

Rainbow Theology: Bridging Race, Sexuality, and Spirit. By Patrick S. Cheng. New York: Seabury Books, 2013. xxi + 185 pp. \$24.00 (paper).

Patrick Cheng has established himself as an eloquent voice in the field of queer theology. In this, his third book in as many years, he continues to chart the complexity of a land between multiple borders. In doing so he faces the considerable challenge posed by the very variety he seeks to describe. He is immeasurably helped in this both by his own clarity as a writer and in the felicity of the undergirding image that informs his work: the rainbow.

One might well observe that the alphabet itself could serve as an effective analogy, as what Cheng admits is an “unwieldy” (p. 100) acronym (LGBTIQ2) seeks to give recognition to the diversity of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, and Two Spirit incarnations of the one human being. The issue for Cheng is that this diversity is multiplied and rendered all the more complex for those who, in addition to identifying themselves in one or more of these categories, leading to separation from or oppression by a majority heteronormative culture, also belong to an ethnic group that has suffered its own separation or oppression: Black, Asian, Latina/o, or Indigenous, and which has each itself visited its own forms of oppression or isolation upon its queer members. “LGBTIQ people of color are rejected twice-over” (p. 95). They live in a region of multiple exiles that Cheng seeks to map in this helpful book, in the context of theology by and for queer people of color: a rainbow theology.

This short volume is both a summary and an introduction. Its first half offers a brief but thorough survey of the literature in this emerging field, noting that the works of queer theologians of color from the last twenty years “remain largely unknown within the broader queer theological world” (p. xv). Four chapters offer a virtual catalogue *raisonné* of the work of Black, Asian, Latina/o, and Two-Spirit Indigenous queer of color theologians. As such, this section could have been a bit dry, but it is leavened with numerous quotations and snippets of narrative that make for both informative and engaging reading. Cheng explores the particular concerns in each of these four cultural contexts, the tensions between each and the dominant American culture, and the particular pressures brought to bear on the queer members within each—all with a view to the role of the theological voices crying out in that particular desert.

The second half of the volume turns explicitly to unpacking the implications of a queer of color theology, beginning with the rainbow itself. Cheng notes the biblical underpinnings for this image. He also provides evidence that the use of the rainbow as part of “gay pride” in 1978 predates by six years the adoption of the image by Reverend Jesse Jackson for the Rainbow Coalition—a fact which renders specious the 2012 charge by African American

pastor Harry Jackson to “steal the rainbow back” from “the gays,” as if, notes Cheng, “there are no people of color who are also queer” (pp. 86–87).

Cheng describes key features of rainbow theology as *multiplicity*—recognizing the multiple oppressions based on sexuality and race, as well as class, economy, and ability; *middle spaces*—the between-the-borders or no-man’s-land experience, in solidarity with Christ as both human and divine, yet with “nowhere to lay his head” (p. 112); and *mediation*—the capacity for those so far outside the norms they are free to serve as mediators, in a refusal to choose sides, in a reflection of the incarnation itself as a transgressive act that “gathered two realms that . . . had not been brought together” before (p. 139). The most important observation Cheng makes is that the primary work of queer theology is not to find a way out of the land between the borders so much as it is to live in the tension of multiple identities in a productive and life-giving way—life-giving not only for the exiles, but for all who have the grace to hear their message.

This volume will be a very useful tool in spreading that message, particularly in church and academic settings where this good news has not been heard.

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Lamentations and the Song of Songs: A Theological Commentary on the Bible. By Harvey Cox and Stephanie Paulsell. Belief Series. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2012. xvii + 300 pp. \$30.00 (cloth).

In its “Belief” series, Westminster John Knox presents theological commentaries “that served the theological needs of the church . . . with relevance, historical accuracy, and theological depth” and were written by theologians who were able “to explain the theological importance of the texts for the church today” (p. xii). This is in contrast to WJK’s “Interpretation” series, “which presents the integrated result of historical and theological work” (p. vii, F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*).

Biblical exegesis usually fits a particular pattern: an introduction that reflects the writer’s academic bias and perspective, followed by a verse-by-verse translation with explanations and interpretations (for example, Cheryl Exum’s commentary on the Song of Songs). Other texts may not offer a “new” translation but generally follow the same verse-by-verse model (see Athalya Brenner’s commentary on the Song of Songs). The “Interpretation” series follows this familiar configuration.



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