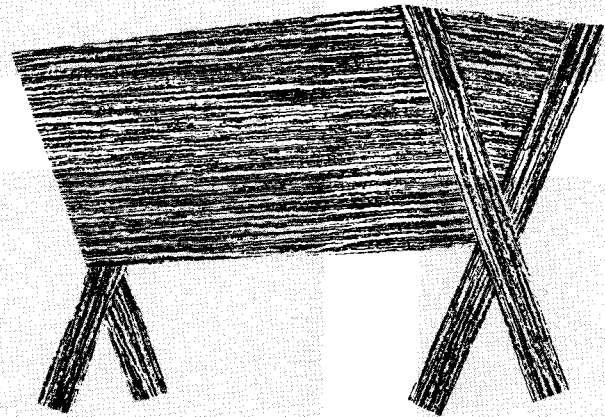


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Why was Jesus born?

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I'm OK—You're OK, by Thomas A. Harris, M.D. Fleming H. Revell Co. (Spire Books); paperback, 317 pp., \$1.95. Reviewed by Dr. Cornelius Van Til, Emeritus Professor of Apologetics at Westminster Theological Seminary.

We're told that this book has been on "*The New York Times* Bestseller List" for over a year. And the author warns that "it is important that this book be read from front to back."

Dr. Harris says his book "is the product of a search to find answers for people who are looking for hard facts in answer to the questions about how the mind operates, why we do what we do, and how we can stop doing what we do if we wish. The answer lies in what I feel is one of the most promising breakthroughs in psychiatry in many years. It is called Transactional Analysis. It has given hope to people who have become discouraged by the vagueness of many of the traditional types of psychotherapy. It has given a new answer to people who want to change rather than adjust, to people who want transformation rather than conformation. 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" (pp. 13f.).

To obtain these benefits the reader must learn to understand himself by means of *Transactional Analysis*, and this means the reader must understand the terms it uses, such as "Parent," "Adult," and "Child." "Continual observation has supported the assumption that these three states exist in all people. It is as if in each person there is the same little person he was when he was three years old. There are also within him his own parents. These are recordings in the brain of actual experiences of internal and external events, the most significant of which happened during the first five years of life. There is a third state, different from these two. The first two are called Parent and Child, and the third, Adult" (pp. 39f.).

The Parent. "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" (p. 40).

The Child. "While external events are being recorded as that body of data we call the Parent, there is another recording being made simultaneously. This is the recording of *internal* events, the responses of the little person to what he sees and hears" (p. 47). "It is this 'seeing and hearing and feeling and understanding' body of data which we define as the Child" (p. 48).

The Adult. "At about ten months of age a remarkable thing begins to happen to the child. Until that time his life has consisted mainly of helpless or unthinking responses to the demands and stimulations by those around him. He has a Parent and a Child. What he has not had is the ability either to choose his responses or to manipulate his surroundings. He has had no self-direction, no ability to move out to meet life. . . . At ten months, however, he begins to experience the power of locomotion. . . . This self-actualization is the beginning of the Adult" (pp. 51f.).

In early years, the Adult "is fragile and tentative. It is easily 'knocked out' by commands from the Parent and fear in the Child." The Adult "is different from the Parent, which is 'judgmental in an imitative way and seeks to enforce sets of borrowed standards, and from the Child, which tends to react more abruptly on the basis of prelogical thinking and poorly differentiated or distorted perceptions.' Through the Adult the little person can begin to tell the difference between life as it was taught and demonstrated to him (Parent), life as he felt it or wished it or fantasied it (Child), and life as he figures it out by himself (Adult)" (pp. 52f.).

The four life positions

Then we go on to learn about "The Four Life Positions" taken by human beings "with respect to oneself and others." They are:

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 first, "I'm not OK—you're OK," is "the universal position of early childhood, being the infant's logical conclusion from the situation of birth and infancy" (p. 67). Things are made comfortable (so, "you're OK"), but the infant himself feels helpless ("I'm not OK").

After the infant is no longer being "stroked" or handled all the time, the second position develops: "I'm not OK—you're not OK." "Life, which in the first year had some comforts, now has none. The stroking has disappeared. . . . In this position the Adult stops developing since one of its primary functions . . . is thwarted in that there is no source of stroking" (p. 70).

The third position, "I'm OK—you're not OK," is the "criminal position." "There are no OK people. Therefore there are no OK strokes" (p. 73). "They are the persons 'without a conscience' who are convinced that they are OK no matter what they do and that the total fault in every situation lies in others" (p. 73).

The fourth position, "I'm OK—you're OK," differs qualitatively from the first three. The great joy of Dr. Harris is that he can tell us all that we have "freedom to change." "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" (p. 83).

Man is not a billiard ball. There is the ordinary causal order. But there is also "another type of causal order which Charles Hartshorne calls 'creative causation'" (p. 87). It is the Adult in us that has this freedom (p. 169).

YOU OK?

So, with Teilhard de Chardin we may say that "the tension between science and faith should be resolved not in terms either of elimination or duality, but in terms of a synthesis" (p. 246).

Mrs. Harris and moral values

With this motto as inspiration, Mrs. Harris writes the chapter on "P-A-C and Moral Values." With Elton Trueblood we must agree that "subjective relativism [in the moral realm] can be reduced to absurdity" (p. 252). "If there is no universal 'should,' there is no way of saying that Albert Schweitzer was a better man than Adolf Hitler" (p. 253).

Says Mrs. Harris: "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" (p. 254). Persons are important. But "the Adult is the only part of us that can choose to make the statement 'I Am Important, You Are Important.' The Parent and Child are not free to do so, being committed to that which, on the one hand, was learned and observed in a particular culture and, on the other hand, what was felt and understood" (p. 256).

If then we are all to follow the Adult in us and practice the idea that all persons are important, we shall repress "a Child acceptance of authoritarian dogma as an act of faith . . ." (p. 260). When morality is "encased in the structure of religion, it is essentially Parent. It is dated, frequently unexamined, and often contradictory" (p. 260). Dr. James A. Pike teaches us this.

The Adult in us may, to be sure, accept the "central message of Christ's ministry." This message centers about "the concept of grace." The Adult in us can accept this *concept of grace* if only together with "the father of all 'new Christian theologians'" [Tillich]

we interpret this as a "theological way of saying I'M OK—YOU'RE OK. It is not YOU CAN BE OK, IF, OR YOU WILL BE ACCEPTED, IF, but rather YOU ARE ACCEPTED, unconditionally" (p. 261).

Or as Tillich says, The prostitute "came to Jesus because she was forgiven," not to be forgiven. "This concept is incomprehensible to many 'religious persons,' because it can only be perceived by the Adult, and many religious persons are Parent-dominated" (p. 261). "The non-Adult transmission of Christian doctrines has been the greatest enemy of the Christian message of grace" (p. 263).

"The doctrine of grace (I'M OK—YOU'RE OK) is hardly recognizable in such doctrines as The Elect and Predestination, preached by the Parent-damning and Child-raging Elmer Gantrys and Jonathan Edwardses who saw the glories of heaven in terms of a ringside seat at the right hand of God to watch the spectacle of the damned burning in hell" (p. 263).

Scientific basis for theology

The author turns again to Chardin and Tillich to show how the idea of Transactional Analysis, in terms of P-A-C, provides the scientific basis for a truly Christian theology of grace, i.e., a theology of grace that means the *unconditional* acceptance of all persons as persons.

True religious experience is the experience of unconditional acceptance of all persons by God as the "ground of being" (p. 267, from Tillich). This is a mystical experience, an experience of self-emptying. James A. Pike has shown how Zen Buddhists and Christians alike have such a religious experience (p. 268). "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" (p. 268).

"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" (p. 270).

Condemning historic Christianity

Looking back over the argument of this book, one sees that at every step

it implies or expresses a condemnation of historic Christianity. The very vocabulary of P-A-C excludes the idea of man being a creature, fallen into sin, bound for eternal death except that Christ died for him on the cross for his sin and rose from the dead for his justification; according to P-A-C, no one has sinned. Everything the historic Christian creeds say about God, about man, and about Christ is regarded as something the *Adult* in us cannot accept.

The philosophical position presupposed by the Harris book is that of Immanuel Kant with its notion of human autonomy, and of pure contingency and abstract rationality as correlative to one another. The Harris book assumes uncritically that this is an intelligible position. Yet it obviously is not. How can human personality say "I'm OK—You're OK" if it cannot even say *I am*?

Of course Dr. Harris is right when he says that the kind of Christianity that fits his scientific notions of P-A-C is the sort of universalism that finds its current expression in the Christ-Mystique of men like Teilhard de Chardin and Paul Tillich. The author might have added Karl Barth. For him as well as for the others Christ stands for the idea that all men are what they are because they are ideally perfect in Him.

The book closes with these words: "We base our hope for the future on the fact that we have seen persons change. How they have done it is the good news of this book. We trust it may be a volume of hope and an important page of the manual for the survival of mankind" (p. 304).

Thus the combined forces of modern process science, process philosophy and process theology are trying to repress the truth of God's revelation within them and about them in unrighteousness. The prodigal son knows he is at the swine trough, but refuses to return to the Father's house.

May the natives of Mansoul not be deceived by the lofty language about human personality. It is the language of Adam when he declared his independence of God and undertook to prove that "reality" would enable him to prove that he could replace God. May God in his mercy, send his Spirit into the hearts of modern men who continue to glory in the wisdom of the world however often it is shown to be foolishness with God.