

## Book Reviews

### **A Peaceable Psychology: Christian Therapy in a World of Many Cultures**

**Alvin Dueck and Kevin R. Reimer**

2009. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press

Reviewed by Anthony J. Headley

I found *A Peaceable Psychology: Christian Therapy in a World of Many Cultures* a most insightful, provocative and challenging read. The book fits within the broader multicultural literature on psychology but uniquely wedds to it a distinctive Christian perspective. In it, the authors describe their vision of a peaceable psychology. The term, a peaceable psychology, is no simple concept to grasp. Rather, it is complex and multifaceted, demanding multiple lenses to understand its nature. However, the authors did a superb job in attempting to make their vision plain. This vision is made clear by contrasting it with Western psychology and laying out singular aspects of a peaceable psychology. In the process, they drew upon a rich body of resources, including a variety of disciplines such as theology, philosophy, sociology and history among others, in order to provide breadth and depth to the subject. I found the journey into these various realms fascinating, mind-stretching and illuminating.

In different chapters within the book, the authors described concepts such as an empire psychology, *secularese*, boutique multiculturalism, thick and thin psychology, and morality. Through these chapters, the authors provided a withering critique of mainstream Western psychology, in particular, American psychology. For example, in chapter two, the authors used the concept of *empire* to critique American psychology's collusion with military projects and procedures and its neglect of the local traditions of the cultures into which it is imported. They noted that, "... American psychology is so enculturated that it reflects the same values that characterize the political and economic priorities of the nation" (p. 37). Similarly, in chapter four, they discussed *secularese*, described as psychology's lingua franca. For them, *secularese* is the primary psychological medium for communication.

Unfortunately, this medium marginalizes the religious language of clients. But *secularise* is not only a language but also a set of practices emptied of the transcendent and relying only on dysfunction and pathology to explain human situations.

Through these and other terms elucidated in the other chapters, the authors described a psychology which largely stands in contrast to a peaceable psychology. For them, Western psychology fundamentally negates clients' religious and ethnic particularity. In contrast, a peaceable psychology validates these aspects of the client. In addition, it takes seriously the presence of evil and privileges the poor and their language. It is willing to relinquish power, suffers with the poor, advocates for the voiceless, responds to the effects of violence and seeks reconciliation. A peaceable psychology also looks to Christ, seeing him as a lens for understanding individual suffering and as the foundation upon which one builds a therapeutic ethic and practice. The authors used several examples from different cultures, primarily Latin American, to further illustrate their theme. Most prominently, they used the example of Juanita, a Guatemalan woman who had experienced violence during the civil war, including the cruel killing of her husband. For the authors, Juanita's suffering face represents the face of the suffering God and is not simply a client to be diagnosed and treated. Rather, according to the authors, a peaceable psychology would respond "...to the effects of such violence with the suffering and resurrection of Jesus" (p. 22)

To further flesh out its meaning, the authors splattered across the book little nuggets which described the nature of a peaceable psychology. These descriptions largely focused on what a peaceable psychology does. I offer a few of these examples: "A peaceable psychology privileges the suffering of the poor and the language they use to understand it" (p. 18). "A peaceable psychology takes seriously the particular, local stories reflective of an indigenous psychology" (p. 22). "... a peaceable psychology does not impose a common language on the "public square" of therapy." It invites the client to bring his or her "private" religious language into the public setting of therapy" (p. 73). In addition, in chapter nine, the authors provided some examples of persons who practice a peaceable psychology. They pointed to José, a Central American psychologist concerned with reconciliation and Ignacio *Martín-Baró*, a social psychologist in El Salvador who "... wrote passionately about a psychology that could be liberating, that was just, and not a servant of violent government." (p. 186).

The end product of these varied efforts to describe a peaceable psychology is a topic and book which are well illustrated and depicted. I came away from these discussions with my mind stimulated, my eyes opened in a fresh way and with new insights and concepts for understanding how psychology has been shaped by a western mindset. I also came away with

new thoughts and perspectives on how different psychology might operate if it was grounded on Christ.

However, although I largely agreed with many of the conclusions drawn, I also came away with some questions. Given their austere critique of Western and American psychology, I wondered whether the envisioned peaceable psychology could be taught within a program in the West and more specifically in the USA. Moreover, given the preponderance of positive examples drawn from Latin American people, cultures and psychological practitioners, I wondered if the authors implied that only such cultures could truly approach their vision. If this is the case, what are the implications for training in the West? Does this mean that training programs in the USA, especially those which self-identify as Christian (including those at which the authors teach), are truly incapable of developing a peaceable psychology? Would such programs have to step outside of their Western biased culture to begin to approach this vision? In some ways, the answer seems to be yes, especially when one considers that at least one of the authors does quite a bit of training of his graduate students in such cultural contexts.

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## Globalization and Theology

**Joerg Rieger**

*Horizons in Theology*

Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010

Reviewed by *Nathan Crawford*

Joerg Rieger's *Globalization and Theology* is another fine contribution to come out of Abingdon Press' series *Horizons in Theology*. This series seeks to theologically illuminate areas that are quite relevant to theology but at times are not adequately dealt with. In this vein, Rieger's text offers a theological account of globalization. He does this by analyzing the forms of power that are prevalent in globalization and how theology deals with them. Rieger's main concern is to counter top-down forms of power. Top-down power is both a hard and soft form of power. The Roman Empire's attempt to regulate and control life and even Christian doctrine is a form of top-down, hard power. The "Hellenization" of Christianity is a form of top-down, soft power because this was not a conscious or national decision, but something that occurs as the upper classes impose their way of thinking upon lower classes. For Rieger, both of these forms of top-down power are quite prevalent in globalization and must be dealt with and, in most circumstances, resisted through theology.

Rieger structures the text into two broad sections. The first is an analysis and critique of hard power while the second analyzes and critiques soft power. The section on hard power shows how this type of power focuses large concentrations of both wealth and influence/power in the hands of a few people to the detriment of the larger majority of people. Hard power does not offer room for alternative forms of existence because this would decrease its power. Instead, this form of power structures the way of life for those people living within its structures. Rieger argues that in order to counter hard power there needs to be a focus on the majority instead of the minority. He says that the globalization that has helped to further consolidate hard power has also led to the sharing of knowledge and resources of those oppressed by hard power. Now the majority can become a collective that actively resists the dominant forms of hard power. Rieger points to the resistance to hard power that occurs theologically in the person of Jesus and the Christian declaration of "Jesus is Lord." Jesus' power works from the bottom up as the incarnation shows God in the flesh of a "day-laborer" and Jesus brings together those who are under the rule of hard forms of power. Thus, the incarnation is a place where bottom up power resists the top down structure of hard power.

The second section of *Globalization and Theology* focuses on soft forms of power. Rieger argues that at this point in time, globalization is now a form of soft power in that, while not a government of empire, it is influential and still seeks (and accomplishes) focusing the majority of wealth and influence/power in the hands of the few. Soft power also works to erase difference through the inclusion of all under some sort of encompassing heading or rubric. As an example, Rieger points to Bartolome de Las Casas, a missionary from Spain to the New World, who was aware of the problems confronting the Native Americas but still wanted to convert them to being Christians in a Spaniard way. The result is an attempt to erase the difference that exists. Las Casas did not force their conversion but shaped his society in a way that "encouraged" the Native Americans to become "Christian." Soft power still supports and endorses clear power differentials. The result is still imperial, even though it does not occur through the form of hard power. Rieger counters forms of soft power by turning to ways that theology embraces bottom up forms of power that resist these soft forms of power. He points to the work of John Wesley with the early Methodists and the work of liberation theologians. In both of these examples, Rieger notices the coalescing of groups who affirm each other's differences, yet are still able to resist the hegemonic encroachment of soft forms of power brought in and through globalization.

Rieger's text is an excellent piece for thinking through the implications of globalization for theology, as well as how theology responds to

globalization. While the text could offer more details at times, it is meant to be introductory in nature. As such, it is ideal for almost anyone who is interested in the issues surrounding globalization and wants to learn more, especially from the perspective of a theologian. In all, then, it is a recommended text.

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