accrues to anyone, and the relationship becomes uncomplementary, or dies of boredom." (99)

This might be better described as sinner-to-sinner! So could *all* of our human communications.

Parent-Child and Child-Adult transactions are both described as complementary (101, 103).

"A person in the grip of NOT OK feelings may reach out to another person for realistic reassurances." (103)

Adult-Parent transactions are also described as complementary (104). Here, the "adult" turns to the other person to "play parent" (104-105).

The second "rule" of communication in Transactional Analysis is stated as follows:

"When stimulus and response cross on the P-A-C transactional diagram, communication stops." (106)

These "crossed" transactions begin with an "adult" stimulus, followed by a child-to-parent or parent-to-child response (106-107). Explaining how this happens, Harris says:

"The origin of the non-Adult responses is in the NOT OK position of the Child. A person dominated by the NOT OK 'reads into' comments that which is not there." (107)

Explaining repeated "child" transactions, Harris says that:

"The person whose NOT OK Child is always activated cannot get on with transactions which will advance his dealing with reality because he is continually concerned with unfinished business having to do with a past reality." (113)

Later he compares this with the person who remains in the "parent" state:

"The person who always comes on Child is really saying, 'Look at me, I'M NOT OK.' The person who always comes on Parent is really saying, 'Look at you, YOU'RE NOT OK (and that makes me feel better).'" (114)

The "adult" is the preferred communicator:

"The adult has a choice as to how it will respond to a stimulus in a complementary way that will protect both the relationship and the individuals in the relationship. This sometimes takes some very rapid (intuitive) computing." (117)

However, the "adult" operates with a built-in handicap because:

"The Adult develops later than the Parent and Child and seems to have a difficult time catching up throughout life." (118)

The Bible has a great deal to teach about our communication with one another. Our words are very important to God. James teaches us that we use words to bless God and to curse man, who is made in His image--but this ought not to be (James 3:9-10). Rather, our communication must be carefully crafted to build up others, to edify and impart grace (Ephesians 4:29). Never does Scripture exhort us to speak at all times as "adult" rather than "parent" or "child." Note how Harris wishes to denigrate two of

his three terms--*the two that describe family relationships*. Scripture places us in the role of *children* in relationship to God, although not in the distorted sense proposed by Harris. Jesus warned the religious leaders of His day to become as little children, trusting, dependent, and humble. The emphasis on "adult" in this system is one that feeds man's rebellious desire for autonomy, as well as the radical individualism found in our culture.

Change: Is There Hope?

Treatment, says Harris, should focus on restoring the "adult" to an executive position rather than catering to the "child" (56), because "only the Adult can look objectively at *all* the data and proceed to look for more" (81). The author recommends treatment for people when "the Adult is impaired to the point where they cannot function" (228). He also maintains that "everyone could benefit from it [Transactional Analysis]" (229).

Counseling goals. Harris promotes *freedom of choice* as the primary goal of his methods:

"The goal of Transactional Analysis is to enable a person to have *freedom of choice*, the *freedom to change at will*, to change the responses to recurring and new stimuli." (82, emphasis added)

"Restoration of the *freedom to change* is the goal of treatment. This freedom grows from knowing the truth about what is in the Parent and what is in the Child and how this data feeds into present-day transactions. It also requires the truth, or the *evidence*, about the world in which he lives. Such freedom requires the knowledge that everyone with whom one deals has a Parent, an Adult, and a Child." (83, emphasis added)

In biblical terms, this could better be called *autonomy*. Man, in his unregenerate state, wants freedom...from God and His law. True freedom, however, is the freedom *from sin*, from both its power and penalty, that Christ alone provides (Romans 6:1-14; Galatians 5:13). Counsel grounded in Scripture is designed to help the believer glorify God by living in accordance with His Word, set free from the bondage of sin.

Still another goal is interpersonal, the development of *intimacy*. Harris explains that:

"For many thousands of years man's existence has been structured preponderantly by withdrawal, ritual, pastimes, activities, and games.... The majority of men have helplessly accepted these patterns as human nature, the inevitable course of events, the symptoms of history repeating itself." (151)

In contrast, the author holds out intimacy as a goal to be pursued:

"A relationship of intimacy between two people may be thought of as existing independent of the first five ways of time structuring [withdrawal, ritual, pastimes, activities, games]...it is based on the acceptance by both people of the I'M OK--YOU'RE OK position." (151)

Furthermore:

"It is a relationship in which the Adult in both persons is in charge and allows for the emergence of the Natural Child." (152)

Again, we are back to the "adult" as the one who is to be in charge.

How do we change? Biblically, the Holy Spirit is the agent who graciously orchestrates change (sanctification), conforming us to the image of Christ. For Harris, *it is the "adult"* who engineers change:

"The Adult can identify the demands of the Parent for what they are--archaic--and give permission to the Natural Child to emerge again, unafraid of the early civilizing process, which turned off not only his aggressive antisocial behavior but his joy and creativity as well." (152)

The "adult" is also seen as the evaluator of truth and knowledge:

"It is through the emancipated Adult that we can reach out to the vast areas of knowledge about our universe and about each

other, explore the depths of philosophy and religion...."
(153)

In addition, the "adult" is presented as having the necessary self-control and wisdom to determine appropriate responses:

"The strength of the Adult shows first also in restraint--in restraining the automatic, archaic responses of Parent and Child, while waiting for the Adult to compute appropriate responses." (118)

Harris presents his method, with its terminology and analysis of communication, as an essential component of change:

"The patient agrees to learn the language of Transactional Analysis and to use it in examining his everyday transactions. The goal of treatment is to cure the presenting symptom, and the method of treatment is the freeing up of the Adult so that the individual may experience freedom of choice and the creation of new options above and beyond the limiting influences of the past." (231)

He speaks in glowing terms of using his methodology, when the "adult" is in control:

"A working knowledge of P-A-C makes it possible for the Adult to explore new and exciting frontiers of life, a desire which has been there all along but has been buried under the burden of the NOT OK." (85)

The "adult," unlike "child" or "parent," is supposedly able to handle uncertainty:

"One of the realities of the human predicament is that we frequently have to make decisions before all the facts are in.... The Child in us demands certainty.... When the Parent or the Child dominates, the outcome is predictable. This is one of the essential characteristics of games. There is a certain security in games. They may always turn out painfully, but it is a pain that the player has learned to handle." (83, 84)

This sounds remarkably similar to much of the modern security-significance psychology that has invaded the church. For the

believer, however, there is a certainty about his *eternal inheritance* that transcends the trials and tribulations of this life. Scripture exhorts us to fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, so that we might not grow weary (Hebrews 12:1-3).

Understanding is paraded as a key element to change--in particular, the understanding of one's own inner "child" and "parent":

"The first way...to build strength of the Adult is to become sensitive to Parent and Child signals.... To know one's own Child, to be sensitive to one's own NOT OK feelings, is the first requirement for Adult data processing." (118)

Harris advocates looking within, to understand how the three "characters" relate to one another:

"One way to practice identifying the Parent and Child is to monitor the internal dialogue." (118)

He sees progress when a person is able "to accurately differentiate their Parent from the Child and both from reality--the outside world" (234).

Understanding of the "*child*" is particularly important:

"The understanding of the existence in oneself of the NOT OK Child is one of the first and most important steps in understanding the basis of behavior." (242)

But this isn't a mere academic exercise:

"*The NOT OK Child* may be perceived as an interesting idea. *My NOT OK Child* is real." (242)

Harris warns, however, that we are to perceive the Parent, Child, and Adult in their *present transactions*, rather than in the past (242). His method is thus similar to, yet distinguished from, much of the "inner healing"/"inner child" therapy that occurs today.

Sensitivity to one's own "child" is claimed to enhance understanding of other people, and thus to facilitate communication:

"As one becomes sensitive to one's own Child, one begins to become sensitive to the Child in others. We fear the Parent in others; their Child we can love. One helpful practice in a difficult transaction is to see the little boy, or the little girl, in another person, and talk to that little boy or girl, not in a condescending way but in a loving, protective way." (119)

This is a sorry substitute for biblical truth about restoring others in humility and gentleness, with the understanding that we are all sinners in need of God's grace (Galatians 6:1).

Harris recommends his method for other reasons as well. One major strength he perceives is the group nature of the treatment program, cutting costs, shortening treatment time, and enabling more people to benefit:

"The treatment of individuals in groups is the method of choice by Transactional Analysts." (234)

However, unlike other group therapy practices:

"Allowing the Child to come on, act out instinctual impulses, and play games at random in the treatment group is a waste of the group's time and invasion of the rights and purposes of each individual group member. If permitted to continue, it sabotages the therapeutic contract of Transactional Analysis. Until each member of the group has achieved at least some freeing-up of his Adult, self-revelation, or the confessional, contributes very little, if anything, to the purpose of curing individuals in the group. Treatment is speeded only by keeping the Adult in charge." (235)

Perhaps this seems less self-indulgent than groups that exalt the "child" and related feelings, but there are still no biblical standards to guide the process or to ensure communication which does not consist of gossip or slander.

Harris speaks of "transference" occurring often in treatment:

"The situation provokes a transfer of feelings and related behavior from the past, when the patient was a child, into the present, in which the Child in the patient responds as it once did to the authority of the parent." (229)

He promotes his method as one that does not have the usual "transference" and "resistance" that occurs in psychoanalysis (244).

"There is nothing of the omnipotent therapist sitting in the dark corner with his poor little patient recumbent before him, both alert to the dangers in the grim business." (244)

Instead, there is a group where the "Child" in each person is encouraged to "come out and laugh" (244).

Responsibility, in this therapy, rests on the person counseled and not on the therapist:

"We have to understand our P-A-C before we can turn off the past. When a therapist tells us we *must*, this is Parent. If we choose to do so ourselves because we understand how we are put together, this is Adult. The 'staying power' of our decision is totally dependent upon whether the decision is Parent or Adult." (278)

Yet Harris also assigns a key role to the therapist, in order to "produce" responsible individuals:

"We cannot produce responsible persons until we help them uncover the I'M NOT OK--YOU'RE OK position which underlies the complicated and destructive games they play. Once we understand positions and games, freedom of response begins to emerge as a real possibility." (279)

Biblically, we are responsible before God to live in accordance with His Word, but believers have the indwelling Holy Spirit as the principal agent of their sanctification. Apart from Christ, we can do *nothing* (John 15:5); His Spirit produces the *fruit* of abiding in Him (Galatians 5:22).

Summarizing, the author recommends that you recognize your Child's fears and vulnerabilities, your Parent's admonitions and fixed positions, be sensitive to the "child" in yourself and

others, and give the "adult" time to process data, sorting out "child" and "parent" (121).

Finally, he says: "Work a system of values. You can't make decisions without an ethical framework" (122). It is true, as Harris states, that decisions cannot be made apart from a system of values. However, he asks the reader to work out that system for himself. As we will see later, Harris exalts *man* and his worth, rather than God and His glory, as the prime standard. He is honest enough to acknowledge the impossibility of counseling without values, but fails to submit to the standards revealed by God in His Word.

Transactional Analysis Applied: Marriage, Children, Adolescents, and Society

Harris views his method as a panacea for whatever might be amiss, at any stage of life, in any relationship, and in any circumstance.

Marriage. Here is how this author explains marital break-up:

"The Child takes over in one or both partners, and the whole marriage is shattered when imperfections begin to appear."
(155)

He explains this childish "take over" in terms of the initiation of the marital relationship:

"When one stops to consider the massive content of archaic data which each partner brings to the marriage through the continuing contribution of his Parent and Child, one can readily see the necessity of an emancipated Adult in each to make this relationship work. Yet the average marriage contract is made by the Child, which understands love as something you feel and not something you do, and which sees happiness as something you pursue rather than a by-product of working toward the happiness of someone other than yourself.... Archaic feelings of NOT OK contaminate the Adult in each partner, and having nowhere else to turn, the partners turn on each other." (155)

Harris recognizes that *morality* and *values* must be considered, but as usual he places the "adult" in charge, rather than any reference to the standards of God:

"It takes the establishment of and embarking upon a new course in the direction of goals arrived at by the Adult. Persons either set a new course or they fall back into the same patterns of drift. It does not matter how many charts they have. This is where the considerations of moral values, of ethics and religion, become important to the course of a marriage. A man and wife must undertake some fundamental inquiries about what they consider important in order to chart their course." (170)

Moral standards are reduced to a mere agreement between the parties, rather than a divinely revealed imperative:

"It is not enough to know the Child needs and feelings of each. If the Parent or Child data is in disagreement, there must be some ethical standard accepted by both, which can give direction to the course of the marriage and value to all decisions that must be made." (171)

Scripture has a massive amount of instructions concerning the marital relationship, which is not a "contract" between two parties (contracts may be broken by mutual agreement), but a *covenant* before God and a *one-flesh* relationship. The New Testament speaks of submission and sacrificial love, giving exhortations to both husbands and wives. Failure to meet biblical standards is *sin*, which arises out of the heart, not a "contamination" caused by "archaic feelings" of being "not OK."

Children. Among other things, Harris examines the situation where parents are divorcing and children are troubled:

"At best divorce is a NOT OK situation, guaranteed to hook the NOT OK Child of all concerned. There is usually very little Adult operating in one of these unfortunate human episodes. This is the major problem. Mother and Father are so totally embattled in crossed transactions that the children are left to muddle through on their own." (197)

The author's solution is to help the children "recognize that they do have an Adult, which can help them find their own reality and

their own way out of the jungle of feelings in which they live" (197). There is *nothing* here about biblical standards, either in trusting the Lord for help and guidance (Psalm 27:10), or biblical obligations to honor father and mother.

Adolescents. The disciplinary problems encountered with teens are seen and explained in terms of the author's own theories:

"Parents may suggest what they believe to be a perfectly reasonable course of action and are frustrated, baffled, and hurt over his angry rebuttal, hooking *their* Child. Often the problem is that he mistakes his external parent for his internal Parent." (207)

His solution is found, as always, in the "adult" aspect of the inner man:

"What constitutes the central work of treatment is the freeing up of the Adult in both the teenager and his parents in order that an Adult-Adult contract may be drawn." (209)

Again, there is *nothing* about biblical responsibilities and relationships within the family, and no biblical concept of sin.

Society. Harris believes that his system is one that holds out hope for society, even on an international level. He envisions a democracy ruled by and for the "adult":

"But democracy can only function with an intelligent electorate, and an intelligent electorate is an Adult electorate. A government of the Parent, for the Parent, and by the Parent will perish from the earth." (287)

He extends his adult-in-charge analysis to communications between *nations*, citing the United Nations as an example:

"If Transactional Analysis makes it possible for two persons to understand what is going on between them, can the same language be used to understand what is going on between nations? ... One of the most hopeful institutions for the analysis of international transactions is the United Nations. It has survived many crossed transactions.... But we do not have to respond with our Child. Nor do we have to respond

with our sword-rattling Parent. *And therein lies the possibility of change.*" (292)

Harris summarizes his vision for world peace with the recommendation that his terminology transcend international language barriers so that nations can communicate "adult" to "adult":

"'OK' is already an international word. Parent, Adult, and Child could also become international words. Now that we have a concept for understanding human behavior that all persons can comprehend, one which can be put into simple words and translated into any language, we may be arriving at a point where we can discard our archaic fears, based on the tragedies of the past, and begin talking with one another in the only way agreement on anything will be possible: Adult to Adult." (296)

Godly international communication is a worthy goal, as we are instructed to live at peace with all men so far as it depends on us (Romans 12:18). However, this system, focusing on the analysis of "transactions" between three proposed aspects of the inner man, is inadequate to deal with the *sin* in the hearts of men that all too often erupts in international disputes and wars.

Transactional Analysis, Truth, and Values

Harris, unlike some of his colleagues, is ready to acknowledge that counseling cannot exist without a system of values:

"Establishing value judgments has been seen by many 'psychological scientists' as an abominable departure from the scientific method, to be shunned righteously, and at all cost.... What they overlook is the fact that the scientific method itself is totally dependent on a moral value--the trustworthiness of the reporters of scientific observation." (248)

Indeed, it is impossible to give counsel without some underlying value system, some goal to be pursued, whether acknowledged openly or not.

However, values do not occur in a vacuum. Searching for a *foundation* (other than God), the author proposes "reality" as a basis for morality:

"Reality is our most important treatment tool. Reality, understood through the study of history and the observation of man, is also the tool by which we construct a valid ethical system." (247)

This "reality," however, extends beyond our own personal experience:

"We can spend a lifetime digging through the bones of past experience, as if this were the only place reality existed, and completely ignore other compelling realities. *One such reality is the need for and existence of a system of moral values.*" (248)

The so-called "golden rule" is cast aside, primarily because man does not know enough about his own desires:

"The Golden Rule is not an adequate guide, not because the ideal is wrong, but because most people do not have enough data about what they want for themselves, or why they want it. They do not recognize the I'M NOT OK--YOU'RE OK position and are unaware of the games they play to relieve the burden." (250)

It is not surprising to find that Harris proposes the "adult" as the judge of moral values, the judge of the "parent" and its admonitions:

"One function of the freed-up Adult is to examine the Parent so that it may have a choice of accepting or rejecting Parent data. We must guard against the dogma of rejecting the Parent *in toto*, and ask, Is there anything left worth saving? It is clear that much Parent data is reliable." (250)

The "adult" is held out as the hope for establishing values in marriage as well as all other relationships:

"The Adult, functioning as a probability estimator, can work out a system of value that encompasses not only the marriage relationship but all relationships.... It can establish new

values based on a more thorough examination of the historical, philosophical, and religious foundations for values. Unlike the Parent, it is concerned more with the preservation of the individual than with the preservation of the institution." (120)

One might wonder what would happen if two "adults" could not agree about values, particularly since each is primarily concerned with the *individual, i.e., self*.

Not quite ready to take the illogical step of throwing away *all* absolute truth (we *should* not have *shoulds*), Harris proposes the following inquiry in his chapter about moral values:

"We think of 'should' and 'ought' as Parent words. *The central question of this chapter is: Can 'should' and 'ought' be Adult words?*" (251)

He wonders aloud if absolute morality is a real possibility:

"Is there an objective morality that has claims on all men, or must we construct our own individual, situational moralities?" (251)

The author notes that "the search for these objective principles and the longing for relatedness is a universal reality" as well as "a personal, experiential reality" (251). He recognizes the difficulties in rejecting the possibility of universal moral absolutes:

"If there is no universal 'should,' there is no way of saying that Albert Schweitzer was a better man than Adolf Hitler.... Albert Schweitzer thought he was right. Adolf Hitler thought he was right. That they were both right is an obvious contradiction. *But by what standard do we determine who was right?*" (253-254)

Good question! *By what standard indeed?* God has provided us with that standard in His Word, and it is written on the heart in such a manner that even the unregenerate are unable to escape it entirely (Romans 2:14-15), despite their attempts to suppress God's truth (Romans 1:18-23).

Harris asks questions that others in his field often ignore. Nevertheless, he admits his aversion to universal moral absolutes, other than those that might fit his man-centered system:

"There are no doctrinal absolutes except the evil of using persons as things, even if one of these persons is oneself. If, in the long run, a transitory alliance produces a lack of self-esteem and a reinforcement of the NOT OK position, then sex outside of marriage has provided only a physical release from tension and has not produced the ongoing ecstasy of two people who share unlimited liability for each other.... Sexual intercourse without personal intimacy can only result in a loss of self-esteem." (215)

Much like proponents of the modern self-esteem movement, Harris draws on the importance of man as the ground of universal truth:

"I would like to suggest that a reasonable approximation of this objective moral order, or of ultimate truth, is that *persons are important* in that they are all bound together in a universal relatedness which transcends their own personal existence." (254)

Even the fact that we counsel, Harris asserts, is evidence that we *value* people:

"The denial of the importance of persons negates all our efforts in their behalf.... The idea that persons are important is a *moral idea* without which any system of understanding man is futile.... We cannot prove they are important. We have only the faith to believe they are, because of the greater difficulty of believing they are not." (254)

But note his failure to provide any foundation for such high esteem of man. He accepts man's worth on *faith*, because he sees no alternative.

Furthermore, he sees differences among various cultures in the esteem of human beings, and he warns against relying on either "parent" or "child" for reaching any agreement:

"Since every culture differs in its estimate of the value of persons, and since this information is transmitted through

the Parent, we can find no way of relying on the Parent to come to any agreement on the worth of persons." (255)

"Neither can we rely on the Child for agreement as to the value of persons. The Child, crippled by its own NOT OK, has little positive data about its own value, let alone the value of others." (256)

It is, once again, the "adult" who can agree with other "adults" on this crucial issue:

"Only the emancipated Adult can come to agreement with the emancipated Adult in others about the value of persons." (256)

The author also inquires as to the nature of the *conscience*, the "still, small voice" inside, and he concludes that it is the Adult (256). The "adult," freed from "parent" and "child" by therapy, is both judge and jury, usurping the throne of God.

Finally, here is how Harris describes *truth* and its relationship to the *church*:

"If personal liberation is the key to social change, and if the truth makes us free, then the church's principal function is to provide a place where people can come to hear the truth. The truth is not something which has been brought to finality at an ecclesiastical summit meeting or bound in a black book. *The truth is a growing body of data of what we observe to be true.* If Transactional Analysis is a part of the truth which helps to liberate people, the churches should make it available." (265)

Harris has not understood the words of our Lord in Scripture, "Your Word is truth" (John 17:17), or the fact that God's Word, God's *truth*, stands eternal and unchanging (Psalm 119:89-90).

Transactional Analysis and Religion

Harris holds to a man-centered religion that denies the God of the Bible:

"Returning man to his rightful place of personhood is the theme of redemption, of reconciliation, or enlightenment, central to all of the great world religions." (257)

He notes, with obvious disapproval, the parent-child concept that is an integral aspect of Western religions:

"The Parent-Child nature of most Western religions is remarkable when one considers that the revolutionary impact of the most revered religious leaders was directly the result of their courage to examine Parent institutions and proceed, with the Adult, in search of truth." (260)

He goes on to reject *absolute truth*, throwing out the concept of religious "dogma," stating that:

"Dogma is the enemy of truth and the enemy of persons. Dogma says, 'Do not think! Be less than a person'.... Central to most religious practices is a Child acceptance of authoritarian dogma as an act of faith, with limited, if not absent, involvement of the Adult. Thus, when morality is encased in the structure of religion, it is essentially Parent. It is dated, frequently unexamined, and often contradictory." (260)

Harris then launches into a discussion of Christianity, revealing the futility of his thinking and the darkness of his understanding (Ephesians 4:17-18). He begins with the statement that:

"The central message of Christ's ministry was *the concept of grace*." (261)

Citing Paul Tillich, he translates Christian "grace," as he perceives it, into his system:

"A theological way of saying I'M OK--YOU'RE OK...not YOU CAN BE OK, IF, or YOU WILL BE ACCEPTED, IF, but rather YOU ARE ACCEPTED, unconditionally" (261).

But he cautions the reader that:

"This concept is incomprehensible to many 'religious persons,' because it can only be perceived by the Adult, and many religious persons are Parent-dominated.... Not all

'sinners' are such blatant game players. However, because their internal religious dialogue is predominantly Parent-Child, they are continually caught up in an anxious scorekeeping of good and bad works, never sure of how they stand." (261, 262)

The biblical view of grace is not "I'M OK--YOU'RE OK" unconditionally. Grace is God's gracious granting of blessings that are not only undeserved, but forfeited due to sin. God shows His love by sending Christ to die for us while we were yet sinners ("not OK"), satisfying divine justice, propitiating the righteous wrath of God, and reconciling us to God. There are definite *conditions* attached to God's granting of eternal life, but He can do so without compromising His perfect justice because *He Himself* took the initiative to satisfy those conditions. Christ has paid the penalty for sin and has lived the perfect life that merits eternal life; His righteousness is graciously imputed to believers, who receive God's free gift through the instrument of faith. Harris offers a washed out substitute that fails to grapple with the reality of sin and its eternal consequences.

Religious experience. Harris begins by wondering out loud where on earth man began to even *conceive* of the idea of God:

"The capacity to reflect on religious experience is significant in itself. Where does our ideation of God, or 'the more,' or transcendence, come from? Does the God-idea simply grow out of fear of the unknown? Was religious experience reported in the beginning in order to manipulate others by claiming other-worldly powers? Has the God-idea simply evolved, survived because it is somehow related to the survival of the fittest?" (266)

His attempt to answer only reveals his folly, as he presupposes evolutionary theory as a starting point:

"It would appear that something in the state of man has changed, through the long process of evolution, which first appears as the ideation of transcendence, and then as transcendence itself.... In view of the 'impossible, unprecedented' development of thinking man, is it not reasonable, and compatible with the evolutionary process in the universe, to say that there may have developed an 'impossible, unprecedented' *transcendent man*?" (266, 267)

This "transcendent man," however, is not the transcendent God of Scripture, certainly not the God-man Jesus Christ, but rather an "experience," an idol where "God" is made in the image of man:

"Transcendence means an experience of that which is more than myself, a reality outside of myself, that which has been called The Other, The All, or God. It is better expressed in the image of depth." (267)

Harris must, of course, explain the phenomenon in his own terms:

"It is my opinion that religious experience may be a unique combination of Child (a feeling of intimacy) and Adult (a reflection on ultimacy) with the total exclusion of the Parent. I believe the total exclusion of the Parent is what happens in kenosis, or self-emptying. This self-emptying is a common characteristic of all mystical experiences, according to Bishop James Pike [equating the "mystical" experiences of Christians and Zen Buddhists]." (267-268)

One thing for sure: It is his *opinion* expressed here, not biblical truth!

The description becomes even more nauseating when Harris describes the exclusion, or "emptying," of the "parent" state:

"I believe that what is emptied is the Parent. How can one experience joy, or ecstasy, in the presence of those recordings in the Parent which produced the NOT OK originally? How can I *feel* acceptance in the presence of the earliest *felt* rejection? ... I believe the Adult's function in the religious experience is to block out the Parent in order that the Natural Child may reawaken to its own worth and beauty as a part of God's creation.... The little person sees the Parent as OK, or, in a religious vein, righteous." (268)

"If it is true that we empty ourselves of the Parent in the religious experience first described, this leaves the Child and Adult. Whether God is experienced by the Child or by the Adult is a fascinating question... Theology is Adult. Religious experience involves the Child...it may be that religious experience is totally Child." (269-270)

The "religious experience," according to Harris, is "the escape from judgment, acceptance without condition" (269). We are back to this theme, but *without* the atoning work of Christ on the cross, without which "acceptance" before God is impossible. There is truly no condemnation to those who are *in Christ* (Romans 8:1), but Harris shows no evidence of understanding what it means to be in Christ. In fact, he demonstrates no firm belief in the actual *existence* of God as distinct from and ruling over His creation.

The concept of "emptying" is probably borrowed from Philippians 2:7, speaking of Christ. This "emptying" was not an "emptying" Himself of some "parent" state, but rather the humiliation involved in the Creator of the universe humbling Himself to become man and die an agonizing death on the cross.

The experience of "salvation" is viewed with contempt:

"There is one kind of religious experience which may be qualitatively different from the Parent-excluding experience we have just described. This is the feeling of great relief which comes from a total adaptation to the Parent.... Salvation is not experienced as an independent encounter with a gracious God but as gaining the approval of the pious ones who make the rules.... The Adult is not involved in this experience. The religious experience of children may be of this sort." (260)

This is a gross distortion of salvation and sanctification. Salvation is by grace alone through faith alone, but that is possible *because Christ, on the cross and in His perfectly obedient life, has fully satisfied the conditions.* Sanctification, meanwhile, involves the gracious working of the Holy Spirit in our lives, enabling us to conform our lives to the will of God--not to earn the "approval of the pious ones who make the rules," but to glorify God, whom we love.

Harris leaves us in something of a twilight zone, where each is left to his own brand of religious experience--although one wonders how tolerant he would be of an "experience" that actually involves God's judgment of sin:

"We cannot be judgmental about religious experiences of others for there is no certain, objective way to know what

really happens to them.... A subjective appraisal, however, leads me to believe that there is a difference in a religious experience based upon Parent approval and a religious experience based on acceptance without condition." (269)

In the Bible, believers are presented holy and blameless before God the Father ("Parent approval") and accepted by Him, based on the conditions satisfied by God the Son. God the Spirit, meanwhile, gives life to the dead (regeneration) so that the gift of eternal life is received through faith in Jesus Christ. Harris, like many others, wants an "unconditional acceptance without conditions."

Early Christians. Harris wasn't there, but he claims to explain the experience and faith of the ancient church:

"The early Christians met to talk about an exciting encounter, about having met a man, named Jesus, who walked with them, who laughed with them, who cried with them, and whose openness and compassion for people was a central historical example of I'M OK--YOU'RE OK.... The early Christians trusted him and believed him, and they changed. They talked to each other about what happened. There was little of the ritualistic, nonexperiential activity so characteristic of churches today." (270)

The life of these early believers is explained in terms of--you guessed it--the terminology of Transactional Analysis:

"Theirs was a new, revolutionary style of life based on I'M OK--YOU'RE OK. If Christianity were simply an intellectual idea, it probably would not have survived, considering its fragile beginnings." (271)

Even conversion is redefined to fit the system:

"Deciding on the position I'M OK--YOU'RE OK has been reported as a conversion experience." (271)

Maybe it has been "reported" that way, but this is not the conversion experience of the Bible.

The intellectual aspect of the faith, in contrast to many passages of Scripture (Acts 20:28-30; 1 Timothy 6:20-21; 2 Timothy

4:1-5), is viewed by Harris with contempt. In fact, Harris claims that theology "may stand in the way of religious experience" (273). But Scripture urges us to hold fast to the truth, to sound doctrine. Our faith is not a mere intellectual exercise, of course. It is based on the solid facts of history, *God acting in history*. Without the literal fact of the resurrection of Christ, our faith would be in vain (1 Corinthians 15:14). However, intellectual knowledge is an indispensable aspect of the Christian faith. Faith involves intellectual understanding coupled with assent to that knowledge and trust in Christ. The mind cannot be "turned off" in favor of "experience." If it is, that isn't Christianity.

Regeneration. Jesus informed Nicodemus (John 3) that it is necessary to be born again by the Spirit of God in order to see the kingdom of heaven. It seems an incredible stroke of arrogance to note how Harris speaks about this passage:

"The rebirth of which Jesus speaks [citing John 3] is, I believe, the rebirth of the natural Child. This is possible after the Adult comprehends the NOT OK, which was produced by the adaptive, or civilizing, process." (274)

Harris has absolutely no clue as to what it means to be born again by the Holy Spirit, to be made alive with Christ. It has nothing to do with understanding the "NOT OK" position in the sense described by Harris, although it does involve understanding that as sinners, we are "NOT OK" before God *except* as we stand before Him *in Christ*, justified on the basis of His righteousness alone. Isaiah recognized his "NOT OK" position when he was thrust into the presence of God's holiness (Isaiah 6), and he was *undone*. If Harris truly saw his "NOT OK" position before God, he, too, would be undone. But God restored Isaiah and called him into a life of prophetic service. God similarly calls believers to a life of service, cleansing them from sin by the blood of Christ. Truly we are "NOT OK" in our own righteousness, which is as filthy rags in the sight of God (Isaiah 64:6). Yet we are "OK," holy and blameless (Ephesians 1:4) in the presence of God when we stand before Him *in Christ*, having been redeemed by His blood. In Him we are assured of our eternal inheritance (1 Peter 1:4-5), and nothing can separate us from the love of God (Romans 8:31-39).

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