

he was writing, Murphy-O'Connor ensures that in future debates the Ephesian period will also be of deep critical interest. Once again we are in his debt.

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*Radical Love: An Introduction to Queer Theology.* By Patrick S. Cheng. Seabury Books, 2011. 162 pages. \$20.00.

This is a very fine introduction to Queer Theology. The author is an Assistant Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Episcopal Divinity School, Cambridge, MA, USA. In this volume, Cheng is especially attentive to both the historical and systematic dimensions of the development of Queer Theology. One of the best features of the book is that Cheng presumes no familiarity on the part of the reader with Queer Theology or LGBT theology (now LGBTIQA—lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, questioning, and allies). He defines terms clearly and carefully, making helpful distinctions between different categories and approaches throughout the book.

The overarching thesis of the book, repeated often in various ways, is that “Christian theology itself is a fundamentally queer enterprise because it . . . challenges and deconstructs—through radical love—all kinds of binary categories that on the surface seem fixed and unchangeable . . . but that ultimately are fluid and malleable” (10). The thread of “radical love” permeates the book at every step. Cheng is also attentive to secondary literature throughout the volume and often summarizes the work of others on the topics he addresses (a thorough bibliography and index will be helpful to the reader as well). In presenting the scholarship of other theorists on Queer Theology, the author weaves his own understanding of “radical love” throughout as a unifying motif.

The first chapter asks simply “What Is Queer Theology?” and considers the use of “queer” as an umbrella term, as transgressive action, and as erasing boundaries. This third use of the term animates the present volume. Cheng considers the classic sources of scripture, tradition, reason, and experience from the perspective of Queer Theology and explores the notion of “queering” these sources. Cheng does a good job of drawing on the work of a variety of Queer theologians in the process. For example, in “Queering Scripture,” Cheng refers to the classic Sodom and Gomorrah story, showing how the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah is more appropriately seen as inhospitality toward strangers. The work of Nancy Wilson and Kathy Rudy on this biblical story has helped to develop a progressive ethic of hospitality within Queer Theology (13). Attention to Queer Tradition draws on the work of John Boswell, Bernadette Brooten, Mark Jordan, and Virginia Burrus. Cheng closes the first chapter with an example of “doing” Queer Theology by considering whether same-sex marriage can be viewed as a sacrament, especially in light of queering

the four classic sources just outlined. The chapter ends, as do all the chapters, with helpful study questions and suggestions for further reading.

The second chapter ("A Genealogy of Queer Theology") traces the historical development of LGBT theology from the 1950s to the present day. Cheng examines four strands in the development of Queer Theology: apologetic theology (gay is good); liberation theology (liberation from heterosexism); relational theology (especially as developed by lesbian theologians); and Queer Theology itself, based on the work of queer theorists. Future trends in Queer Theology, according to Cheng, include intersectionality and hybridity. Intersectionality deals with the intersections of race, class, and other factors in addition to sexuality and gender identity. Hybridity draws especially from the work of postcolonial theology. Both aspects focus on the fluidity of boundaries and the changing shape of identity.

After these introductory chapters, the remainder of the volume approaches the queering of overtly Christian theology by developing a Trinitarian understanding of God as the one who sends forth radical love (classically, God the Father), who recovers radical love (classically, God the Son), and who points to the return of radical love (classically, God the Holy Spirit). A chapter is devoted to each of these three aspects of God. In the discussion of God as the one who sends forth radical love, Cheng examines four classical theological doctrines about God: revelation, God as first person of the Trinity, the Trinity proper, and the doctrine of creation. The doctrine of revelation shows God as "coming out" in radical love that dissolves the boundaries between the divine and the human, between the powerful and the weak, and between knowing and unknowing (with a nod to the apophatic tradition). The doctrine of God shows a God who is radical love itself, in contrast to a classic notion of an "omni" God (omnipotent, omniscient, etc.), which is toxic for many queer theologians. The doctrine of the Trinity shows a God who is an internal community of radical love that breaks down the dualism between sexual and nonsexual relationships, between pair-bonded relationships, and fragmented identities. The doctrine of creation shows a God who pours out radical love in such a way that dissolves the dualisms of flesh/spirit, humanity/creation, and marriage vs. queer sex.

Cheng then turns to Jesus Christ as the recovery of radical love. Here four additional classic doctrines are examined: sin, Jesus Christ, Mary, and atonement. Sin is redefined as the human rejection of God's radical love, the resistance of humans to the dissolving of boundaries and divisions. In this view, sin is a form of essentialism that reinforces boundaries that keep categories separate and distinct from each other. This includes the sin of sexual and gender essentialism, as well as the sin of separating race and sexuality. Cheng envisions Jesus Christ as the physical embodiment of radical love, where Jesus is the "boundary-crosser extraordinaire" (79). He crosses divine, social, sexual, and gender boundaries throughout his ministry. Here Cheng raises the intriguing notion that as the child of a virgin birth (parthenogenesis), Jesus would be physically male, but genetically female (having two X chromosomes and no male Y chromosome), and so he is intersexed. Thus, Jesus was both male and

female. Queering the doctrine of Mary means dissolving sexual oppressions, family boundaries, and gender boundaries. As the *theotokos* (mother of God), she is also the daughter of God, the bride of Christ, the new Eve to Christ's new Adam, and mother to Jesus. Mary thus blurs the boundaries between mother, daughter, and spouse. Finally, borrowing heavily from the work of Rene Girard, atonement in Christ means ending scapegoating through radical love.

The chapter on the Holy Spirit reflects on the Spirit as the return to radical love. The Spirit functions as a kind of GPS device, or "gaydar," that points in the direction of radical love. The Spirit also dissolves boundaries that humans create: between sexuality and church, between private and public, between unity and diversity, and between law and lawlessness. The Spirit also animates the church, which is the external community of radical love. Cheng identifies the four marks of the church as: oneness (a permanent porousness in being open to others), holiness (radical hospitality), catholicity (unity in difference), and apostolicity (sent forth to spread radical love), all from a queer perspective. The communion of saints, referred to in the Apostles' Creed, speaks of the breaking through of radical love—breaking through erotic boundaries, through literary boundaries, and through social boundaries.

Cheng then examines the sacraments as a foretaste of radical love. Following the lead of Chris Glaser, he argues that *coming out* is the central sacrament for LGBT people. This is expressed in baptism, as LGBT people leave behind their old closeted lives and are born into a new life of openness without shame. Eucharist also has aspects of coming out, in that it involves a sacrifice and an offering that creates communion with God and others. Cheng then explores the other five sacraments in the Catholic tradition from a queer perspective: confirmation, reconciliation, matrimony, holy orders, and the anointing of the sick, all of which are similarly closely connected to the fundamental metaphor of coming out. Finally, Cheng looks at the notion of eschatology as the horizon of radical love. This horizon erases the distinction between life and death, and between punishment and reward.

By way of evaluation, a few comments: first, as noted at the outset of this review, this is overall a very good introduction to Queer Theology. Cheng covers a lot of territory and does so with clarity and solid interaction with the literature in the field. I would recommend this volume to anyone wanting a quick take on the various dimensions of Queer Theology. Second, although the book is very clear, it is also rather repetitive in places, though perhaps this is intentional in an introductory text. Third, while the term *radical love* is repeated over and over again, with an emphasis on breaking down traditionally fixed boundaries, surely Queer Theology also constructs new boundaries, even if they are boundaries of radical inclusion. If there are no boundaries, then what does it mean to belong to a community of faith? At times the notion of *radical love* seems overly conceptualized and would benefit from more concrete examples. Finally, it would help if Cheng also offered some critique of Queer Theology along the way, both by Queer theorists themselves (e.g., can one truly be queer and Christian at the same time?) and by more traditional

theologies that identify Queer Theology as taking things too far, notwithstanding the Trinitarian emphasis of the book. But perhaps Cheng will turn to some of these issues in his next book. In the meantime, this volume is a very good introduction that would serve well in a classroom or in a church study group.

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*The Good and Evil Serpent: How a Universal Symbol Became Christianized.* By James H. Charlesworth. Yale University Press, 2010. 736 pages. \$45.00.

The snake is easily one of the most reviled creatures in the history of western—particularly Christian—culture. It stands as an embodiment of evil at both the beginning and the end of the Christian Bible. In Genesis 3, the snake entices Eve into eating from the forbidden fruit of the Garden of Eden, thereby earning for herself the charge that she introduced original sin into the human character and ensuring that all of her descendents would be subject to death and expulsion from the presence of G-d in the Garden. In Revelation 12, the snake or dragon comes to the cosmic woman in a futile attempt to devour her child, only to be defeated by Michael and his angels. When the snake was thrown down from heaven by Michael and his hosts, he was identified as “the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world” (Rev. 12:9), who would continue to pursue humankind in opposition to G-d and Jesus Christ. Because of this identification of the snake in Revelation 12, the snake in Genesis is likewise presumed to be Satan, whose deception of Eve prompted the downfall of all humanity. Between these two texts, the snake earned a reputation as the most evil and deceptive figure in all of Christianity.

But during the course of a doctoral seminar at Princeton, James Charlesworth came across a passage from the Gospel of John that he could not understand: “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so it is necessary for the Son of Man to be lifted up, in order that all who are believing in him may have eternal life” (John 3:14–15).

The problem was the analogy made between the reviled serpent figure, apparently drawn from the portrayal of the copper/bronze serpent figure placed on an ensign in the wilderness by Moses (Num. 21:4–9) and the crucified Jesus. The analogy built on the portrayal of both figures raised up on a pole or cross that would then play a role in granting life for others. But if the serpent is indeed the reviled Satanic figure that Christianity had portrayed it to be, how could it form an analogy for the Christ of the New Testament and Christian tradition?

The present volume presents an exhaustive study of snake/serpent (ophidian) imagery and conceptualization throughout the ancient world in order to find a solution to this dilemma. Overall, Charlesworth demonstrates that