

A Peaceable Psychology

Christian Therapy in a World of Many Cultures

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Introduction



Let us suppose that you are a Christian psychologist invited by a colleague to consult with a relief agency in Afghanistan. You are assigned to a clinic outside Kabul, the capital city. Red Cross workers are in contact with several Muslim families who recently moved back into their homes after the American overthrow of the Taliban. You are asked to give professional assistance for children who survived the conflict and who are now in need of help. Soheil is a nine-year-old boy who was slightly injured in a terrorist bombing. Through a translator, his parents anxiously report that he can be found on some nights hiding in his sister's closet. At times he will sleep there. Soheil struggles to focus on his parents' instructions when he withdraws and stares vacantly into space for minutes on end. During these episodes he is unable to interact with others around him. Soheil used to love soccer, praying at the mosque, and attending the local elementary school but now shows little interest in these activities. He has lost five pounds since the conflict, even with nutritional supplements from the Red Cross. Aid workers inform you that Soheil was unable to make eye contact during an initial meeting, even when presented with toys, markers, and paper. In your first encounter with the boy, Soheil's oldest sister Anahita stays to translate. During your time together, Soheil sporadically engages in rapid-fire conversation with his sister. When you ask her what he is saying, she shrugs and states that Soheil is feeling sad.¹

This case seems daunting. Soheil needs help but what do we know about healing within his ethnic tradition? Should Americans even be the ones to assist given our presence as occupiers? Can a Christian therapist provide comfort to a Muslim boy given the long history of animosity between our religions? Would our presence as therapists symbolize and effect peace in some small way? Our response to these questions, we hope, will move the conversation forward on the following interrelated issues: healing, politics/ethnicity, and religion. Jesus's political proclamation of a new world order (the reign of

God), and his empowerment of the poor and voiceless is for us the point of departure for healing.

Some rough definitions are in order. First, psychological healing in the West is dominated by the scientific paradigm. However, we will view healing through the eyes of clients and professional therapists, whether Western or indigenous non-Western. Second, in the tradition of Aristotle,² we consider the structuring of relationships in traditions to be a political phenomenon. We also include in this rubric the distribution of power and the empowering of minority voices. Politics, ethnicity, and tradition are, in our opinion, linguistically related. Finally, we bring our theological convictions to bear on contemporary psychology/psychotherapy. We are cognizant of our own limitations in addressing these issues but hope our thoughts will stimulate further reflection.

Over the past century, psychology has been practiced in the manner of medical science working from an objective, universal perspective that assumes one can transcend particular traditions. We have little doubt that some good has come from this brand of psychological practice. However, in this book we will explore a different paradigm. Our hope is to generate conversation emerging from a theologically, culturally, and politically sensitive psychotherapy.³

In the Western model, Soheil's suffering would be identified with psychological terms such as "trauma," "depression," and "self." These psychological concepts have respectable histories in Western practice. Beyond their immediate value to clinical psychologists who wish to treat Soheil, each term is freighted with political and cultural meanings. Psychological jargon is heard back home on the evening news, in public school classrooms, in graduate programs, and from the Sunday pulpit shorn clean of its political import. Millions of North Americans worry about their mental health, take pills to enhance it, and write books promoting it. An individualistic psychological vocabulary dominates contemporary definitions of human nature, and with it we diagnose and treat pathology. These are words of enormous utility, but they are seldom understood politically or from within the particular semantic universe of the client.

For Soheil's sake, we believe that facile use of Western psychological concepts is problematic. We do not dispute that Soheil may be traumatized, depressed, and dissociating. But we are concerned that these words, applied in the objective manner of Western psychology, may trample and even violate cherished dimensions of the boy's tradition and forget the political context in which care is given. Soheil is a Muslim from a conservative religious family in a war-torn country living under the powerful presence of a superpower. In his world, "trauma" reflects suffering directly related to moral, religious, and military conflict. There is nothing neutral about it. The world belongs to God (Allah), reflecting cosmic spiritual conflicts between good and evil. Suffering is ultimately subsumed within an understanding of Allah's will. Soheil's religious world is at a linguistic loss to describe "depression." People experience

sadness, but from their perspective it is not necessarily a mental disorder like post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Sadness, for Soheil, becomes a companion to the loss and mourning living amid American military forces. It is typical of a place where sin is considered an everyday reality, requiring expiation through obedience to Qur'anic teachings. The notion of a monadic, apolitical "self" is ludicrous. Religion and politics are inextricably connected in his world. Everything attributed to Soheil's selfhood in actuality is directed toward his soul, his Muslim religion, and his relationships with others. Neither Soheil nor his parents are concerned with an autonomous self in a Western sense. The boy's obligations are directed first to Allah, then to his parents and family, and finally to the hopes of his religio-political community. In spite of the well-meaning intentions of the psychologist who sits before him, the assumptions of Western psychology basic to Soheil's treatment are foreign—and potentially destructive—to his tradition. The great risk is that an objective, apolitical Western psychology may undermine Soheil's ethnic and religious narratives, extending the damage of terrorist bombs. Further, if the therapist is from the United States, he or she may assume that the American presence in Afghanistan can be justified as liberating the Afghans from the Taliban. If Soheil feels otherwise, would the therapist recognize the politicized nature of his or her therapy?

At first blush the Western psychologist may find these concerns preposterous. The past twenty years have witnessed a renaissance in clinical sensitivity to ethnic and religious issues. Psychological training departments across the country have adopted thorough training programs for diversity. A gold standard in clinical education, the American Psychological Association (APA), has pulled out the stops in an effort to sensitize the practice of psychology to the needs of persons with diverse ethnic, religious, and sexual orientations. Western psychologists traveling to places like Afghanistan are presumably better equipped to deal with Soheil and his local tradition than at any time in the history of the profession. For these critics, our concerns may be much ado about nothing.

Additionally, the growth of cross-cultural psychology as a discipline continues to change the field for the better. Psychologists have become conversant with anthropology and other related disciplines.⁴ As a result, clinicians are sensitized to diversity in a way that permits them to effectively build on Soheil's beliefs toward recovery from even the most severe stressors. We would agree that these trends have made the Western psychology of the present day more effective and appropriate than in the past. However, our sense is that despite these advances, we continue to export our psychological vocabulary and syntax, assuming it is generalizable.⁵

Our objection is that ethnicity and religion in the diversity framework effectively reduces traditions such as Soheil's from the sacred to the instrumental. We hope to demonstrate that ethnicity and religion too often become functional,

useful techniques for therapeutic change determined by the psychologist's own definitions and priorities. Soheil's notion of healing, whatever it may be, remains on the shelf. References to Allah or the Qur'an are then only useful instruments applied in the interest of establishing rapport with the boy. Using Soheil's language becomes a clinical advantage when it makes his pathology a little clearer, his language of relationship a little more intelligible.

Diversity in this sense serves the central mission of the clinician to objectively treat pathology within a landscape that fixes human nature in essentialist, Western terms. Soheil's understanding of these issues may be circumscribed to the point where he is no longer a participant in the therapeutic conversation. Like a potted plant, references to indigenous religion and politics are kept at the margins—quietly inhabiting the office corner and collecting dust. Soheil's ethnic and religious tradition in this instance has no life or sacred character; his political context has no relevance.

We acknowledge that the collision between Western psychological universals and particular ethnic traditions may mean little for Americans who lack defined ethnic or religious identities. But for those who have them, the implications are unsettling. As an example, instrumental treatment of African-American identity and spirituality may erode the sacred memory of generations who sought a way out of the darkness of slavery. "Trauma," "depression," and "self" may be more recognizable to African-American clients than to Soheil, but the meaning of these words is not necessarily the same as in the universalistic lexicon of Western psychology. The suffering behind each term invokes a uniquely African-American cachet of idiom and metaphor. The apolitical psychologist who blithely links these concepts with an instrumental approach to African-American ethnicity and spirituality may be socializing the client into a foreign mold. Ironically, no one is immediately aware of what is happening. At the termination of therapy the client lives with a thinly contrived understanding of healing that unconsciously adopts the ahistorical psychologist's words and meanings. The client may find it odd that the new psychological vocabulary doesn't resonate with family and friends but instead creates subtle suspicion. The client may live with a muted sense of "progress" made away from the presenting psychological problem, but in a direction that doesn't seem consistent with African-American spirituality.

We believe that this process belies a subtle insult to the dignity of human beings created in God's image. Rather than recognizing and affirming the client's traditioned sense of healing, the instrumentally trained psychologist unwittingly creates an individual fashioned in the image of Western ideals. Perhaps Christians are aware of this danger. While adopting the training standards of the APA, many Christian psychology programs have also implemented "integration" curricula designed to help psychologists understand the meaning of concepts like trauma, depression, and self at a theological level. Yet this may not be enough. The hegemony of Western psychology is rapidly eroding

the remnants of indigenous Christian understanding of the self, community, politics, and tradition. Social thinkers like Philip Rieff have noted that the triumph of therapeutic vocabulary is sufficiently complete that even clergy have come to redefine their roles principally in psychological terms.⁶

We are concerned that psychological ideology is rapidly eliminating ethnic and religious traditions, one person at a time. For Soheil's sake we are morally compelled to consider the complex issues beneath this process. Because we are Anabaptist Christians with a specific religious identity, we write with self-conscious recognition that our analysis and proposed solution is particular and confessional.⁷ We extend the argument, developed by the first author in a previous publication, that Jesus is a political figure and that by implication Christian psychologists are to be sensitive to the political nature of their work.⁸ From this vantage point we contend that the Christian psychologist must treat Soheil with attention to the particulars of his political situation and his ethnic and religious tradition.⁹ The concepts of trauma, depression, and self must wait for qualification on Soheil's terms. To do this respectfully, the Christian psychologist must be self-conscious of her or his own social location. At its most basic level, psychotherapy with Soheil is an encounter between local narratives where two people, each with their particular traditions, are engaged in conversation. With critical reflection on the Western liberal tradition and respect for Soheil's tradition, the clinician may win the trust that encourages Soheil to lead with his own story, permitting an exchange that embraces local definitions of pathology and that anticipates healing. We contend that the universal objectives of psychology are themselves a tradition capable of being imposed on the ethnic or religious client.

We are challenging the Christian psychologist to be cognizant not only of the client's political and cultural narrative, but also the role of her or his own Christian story in the therapeutic dialogue.¹⁰ The incorporation of particular, local traditions into the clinical conversation gives witness to our conviction that to uncritically employ generalized psychological constructs risks imposing a psychology that is practically atheistic, undertaken as if God doesn't exist.¹¹ Since the psychologist holds in her or his hands the delicate psychic fragments of another human being, maintaining one's Christian authenticity does not mean imposing our Christian story on Soheil. Sitting across from him, we are confronted with a particular individual of inestimable worth to the God who makes healing possible in the first place. Our approach is premised upon incarnation—an encounter between two human beings who each live within stories of existential and transcendent significance.

Briefly, the outline of our argument is as follows. The suffering of the innocent is our point of departure, and Juanita, a Guatemalan, will be our companion through the book. We view her suffering as a continuation of the suffering of Christ who was crucified by the Roman Empire. In her face we see the face of our suffering God. Her suffering, like Christ's, occurred in a

political context. Unfortunately, Western psychologists have been complicit in the suffering of the innocent in their collusion with military projects, their presence at hostile interrogation of prisoners of war in Afghanistan and Iraq, and their presumption that their psychological findings are universal. The attempt to build an empire with a common language failed at Babel. We suggest that it is precisely an empire mentality that the apostle Paul critiques. The antidote to universalism is to focus on the local, and so we valorize ethno-religious particularity.

We are not entirely convinced that Western liberal societies prize ethnic and religious indigeneity and differences. Americans tend to value individual rights more than communal rights. Our argument is that differences in ethnic communities are a gift to society. Pentecost points to the goodness of ethnic particularity in that persons who had come to Jerusalem from all over the ancient Near East heard the gospel in their own tongue! However, we will note the push toward linguistic homogeneity in the public sphere. Instead of marginalizing other voices, we hope for a public space in which a range of voices would be heard. Given the hegemony of secularity, clients tend not to bring their native ethnic or religious voice into therapy.

Because language so powerfully shapes identity, we will encourage therapists to empower clients to use their mother tongue, should they wish to do so. Honoring a client's local language and providing tradition-sensitive therapy seem to make the good gifts of his or her community accessible for healing. We recognize that at times the logic and vocabulary of faith and psychology are very different from each other. We must learn which language is most appropriate at a given moment in therapy. However, we must be cautious when we affirm religiosity in therapy, as we may find ourselves affirming a religiosity shaped by individualism, secularity, and pragmatism rather than the indigenous spirituality of our clients. We will examine a model of therapy appropriate for sacral cultures that seek to live by the love and grace of God.

Rather than imposing a general conception of personality or religiosity, the peaceable therapist relinquishes such power, being open to working from a position of weakness and transparency. Internationally, our task is to empower local mental-health practitioners to mine their own traditions for gifts of healing. The tradition-sensitive psychologist would, accordingly, seek to empower local practitioners to explore the contours of a psychology sensitive to the best values of their culture. Then there is the issue of morality in therapy. We will make a distinction between traditioned and abstract forms of morality. Our focus is on a peaceable Christian approach to psychotherapy, and hence we point to the concrete life of Jesus as the foundation upon which we wish to build our therapeutic ethic and our norm for what it means to have human identity. He who is the Prince of Peace seeks reconciliation of enemies within and beyond our communities. When we appropriate the story of his life, it is a narrative that brings healing. Jesus's continuing presence in

the body of the church is the context in which healing and ethical discernment can occur.

Before we proceed, we wish to make a comment about our intended audience. First, we write to those engaged in work as psychologists and psychotherapists who desire to have their work reflect their commitment to being followers of Christ. Secondly, we wish to challenge those pastors and mental-health workers who think integrative conversation between theology and psychology is between a domesticated Jesus and a depoliticized psychology. Third, we would hope to empower non-Western Christian therapists who are disenchanted with psychotherapy as practiced in the modern world to find their own psychological voices and to bring their indigenous Christianity to the practice of indigenous psychotherapy. Fourth, we are writing to religious psychologists, international mental-health workers, pastors, and theologians concerned about the negative impact of Enlightenment modernist psychology on ethnic and religious groups. Those who are weary of secular objectivism and fundamentalist triumphalism are our conversation partners. This book is for those who wish to see indigenous psychologies flourish—whether in Guatemala, Kenya, or Sichuan—according to the best in their traditions. Given an increasing concern about globalization, this book is for anyone interested in ways one can engage in a conversation between Christian mental-health practitioners from diverse cultural and political contexts.

Our audience is not only the living, but also those who have preceded us. Annie Dillard reminds us that the soil we walk on contains the dead, those who have made it possible for us to go on.¹² For us this includes the faithful saints through the centuries who have sought peace, who lived patiently, actively waiting for the peaceable reign of God, and who were willing to die rather than submit to the story that was imposed upon them. We come from a tradition that has known suffering. During the Reformation our leaders were burned, tortured, and drowned by civil and religious bodies. In our homes, on the shelf beside the Bible was *Martyrs Mirror*,¹³ a book which recounted the testimonies of those whose lives were snuffed out by oppressive ecclesiastical and political authorities from the time of the early church until the time of its first printing in 1660. Then there were our Mennonite grandparents who fled the Ukraine in the 1920s to avoid the random violence. Some fifty thousand were killed. Those deaths were a central theme in the story of our Mennonite people, and, in writing this book, we seek to honor them as well.

We write for the future without making assumptions about how long this book will be in print! We see our writing as a witness for peace that perhaps our grandchildren will read. We live in a time of war, and we cannot remain silent. We have no illusions about what our writing will accomplish. We prefer to think of it as an act of faithful witness to our Lord who empowered a Samaritan woman, who healed the ear of an enemy soldier even as they came for him, and who suffered rather than be violent.

1

Suffering, Symptoms, and the Cross



Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering.

Mark 8:31

But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.

Psalms 86:15

The late-night Guatemalan rain has washed clean the morning air, but already diesel fumes from the nearby thoroughfare are drifting through the window.¹ The bougainvilleas along the eastern wall of our domicile are bright red, the color of suffering. Blue petals from the jacaranda tree in the courtyard fall to earth gently, unlike the way power descends on the heads of the innocent. I (AD) hear the crying of children from the San Pedro Negro Hospital next door—the sick are watched over by a black saint. Are the poor, who mourn and are hungry, actually blessed? Will the meek of Guatemala inherit the earth, or simply more violence from expansionist nations?

I have returned again with my students to this land of suffering. The soil is scorched from a civil war lasting thirty-six years, a conflict between government militia and guerrilla fighters. A million people were displaced. Two hundred thousand Indians from the rural highlands were killed. Some 440 Mayan communities were decimated. In 1996 the Guatemalan peace accords were signed, but the cumulative effect of death and emigration is such that 43 percent of the population is now under fourteen years of age.² The fires

of civil war were fueled by American paranoia of communist sympathizers in the 1950s, along with capitalist interests in the form of conglomerate fruit companies, and prejudice against native peoples.

Our group is composed of mental-health clinicians in training from the Graduate School of Psychology at Fuller Theological Seminary. Back in the relative tranquility of Pasadena, a small bronze statue in the campus courtyard offers a reason for our coming. The statue represents the mission of the School of Psychology—a cross (✝) embedded in the Greek letter *psi* (Ψ). It symbolizes our desire to keep the cross of suffering in the heart of our work as professional therapists. Being in Guatemala is our way of remembering the suffering of the innocent. Perhaps this experience will help us shape the contours of a peaceable psychology. We wish to experience deeply the lives of the Guatemalans we meet and to consider our professional practice from the perspective of the poor, the forgotten, and the wounded.

The concern for a peaceable psychology in this book emerges from the fact that we saw victims of empire-building in Guatemala. In this chapter we outline some of the contours of this psychology. A peaceable psychology privileges the suffering of the poor and the language they use to understand it. Christian psychologists who focus on peace affirm a peaceable view of atonement, yearn for reconciliation and depend on the hope that comes with Christ's resurrection.

To flesh out these themes we will meet Juanita, whose emotional life carries the scars of violence. At least a part of a therapist's responsibility is to assist clients' finding meaning for their lives; another part is symptom relief. We wrestle with the problem of viewing troubling experiences primarily in terms of symptoms rather than in terms of suffering. Symptoms point to an underlying cause, while suffering calls for new meanings. We propose that meaning may be evident in local stories. Hence, we encourage the indigenous persons to give voice to their experience. Moreover, there may be meaning for Juanita in the fact that Jesus suffered in the context of political oppression but still advocated a peaceable reign of God. That is, a Christian psychotherapist understands suffering in terms of Jesus's suffering and believes in the resurrection hope for reconciliation.³

Our North American psychology presents itself largely as apolitical and religiously aloof, and that implicates the kind of meaning given to suffering.⁴ Is our psychology sensitive to issues of power and oppression? Is it possible that some elements of our American psychology are insensitive to issues of justice or local concerns? We wonder what cross of suffering will be placed in the heart of psychology without reflection on these and other questions that emerge from the real suffering of a forgotten people.

Nestled among Guatemala's volcanic mountains lies the small village of Santiago de Atitlán. The serene ambiance, however, belies a violent history. Juanita's⁵ experience will serve to illustrate the main themes of this book. This is the story of a Guatemalan woman known to the first author (AD) that we have adapted into a therapeutic context. The experience of Juanita is as she tells

it. Contextualizing her story in a therapeutic setting is our way of illustrating a peaceable psychology. In her first session with her counselor she says:

I am going to tell you my personal history and about my community. It hurts me to tell this story . . . each time I remember it, the feelings come back strong . . . but it is important that you know how we have lived.

In 1979, the violence began here. We heard that there was going to be a civil war, but didn't know what that was. They told us that in a civil war there would be dead people in the streets—but it wasn't that way. First, pamphlets were placed under our doors with the name of the organization, ORPA. The papers said we should protect the members of this organization, open our doors to them and hide them in our homes. I remember the first day the guerrillas walked by my house. When they passed, they greeted us with, "Good afternoon, friends," and I responded by saying, "God bless you." I didn't know at the time if they were guerrillas or soldiers, but they greeted us very kindly. They went to the central plaza and hung a large ORPA banner. They invited the townspeople to a conference in the plaza. Many went to hear them. There weren't any problems that night; some people gave Coca-Cola, bread, and other gifts to this group who had come into the community.

The next day, there were problems. The first thing we heard was that my brothers appeared on a list that was being circulated. It had the names of all the people who had attended the meeting. You see, the military has its commissioners, representatives who spy in the community. It was just a few days later that the army came, and that night we had our first kidnapping. The first to be kidnapped was a distant relative, whom we were close to, and another man. People were afraid. I went to visit the wife of the man. She didn't know why they had taken her husband, but they were armed and wearing white clothing.

The next day there was another kidnapping . . . this time an ex-seminarian. He was asleep in his bed. They kicked the door in, dragged him out of bed and threw him against the wall so many times that his head split open and left bloodstains on the wall. The kidnappings went on and on, not just at nighttime, but in the daytime when people went out to work in their fields and didn't return. The violence became so bad that people didn't even sleep in their own homes. I went to stay with my sister. Only the military had the right to walk in the streets after 5 p.m.

The community joined together by opening the churches and starting a prayer chain. But we couldn't resolve anything, and many people went to sleep in the churches thinking that the violence would end in just a matter of days. There were so many people in the church that we had to sleep sitting up. At that time, the army did not have the right to enter the churches. The violence continued and we couldn't keep staying at the churches. People stopped coming to visit us here, as everyone was afraid to walk around the streets.

I remember a day when things were a little calmer for us when the army left at Christmas time. When they left, we celebrated a peaceful Christmas, New Year's, and also Three Kings Day, all without the military. They left for only two weeks. They returned on January 7 (1980) around midday. Two truckloads of soldiers passed by my house. A few minutes later we heard the first shots . . .

gunshots, bombs, or grenades . . . I'm not sure. A Canadian friend came by and asked me where my husband was working, and I pointed towards the gunfire. I got really afraid—the shooting wouldn't stop. The streets were full of people. We were asking each other, "Where is your husband? Where is your son? Where is your father?" Later that afternoon two helicopters arrived. The doors were open and soldiers were pointing guns down at the community. We were all afraid and I began to cry because I had no news of my husband or my father.

The gunfire stopped about 5 p.m. We saw the trucks coming this way, and we hid in the house. I still had hope that my husband was alive. The community organized a commission to go to the area of shooting and investigate. Some of my relatives were on the commission; I stayed in the house with my children and my mother. The first person they found was a teacher, and he was dead. Then they found another pregnant teacher, also dead. They walked near the edge of the lake and found a man whose whole torso was cut open. Others were tied to coffee plants. The commission returned with some of the bodies and reported what they had found.⁶

O God, hear the cries of the innocent.
 Are not the poor your people?
 Did you not bring your people out of Egypt?
 Where were you when Juanita's people suffered in Guatemala?
 Hear, O God, the pleas of the downtrodden.⁷

We are often asked why we have come to Guatemala. To hear the stories of Guatemalan people, we say. But stories like Juanita's are beginning to overwhelm us. As clinical psychologists, despair and lament should be familiar territory. But the suffering of the thousands who lived through the Guatemalan civil war changes the landscape of psychological theory and practice for us. Theirs is a suffering that comes from political and institutional violence rather than occupational stress, marital conflict, or children who act out. Such pain is a product of a larger political problem that often escapes the attention of the North American therapeutic community. Their suffering is partly a consequence of political and economic expansionism. What form of healing is sensitive to issues of injustice, local political issues, and the thickness of Guatemalan spirituality?

Symptomology or Suffering

Our reflections on a peaceable psychology and suffering emerge directly from Juanita's narrative and the plight of persecuted ethnic minorities and religious communities around the world. The welfare of indigenous peoples is jeopardized by governments around the world: Montagnards in Vietnam, the Karen in Burma, the Kurds in the four countries they call home, the Copts and Bahais in Egypt, the First Nations in the Americas. It is especially so if religion is part

of the ethnic culture. What are the characteristics of a peaceable psychology that responds to the suffering of the marginalized?

A peaceable psychology cannot avoid addressing the *meaning* of suffering for the individual. A Christian therapist can respond to violence with psychological insight and compassion that is theologically informed. Juanita's story points to the integral role suffering plays in human life. We see Juanita's suffering in view of the role violence plays in society to maintain order. How might Christ's life and death shed light on the nature of suffering? Christ's suffering is relevant because he, like the Guatemalan Indians, suffered innocently. Suffering must be understood, as illustrated by Juanita's experience, both ethically and politically. Do Christian psychologists possess such frameworks for understanding suffering?

It is not clear whether mental-health professionals understand profound suffering. They may understand symptoms, but do they understand *suffering*? Ronald Miller points out that while psychology enjoys considerable popularity as a profession, there is a fundamental dissociation between the discipline as a science and the suffering of clients. Despite the fact that his book is published by the American Psychological Association (APA), the opening chapter is entitled "American Psychological Dissociation."⁸ The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSMIV-TR) speaks of distress, disturbance, and suicidal ideas, but it does not address suffering. Perhaps it is because suffering is a moral concept which we have reduced to a catalog of symptoms.⁹ Edwin Gantt wonders whether, by its uncritical adoption of the medical model of pathology and clinical practice, contemporary psychology "has robbed itself of the possibility of genuinely understanding the radically ethical nature and significance of human suffering."¹⁰ Viktor Frankl addressed the suffering of the innocent directly from his Jewish perspective.¹¹ For him suffering is inevitable, but we can choose how to respond. M. Scott Peck opens his book *The Road Less Traveled* with the simple statement, "Life is difficult."¹² In the 1960s, psychologist David Bakan expressed the hope that a psychology of suffering would emerge.¹³ We believe this vision remains unrealized. For the mechanistic model implicit in various contemporary psychological theories, suffering is a symptom of underlying psychological or biological processes which, if skillfully addressed, can be alleviated. In the pragmatic paradigm of psychological practice, the larger ethical and political dimensions of suffering are often lost. The client's communal narrative of suffering is forgotten, and the meaning of suffering is privatized. Healing then becomes a matter of locating the correct technique to assuage discomfort.

Juanita's experience demands a moral response. Hers is innocent suffering. If we are open to the possibility, Emmanuel Lévinas tells us, the suffering of the other will interrupt our psychic life, rupture our consciousness, and sear our unconscious sense of stability.¹⁴ It will undermine our quick and ready

explanations of suffering. The suffering of the other makes an ethical demand on me; it is not something I simply observe as a neutral bystander. Our tendency is to view the other as the same as ourselves, to possess the same human nature. To do so is to deny the radical otherness of the person in pain. We may rush in to diagnose, interpret, and explain the suffering individual, and in doing so we may evade the full impact of their pain.

If Juanita were our client, would her suffering fully impact us? Or would we be distracted by our need to quickly reduce her sadness? Juanita's face is the face of our suffering God. She is not simply a client to be diagnosed and treated. She represents the innocent who suffer, and we are implicated in such violence. As psychologists trained in North America, apart from theological and political understanding, we could harm Juanita.

Indigenous Meanings of Suffering

The mountains are colored in variations of blue as we ascend and descend the winding roads of the Guatemalan highlands. As we sit on their workbenches, the widows of the Ruth and Naomi Co-op are bringing out plates of beans, rice, and fried chicken. Surrounded by their handicraft, we hear their experiences of the war. They know that their husbands disappeared and that they must now sell what they have created on their saddle looms to care for their children and grandchildren. However, they seem unaware of the fact that our government was deeply embroiled in the conflict that caused them so much pain. With quiet humility they tell their story of suffering to people like us.

A peaceable psychology takes seriously the particular, local stories reflective of an indigenous psychology. We cannot ignore the fact that therapy involves a culturally particular conversation. The local grammar of healing in Guatemala might look different from that of clinical interventions in the United States. It seems to us that a Christian psychology would, given the history of Guatemala over the past four decades and the experiences of victimization by our North American clients, be compelled to reflect emically on the suffering of an innocent people and a theology which addresses this suffering. There, as here, we are confronted with the effects of structural evil—racism against native peoples, the accumulation of wealth on the backs of the poor, politically expedient instead of peaceable solutions. How can one respond theologically so as to comfort and empower the innocent who suffer?¹⁵ A peaceable psychology responds to the effects of such violence with the suffering and resurrection of Jesus. If we wish to avoid the negative political consequences of North American psychological practices, our peaceable psychology would do well to begin with particular, local stories reflective of a commitment to indigeneity.¹⁶

The Suffering Christ

To understand Juanita's suffering we begin by remembering that Jesus lived in a political world dominated by the Romans. Evidence suggests that there was a long history of Israelite resistance to alien oppressive rule reaching back to the bondage in Egypt. After a Jewish revolt in 4 BCE, Roman general Varus burned the town of Sepphoris and crucified two thousand men. It was the Roman way of eliciting loyalty (*pistis*).¹⁷ The narrative of Jesus's life begins with a registration of all citizens by Emperor Augustus (Luke 2:1-20). Jesus's response to the Roman presence was not to lead an insurrection, but to announce the imminence of the reign of God—that is, a judgment on rulers who usurp God's rule, and a proclamation of a coming peaceful reign. Given a Roman coin, he said: "Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's" (Matt. 22:21). To pay tribute to Rome was against Moses's covenantal law, and not to pay it would have been treason. Ancient Near Eastern listeners who did not separate religion from politics would have known that Jesus's response was a veiled way of saying that God has priority over Caesar.¹⁸ Like the Jews of Christ's day, the Guatemalans have lived with political occupation and oppression—a truth Juanita would understand.

Second, our meaning-oriented response to Juanita's suffering builds on Jesus's words. In a violent society, honor is built on hierarchy. But Jesus turns the hierarchy upside down. In the Sermon on the Mount, the poor and oppressed are honored. Jesus's view of the dishonored was subversive of Rome's hegemony. What we translate as "blessed" might be better translated as "honored."¹⁹

Honored are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
 Honored are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.
 Honored are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.
 Honored are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.
 Honored are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.
 Honored are the pure in heart, for they will see God.
 Honored are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.
 Honored are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
 Honored are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. (Matt. 5:3–11)

Those who are meek, poor, hungry, mourning losses, and yearning for justice are honored. The Christians we met in Guatemala were crushed in

spirit but remained dependent on the kingdom of heaven. They mourned the loss of life in their communities but were comforted by faith in God's justice. Such people inherit the earth through meekness rather than violence. Their hunger for justice results in death but also participates in the liberating power of God's peace. When they make peace with their enemies they are called the children of God.

We can only conclude that the words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount are as descriptive as they are prescriptive. The Beatitudes are not simply ideals which, if fulfilled, ensure well-being and success. Rather, they describe people who are already participating in the reign of God. Their lives already reflect Christ's presence. Glen Stassen and David Gushee point out: "Jesus was saying that we are blessed because we are experiencing God's reign in our midst and will experience it yet more in the future reign."²⁰ Reflecting on our time in Guatemala, we suspect our experiences were sightings of the honored in the reign of God.

A Christian psychology that seeks meaning in suffering will give attention not only to the political context and the words of Christ, but also to the life of Christ in which he overcame the evil powers of discrimination against Samaritans (John 4), the neglect of the poor (Luke 4:18), the marginalization of women (Luke 10:38–42), and the hatred of the Romans (Matt. 5:38–42). This too is the work of atonement in salvation and healing. There is consistency between the incarnated nature of Jesus's identity and his death on the cross. When Irenaeus was asked why Christ came down from heaven, the answer was "that He might destroy sin, overcome death, and give life to man."²¹

We understand the meaning of Juanita's suffering not only through Jesus's words and life, but also through his death on a cross. But how do we understand the meaning of the cross of Christ? For many Christians the meaning is simple, if familiar. We are saved personally by the death of Christ, who paid the penalty of sin and reconciled us to God the Father. Perhaps, unintentionally, this shifts the focus of suffering from the other to how Christ's death benefits me, to my suffering and my salvation. But is this the only way of understanding the healing work of Christ's death? After all, Jesus's message was so threatening he was crucified by a Roman governor on a Roman cross, a humiliating form of execution used to intimidate a colonized people.²²

To victims of violence, it might matter that God suffered as Christ died, that Christ is a model for how to suffer, and that reconciliation with one's enemies is one way we can also be healed. The crucifixion of Jesus explicitly mirrors the arbitrariness and stark reality of suffering. Within the Christian tradition there are those who have asserted that the death and resurrection of Jesus should be understood as an expression of self-giving for his followers. We do well to follow his example.²³

If the cross is integral to our work as Christian therapists, then our theory and practice must be changed by the stories of people like Juanita. If we

wish our work as psychologists to be peaceable, our approach to healing will necessarily be framed by the cross of a suffering God. Remaining open to the suffering of others is integral to being a follower of Jesus.²⁴ To wait for the reign of God to come in fullness requires patience and the willingness to suffer.²⁵ Jesus tells his disciples that suffering is part of his future role as Messiah. But Jesus goes further. It is not only he who must suffer—those who follow him are asked to embrace the same possibility. “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it” (Mark 8:34–35). Clearly the cross is at the heart of what it means to be a disciple. When the Guatemalans or other victims of abuse suffer, they suffer in the same way that Jesus suffered—innocently. Indeed, I am my brother’s or sister’s keeper when my heart is open to their pain. How central to our professional lives as clinicians is the suffering that comes as a result of systemic social sin?

Christ’s call to “take up the cross” implies that pain and suffering in life is not an arbitrary or capricious element in human affairs. Nietzsche rejected this admonition as “gutter religion.” What psychologist in today’s wealthy, comfortable, powerful, predominantly Christian America would want to be reminded that the Christian God is a vulnerable God who hung on a cross?²⁶ Perhaps, as the apostle Paul reminds us, the cross and cross-bearing are still a scandal for most of us.²⁷ John Howard Yoder has argued that in the taking up of the cross, Jesus is our model.²⁸ It is the key to understanding Jesus’s life. Jürgen Moltmann has drawn our attention repeatedly to the suffering Christ, the crucified God.²⁹ The cross implies a peaceable psychology which is in solidarity with the suffering of the poor and oppressed.

We propose that the cross at the heart of psychological practice is the suffering of our clients who have been violated. On the cross God identifies with the victims of violence. God’s priority is to identify with those who suffer violence, those who cannot defend themselves. The justice of God is the justice of compassion, the justice of the God of the widows and the fatherless (Ps. 68:4–6). Those who hurt the poor also hurt God. God is then a victim of the violent. A peaceable psychology suffers with the poor, anticipating a healing that places psychological technique within the larger purposes of God’s Spirit present in the therapist–client relationship. This is far from a detached position of observation and clinical diagnosis.

We see the suffering of Juanita in the light of Christ’s suffering as a political scapegoat. The violence that resulted in the death of Juanita’s husband was an attempt by the Guatemalan government to create social order in the face of a threat. When the scapegoat is killed, society experiences a feeling of catharsis and peace. But it is an illusory peace. This is the sacrificial logic of totality, of empire. In Guatemala, highland Indians in general, and Juanita’s husband in particular, were the scapegoats.

Neither Guatemalans nor Jews in the Holocaust died like protagonists in a Greek tragedy. They died as Christ did—victims of political violence. A peaceable psychology will not romanticize death. David Bentley Hart comments:

None of the mystifications of tragic consciousness should be allowed to intrude here, no talk of a conflict of divine necessities or natural forces should divert attention from the truth that these lives were unmade by the quite contingent political arrangements of an unjust order, and by the demonic cruelty of human sin. Their deaths were without meaning, beauty, or grandeur.³⁰

Hart views suffering and violence as universal, historical, particular, and demands an act of justice and rescue from God. A peaceable psychology refuses to be reconciled to such loss of good creation and hopes for reconciliation that is redemptive. As Christians we are the people of God with a memory of suffering.³¹ Such a memory predisposes us to see a person first, not as living in sin, as guilty, but as one who suffers.

As Christian psychologists who seek peace, we understand Christ's death on the cross as an act of love, a gift given to God the Father. In his death Jesus continues to retell the human story according to a true pattern of loving obedience and humility. Even in the midst of a social order that sacrifices to reinforce the status quo, the sacrifice of Jesus overcomes it by living out his life in obedience to God. The overthrow of violence is accomplished by peaceful self-donation. Yoder states:

Christ was exactly what God meant humans to be: in free communion with God, obeying God and loving others—even his enemies—with God's love. . . . [P]erfect love in obedience had to be lived in the world of sinners, respecting the liberty of sinners to be unloving. Thus *agape* comes to mean nonresistance, bearing the other's sinfulness, bearing, literally, our sins. . . . The imagery of sacrifice is particularly relevant here. For the ultimate sacrifice, the sacrifice of self, is precisely giving oneself utterly to communion-obedience with God. This is what Jesus did in letting God express *agape* through his "obedience unto death, the death of the cross."³²

Faithfulness to and love for God cost Jesus his life in a violent world. Our appropriate response to this act of suffering is repentance and faith. Repentance points not only to sorrow, but to ethics, to a changed life. Faith is more than assent; it is a sense of commitment to obedience and union with the death of Christ as a gift of love. Forgiveness is then not so much the lifting of a sentence as it is the removing of obstacles to restored communion with God.

Finally, in the face of the sufferer—Juanita, for example—we glimpse the face of our suffering God. The God of Jesus Christ is one who suffers.³³ After the death of his son in a tragic climbing accident in 1983, Nicholas Wolterstorff,

a Christian philosopher and emeritus faculty member of the Yale Divinity School, wrote the following:

For a long time I knew that God is not the impassive, unresponsive, unchanging being portrayed by the classical theologians. I knew of the pathos of God. I knew of God's response of delight and of his response of displeasure. But strangely, his suffering I never saw before.

God is not only the God of the sufferers but the God who suffers. The pain and fallenness of humanity have entered into his heart. Through the prism of my tears I have seen a suffering God.

It is said of God that no one can behold his face and live. I always thought this meant that no one could see his splendor and live. A friend said perhaps it meant that no one could see his sorrow and live. Or perhaps his sorrow is splendor.³⁴

If I am open to the suffering of God, I will be changed. If I sense a deep connectedness to the suffering of my client, her face makes an ethical claim on me since I am, in ways I do not know, responsible for her suffering. She invites me to empty myself, to create a space within me for her.

From his prison cell Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote that it is "only the suffering God that can help."³⁵ Following the suffering servant motif described in Isaiah 53, Moltmann goes further and argues that in the death of Jesus there is healing in that the perpetrators of violence are brought to repentance.³⁶ The Jesus who dies on the cross, who experiences God's abandonment, portrays for us the suffering God. The scandal of the cross is that for the innocent and the obedient, suffering remains their lot.

Peaceable Atonement?

There is considerable controversy over the meaning of the cross and Christ's suffering. Pacifists, feminist and womanist theologians, and therapists have objected to an image of God as condoning violence.³⁷ As an innocent sufferer in the divine plan, Jesus is portrayed as a voluntary but passive victim of violence. This model suggests that violence can be instrumental for reconciliation and healing with God. However, an abused person may model this passive approach or even accept it as God's will for her or his life. This contrasts with the Jesus who invites us to love our enemies, who makes visible the peaceable reign of God.³⁸ A theology that emphasizes that "Jesus died for my sins," while a healing balm for the individual soul, has also been used to defend slavery and colonial oppression.³⁹ The relationship between God and humanity as the resolution of an abstract legal formula occurs beyond history, while the suffering of Guatemalans and our clients occurs within history. One might also ask whether Christians too quickly adopt

the model of an angry God who needs to be pacified in order to justify wars to exterminate evil.

As summarized by Gustaf Aulén, in the history of the church there are three classic theologies of suffering and healing.⁴⁰ The first is the *Christus Victor* model (held in various forms by the early church fathers); it focuses on the drama of history in which there is a conflict between God and the evil powers of the world. Christ suffers because of the powers and is victorious over them.⁴¹ The second is often referred to as the *penal satisfaction* model of reconciliation and healing. This theory proposes that human sin so offended God's honor and so upset the divine order of the universe that the suffering and death of Jesus the God-human was necessary to avert God's anger. Since the law required that sin be punished, Jesus, in submitting to death, paid the penalty. A third interpretation of suffering comes from Abelard in the twelfth century and suggests that Jesus's death was a *moral act of God* to model for us God's love.⁴²

The meaning of Christ's suffering on the cross differs in each of these models. In the *Christus Victor* model, suffering is a consequence of historical evil; whereas in the *penal satisfaction* model, death is aimed at restoring God's honor. The latter's approach seems to imply that God foreordains the death of Jesus, while in the *Christus Victor* model it is the evil powers that kill Jesus. While the *Christus Victor* model was most common in the first millennium after Christ, the theory that "Jesus died for me" has dominated the West for the past millennium.

Each view of atonement was a response to a particular social and historical context, and we will follow this same hermeneutic.⁴³ It is significant that the *Christus Victor* model emerged in response to empires.⁴⁴ Perhaps this simple fact justifies its relevance for today—as evidenced by Western political interests in Guatemala or more recently in the Middle East. According to this reading, the cross symbolizes the conflict between God and evil. Christ died as an innocent man in the context of the Roman Empire.

We have reviewed Aulén because of his historic role in discussing these forms of atonement. His treatment has, however, been critiqued as stereotypic, and we agree with James McClendon, who has suggested that we should not be limited to the metaphors described by Aulén.⁴⁵ The New Testament, he points out, uses metaphors of war (justice and judgment, punishment and substitution), of military victory, of sacrifice, and of family. Overall, we would agree with John Howard Yoder when he comments:

We have seen that the satisfaction theories are the most serious answers found in the history of Christian theology in the sense that they answer the question of piety. They make sense in prayer. They call forth praise, gratitude, and commitment. Therefore they are deeply rooted in the life of the common believer. We need to recognize and respect the theory because of that moral strength.

But we have also seen that it is a biblically unsatisfactory theory. It makes systematic assumptions counter to the meaning of the doctrine of the Trinity. If consistently applied in its own logic it would be ahistorical and universalist in its implications. It gives us a vision of God as a judge rather than as a reconciling and loving Father.⁴⁶

Yearning for Reconciliation

A peaceable psychology yearns for reconciliation with enemies: between warring tribal factions, between superpowers and developing nations, between religious minorities and secular democratic liberalism, between ethnic majorities and minorities, and between an angry father and an alienated son. Hence, we wonder how Christ's suffering mediates reconciliation and healing. If we confess the lordship of Christ, then his nonviolent stance should in some manner inform the nature of our therapy. The scandal of the cross is that nonviolence can be transformational in nature. Such peace is inaugurated not through political aggression or therapeutic prowess but through the peaceable reign of God.

Rather than an exclusive focus on individual change, we are concerned with social and historical transformation. Our focus is not on ontology, but rather on ethics and history. In our view the cross is not a result of a cosmic conflict between good and evil or a metaphysical dualism between mind and matter, something and nothing, human and divine. The victory over evil powers in history brings about a new relationship—reconciliation between God and the world. Most importantly, this reconciliation is the work of a peaceable God. If Jesus is the full revelation of God, as is declared by the Council of Nicea, then God must be nonviolent. If Jesus is fully the revelation of God, then God cannot be violent while Jesus is nonviolent.

A peaceable psychology, then, involves reconciliation. How is Christ's death peaceable when its context is so obviously and terribly violent? How is the death and resurrection of Jesus therapeutically relevant in Guatemala or in the American therapist's office? It is Christ who mediates the reconciliation and healing of humanity from a broken existence imbued with suffering. Sanctification means that Christ bound humanity to God's self in and through his own suffering. As an act of solidarity with humanity, Christ's suffering on the cross is a reconciling ministry of grace against brokenness and estrangement. In the act of binding humanity to God's person, Christ permits us to forgive the enemy and to live in reconciliation with those who violate us. Thus in Christ is found the reconciliation and healing of persons with God through the objective reality of the cross.

The reconciling atonement of Christ is not spiritual alone but contains physical, psychological, and social dimensions of human brokenness. The suffering

God is a beckoning God, who in Christ offers the potential of a new beginning. Consequently, a peaceable psychology is an incarnational event whereupon the invisible spiritual reality of God's grace is attached to and bound up in the visible life of both the victim and the offender. A peaceable psychology is concerned that pathology be framed within the larger rubric of the victim's estrangement from God, from others, and from self. Christian psychology takes up the cross, fully aware that the brokenness and suffering of the client is understood by the suffering of Christ, who images the suffering God.

God bears the pain of a world of suffering rather than responding with judgment and violence. Our focus here is not on Jesus's death for our sins, but on God's love for us, which is healing and peace-giving. Moltmann comments:

So how does atonement reach the people who commit injustice and violence? It reaches them out of the compassion of the Father, through the vicariously suffered God-forsakenness of the Son, and in the exonerating power of the Holy Spirit. It is a single movement of love, welling up out of the Father's pain, manifested in the Son's sufferings, and experienced in the Spirit of Life. In this way God becomes the God of the godless. His righteousness and justice justifies the unrighteous and the unjust.⁴⁷

The focus here is not on a retributive God who demands the death of Jesus as propitiation. God does not demand the death of the perpetrators, but rather bears the suffering.⁴⁸ Atonement is God's welcoming of the enemy, of the other. It is an invitation to new life, to freedom from sin. This is the basis of a peaceable psychology.

Resurrection Hope

A Christian psychology rests in the profound message of hope contained in the resurrection of Christ. The resurrection points to the victory of God over the powers of empire. This new life is genuine fellowship—peace with God. Salvation is the preservation and bestowal of life because the victory of God over the powers of evil is a just peace occasioned not by violence but by persuasion. Hart points out:

Easter unveils the violence of history, its absolute ungodliness, its want of any transcendent meaning; the meaninglessness and tyranny of death is made absolutely clear in the Father having to raise the Son for the sake of his love. . . . In the light of Easter, the singularity of suffering is no longer tragic (which is to say, ennobling), but merely horrible, mad, everlastingly unjust; it is the irruption of *thanatos* into God's good creation. . . . In the light of Easter, all the sacrifices totality makes are seen to be meaningless, an offense before God, disclosing no deeper truths about being; the system of sacrifice is a tautology, a practice that

justifies itself through further practice; what the totality is willing to sacrifice on behalf of metaphysical solace is what God raises up. Because of the resurrection, it is impossible to be reconciled to coercive or natural violence, to ascribe its origins to fate or cosmic order, to employ it prudentially; as difficult as it may be to accept, all violence, all death, stands under judgment as that which God has and will overcome.⁴⁹

The good news is that the powers of evil are conquered nonviolently by the resurrection, the ascension, and the continued presence of a peaceable church in a hostile world. This, it seems to us, is good news to Guatemalans and people oppressed by empires or scarred by familial violence.

The village of Santiago de Atitlan witnessed a peaceable religious faith. On December 1, 1990, when soldiers had shot a local in a skirmish, the village was in an uproar. Ringing church bells brought the townspeople to the village center. In the early hours of the morning, between two and three thousand people marched peacefully to the military garrison, demanding an end to the harassment. They carried no weapons. Reportedly because of confusion in their ranks, soldiers fired into the crowd. In the ensuing massacre, thirteen individuals were martyred for the cause of peace. Three weeks later, then-president Vinicio Cerezo ordered the removal of the military base from Santiago. The kidnappings stopped. This powerful combination of faith and action eventually led to peace accords some six years later.⁵⁰

A peace park now stands as testimony to the courage of the slain villagers. Stones for the park were taken from the barracks as it was disassembled. The park commemorates the deaths (including that of an eleven-year-old boy) with plaques in the exact places where they fell. A letter from the president is engraved on marble as a reminder. When villagers involved in the construction of the park came across a mass grave, Guatemalan military officials warned that further digging would mean the army would return. It was a fragile peace. The villagers complied with the request but left a gaping hole in the ground as a reminder.

Pedro, now a septuagenarian, witnessed the massacre and told the story as he stood proudly beside the monument with the engraved letter of the president. When Pedro was asked why the town of Santiago resisted when other communities had not, he smiled. "Santiago is a religious community," he said. On that day, Catholics, Pentecostals, and various other Protestant groups came together to protest. "It is the hope of our faith," he stated simply, "that gave us strength then and today."⁵¹