

Boswell
FOURTH ANNUAL JOHN E. BOSWELL LECTURE



The Rainbow Connection: Bridging Asian American & Queer Theologies

The Rev. Dr. Patrick S. Cheng

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The Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies
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Lectures



The John E. Boswell Lectureship

The Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies in Religion and Ministry at Pacific School of Religion



The John E. Boswell Lectureship Fund, established at CLGS in 2006, supports innovative historical and religious scholarship in and for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities and provides a high-profile venue for present-

ing that scholarship to wider audiences.

In 1980 John Boswell published a book that historian of sexuality Michel Foucault called “a truly ground breaking work.” *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* charted bold territory in both historical and religious scholarship, setting a new benchmark of academic excellence for gay and lesbian studies. Equally significant, if not more controversial, was his 1993 book, *Same-Sex Unions in Premodern Europe*, in which he tried to show historical precedence for the religious blessing of same-sex relationships.

Although John Boswell died from AIDS-related illnesses in 1994, his trail-blazing efforts in historical scholarship continue to shape and inspire academic, activist and faith communities of all traditions.

Contributions to this important lectureship fund, as part of the CLGS endowment, will help to ensure that Dr. Boswell’s legacy endures for many years to come.

The Rev. Dr. Patrick S. Cheng



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The Rainbow Connection: Bridging Asian American and Queer Theologies

The Rev. Patrick S. Cheng, Ph.D.

Good evening. It's a privilege and a blessing to be with you tonight and to deliver the Fourth Annual John E. Boswell lecture at the Pacific School of Religion. This invitation is especially meaningful to me because John Boswell was my medieval history professor at Yale University in the late 1980s. I remember Professor Boswell telling us about his research on medieval same-sex liturgical rites during one of his lectures. As many of you know, this research resulted in his final book, *Same-Sex Unions in Premodern Europe*, before his untimely death in 1994.¹ I also remember hearing Professor Boswell speak at St. Thomas More House, the Yale Catholic student center, about how he was able to reconcile his identity as both an openly gay man as well as a practicing Roman Catholic. Although I did not realize it at the time, that talk had a deep influence on me in terms of my own vocation as a queer theologian.

I am also glad to be back in beautiful Berkeley, California. I grew up in the San Francisco Bay Area, and I have fond memories of taking summer classes at U.C. Berkeley. But more importantly, I attended midnight screenings of the *Rocky Horror Picture Show* during my senior year of high school at the now-closed UC Theater on University and Shattuck. Believe it or not, the *Rocky Horror Picture Show* also had a deep influence on my vocation as a queer theologian. Little did I know how important it was to take seriously Dr. Frank-n-Furter's wise counsel during The Floorshow to "Don't dream it—be it."² It's taken me almost twenty-five years to return to Berkeley, but the journey has been worth it.

Introduction

My lecture tonight is entitled "The Rainbow Connection: Bridging Asian American and Queer Theologies." As the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies in Religion and Ministry (CLGS) website points out, this lecture marks and celebrates an emerging theological and religious scholarship among people of Asian descent who self-identify as "queer"—that is, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, questioning, and two-spirit folk, as well as our allies.³

In this lecture, I use the phrase "queer Asians of faith" as a shorthand way of describing those of us who self-identify as queer, Asian (including South Asians and Pacific Islanders), and spiritual. I do recognize that all three of these identities—"queer," "Asian," and "spiritual"—are complicated and contested terms, and so I will explore them further during the course of the lecture.⁴

My talk is divided into four parts. First, I will start by exploring the symbol of the rainbow. Many cultures around the world—and throughout history—have been fascinated by the rainbow, and I would like to examine three characteristics of the rainbow that I find

¹ See John Boswell, *Same-Sex Unions in Premodern Europe* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994).

² "Rose Tint My World," from *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, directed by Jim Sharman (Twentieth Century Fox, 1975).

³ See <http://www.clgs.org/events/fourth-annual-boswell-lecture-rainbow-connection> (accessed on December 21, 2011). For a discussion of the various ways in which the word "queer" is used in theological discourse, see Patrick S. Cheng, *Radical Love: An Introduction to Queer Theology* (New York: Seabury Books, 2011), 2-8.

⁴ For a brief discussion of such complexities, see Patrick S. Cheng, "Multiplicity and Judges 19: Constructing a Queer Asian Pacific American Biblical Hermeneutic," *Semeia* 90-91 (2002): 119-33.

particularly interesting: (1) multiplicity; (2) diaspora; and (3) hybridity. Second, I will argue that the rainbow—and its associated characteristics of multiplicity, diaspora, and hybridity—is a particularly helpful way of understanding the experiences of queer Asian people of faith. As such, I am claiming my identity tonight as a rainbow theologian. Third, I will sketch out what a rainbow, or queer Asian, theology might look like in light of the themes of multiplicity, diaspora, and hybridity. I also will examine the classical Christian doctrines of the Trinity, eschatology, and christology in light of these themes. Fourth, and finally, I will close with a discussion of where I think rainbow theology is going in the future and what is needed to sustain this work.

I. Rainbows

I thought it would be fitting to begin tonight's lecture with an image of the CLGS logo.⁵ What do you see? A rainbow, of course. Specifically, the logo shows a triangle with various rainbow-colored flames leaping forth from it. It's fair to say, based solely upon the CLGS logo, that the rainbow has great significance for all of us who self-identify as queer.

In fact, there are many connections between rainbows and queer people. First of all, there is the rainbow flag, which, since the late 1970s, has become an international symbol for the queer liberation movement. So much so that one of the activists associated with the anti-queer National Organization for Marriage recently complained that the rainbow should be reclaimed from queer folk because the rainbow is actually a symbol of "God's covenant with man [sic]."⁶ But more about that later. In addition to the rainbow flag, there is also *The Wizard of Oz*. Judy Garland's song from that movie, "Somewhere Over the Rainbow," has been a long-standing anthem of liberation for gay men and all kinds of other "friends of Dorothy."⁷

But there's more to rainbows than just flags and *The Wizard of Oz*, believe it or not! As a queer Asian person of faith, I find the rainbow especially interesting because of three specific characteristics: (1) multiplicity; (2) diaspora; and (3) hybridity. I'd like to explore each of these three ideas with you in some detail.

First, multiplicity.⁸ Rainbows symbolize multiple things, and not just because they contain multiple colors. I have done a lot of research on this and found a number of weighty authorities for this proposition. Take, for example, Kermit the Frog. In his song "The Rainbow Connection," Kermit asks the question, "Why are there so many songs about rainbows?"⁹ Well, I believe there are so many songs about rainbows because the rainbow is a multivalent symbol. Rainbows mean different things to different people. Throughout history, rainbows have been seen not just as bows, but also as snakes, bridges, and nets. Rainbows have evoked not only hope, but also fear and dread.¹⁰

⁵ See <http://www.clgs.org> (accessed December 21, 2011).

⁶ See "Anti-Gay Group Wants Its Rainbow Back," Gawker website (December 16, 2010), at <http://gawker.com/5714176/anti-gay-group-wants-its-rainbow-back> (accessed December 21, 2011).

⁷ See "Somewhere Over the Rainbow," from *The Wizard of Oz*, directed by Victor Fleming (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1939). A "Friend of Dorothy" is a term used to describe a gay man. See <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Friend+of+Dorothy> (accessed December 21, 2011).

⁸ See Cheng, "Multiplicity and Judges 19"; see also Laurel C. Schneider, *Beyond Monotheism: A Theology of Multiplicity* (London: Routledge, 2008); Catherine Keller and Laurel C. Schneider, eds., *Polydoxy: Theology of Multiplicity and Relation* (London: Routledge, 2011).

⁹ "Rainbow Connection," from *The Muppet Movie*, directed by James Frawley (Henson Associates, 1979).

¹⁰ For general works about the rainbow, see Carl B. Boyer, *The Rainbow: From Myth to Mathematics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987); Raymond L. Lee and Alistair B. Fraser, *The Rainbow Bridge: Rainbows in Art, Myth, and Science* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001); Richard Whelan, *The Book of Rainbows: Art, Literature, Science, and Mythology* (Cobb, CA: First Glance Books, 1997). For a discussion of the rainbow in the context of queer spirituality, see Randy P. Conner, David Hatfield Sparks, and Mariya Sparks, *Cassell's Encyclopedia of Queer Myth, Symbol, and Spirit* (London: Cassell, 1997), 278-79.

So how might the multiplicity of rainbows speak to someone like me who self-identifies as a queer Asian person of faith? Take queerness, for example. Did you know that it was believed in medieval and renaissance France, as well as in Russia and Eastern Europe, that a person could change her or his sex by passing directly beneath a rainbow?¹¹ That's pretty queer. Similarly, the rainbow is a symbol of gender fluidity in the Yóruba and Santería traditions. The rainbow deity is called Oshumaré, and she is an androgynous serpent figure with both female and male elements. It is no surprise that the lesbian Afro-Caribbean writer Audre Lorde invoked the symbol of the Rainbow Serpent in her works.¹²

And what about Asianness? Well, rainbows certainly are not a monopoly of the West. For example, ancient Chinese creation myths have explained that the rainbow was created by the Great Mother goddess Nüwa's repairing of the broken sky. At one point, the four giant pillars that held up the sky had collapsed, and this caused great chaos on earth. Nüwa restored order by melting together stones of five different colors, and she patched up the sky, thus creating the rainbow.¹³ (Other Chinese folktales have claimed that rainbows contain the souls of two "star-crossed lovers" who can be united only when it rains because they can hide in the storm clouds.¹⁴) And in Japanese mythology, the male and female creator beings, Izanagi and Izanami, stood on a rainbow and created the islands of Japan from a jewel-encrusted spear that had been dipped into the ocean of chaos.¹⁵

Finally, rainbows are also symbols of spirituality, as our "friends" at NOM have so helpfully pointed out. Yes, rainbows do signify God's covenant with humanity, as we have seen in the story of Noah's ark in Genesis and God's promise never again to wipe out the human race.¹⁶ And, yes, rainbows also signify the glory of God. We see this in the Books of Ezekiel and Revelation, where God's very presence and throne are surrounded by rainbows.¹⁷ However, rainbows also have meaning in non-Christian religious traditions. We have already seen how the rainbow is seen as a transgender deity in the Yóruba and Santería traditions. There are many more examples. In Hinduism, for example, the rainbow appears in the sky after the anger of the god of storms, Indra, has subsided.¹⁸ For Buddhists, rainbows are associated with "the highest state achievable before attaining Nirvana."¹⁹ Those who attain this state are described as having a "rainbow body"—that is, a "luminous awareness and bliss in which one is free from all desire"—and depictions of this state can be found in Tibetan religious artwork.²⁰ Indeed, rainbows are symbols of multiplicity with respect to queerness, Asianness, and spirituality. As such, they can speak powerfully to queer Asians of faith!

Second, rainbows signify diaspora, or the notion that we are exiled from our true homes.²¹ In *The Wizard of Oz*, Dorothy longs for another homeland in "Somewhere Over the Rainbow" – a place "way up high" that she's heard of "once in a lullaby."²² Those of

¹¹ See Conner, Sparks, and Sparks, *Cassell's Encyclopedia*, 278; Lee and Fraser, *Rainbow Bridge*, 27.

¹² See Conner, Sparks, and Sparks, *Cassell's Encyclopedia*, 278-79; Lee and Fraser, *Rainbow Bridge*, 22-26.

¹³ See Lihui Yang and Deming An, *Handbook of Chinese Mythology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 171-72.

¹⁴ See Lee and Fraser, *Rainbow Bridge*, 31.

¹⁵ See Lee and Fraser, *Rainbow Bridge*, 31-32; Whelan, *Book of Rainbows*, 108.

¹⁶ See Gen. 9:9-17.

¹⁷ See Ezek. 1:28; Rev. 4:3, 10:1.

¹⁸ See Whelan, *Book of Rainbows*, 120.

¹⁹ See Lee and Fraser, *Rainbow Bridge*, 31.

²⁰ See Whelan, *Book of Rainbows*, 120.

²¹ For a definition of "diaspora" in the postcolonial context, see Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* (London: Routledge, 2000), 68-70.

²² "Somewhere Over the Rainbow," from *The Wizard of Oz*.

us who are Asian North Americans understand this idea of diaspora quite well, and what it means to be exiled from our true homes. Like the ancient Israelites who wandered in the desert for forty years and who lived by the waters of Babylon in exile, we are never quite at “home.”²³ Although we are of Asian descent, many of our ancestors immigrated to this country in the 1850s as a result of the California gold rush and the construction of the transcontinental railroads.²⁴ As such, we no longer belong fully to Asia (as is painfully obvious to those of us who have visited Asia and struggled with the local languages and customs).

And yet, although we are Americans, we are often seen, thanks to pervasive orientalist stereotypes, as strangers in our own homeland. There is a political cartoon from the 19th century that portrays an Asian man as a slimy octopus with tentacles of disease, lechery, drug use, and corruption.²⁵ Unfortunately, we Asian North Americans are often still seen as such outsiders in the 21st century, as demonstrated by a contemporary cartoon of orientalist stereotypes—complete with slanted eyes, buck teeth, mispronouncing “l” for “r,” and Chinese food takeout containers.²⁶ In a similar fashion, rainbows have served as diasporic symbols throughout the ages that point to another homeland. For example, one of the primary functions of rainbows in world mythologies has been to point to the divine realm, which is seen as our “true” spiritual home.²⁷ So rainbows are powerful symbols of diaspora.

Third, rainbows signify hybridity.²⁸ Hybridity is a term that originated from botany, and it signifies the creation of a third thing out of two things, such as an apple pear that is a cross between an apple and a pear. (There is a funny cartoon of a pear telling an apple that their hybrid offspring has inherited the apple’s shorter stem.²⁹) The concept of hybridity has been used by postcolonial thinkers like Homi Bhabha to describe the unique power dynamic that takes place in a colonized land. Bhabha argues that the encounter between the colonizer and the colonized takes place in a hybridized “third space,” akin to the stairwell that connects two floors. In this hybrid space, the traditional structures of power are deconstructed, and both the colonizer and the colonized are mutually transformed.³⁰

Those of us who self-identify as Asian North Americans are hybrids to the extent that we are a cross between our Asian bodies and cultural heritage on the one hand, and our North American mindset and social location on the other hand. Similarly, rainbows signify hybridity because they occupy the “third space” between illusion and reality. On the one hand, rainbows are illusions because they are simply a “broken” reflection of the sun

²³ See Psa. 137 (“By the rivers of Babylon – there we sat down and there we wept when we remembered Zion.”).

²⁴ See Ronald Takaki, *Strangers From a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans*, updated and rev. ed. (New York: Back Bay Books, 1989), 79-131 (“Gam Saan Haak: The Chinese in Nineteenth-Century America”).

²⁵ See, e.g., Philip May, “The Mongolian Octopus – His Grip on Australia,” *The Bulletin* (August 21, 1886), at <http://www.multiculturalaustralia.edu.au/library/media/Image/id/623.The-Mongolian-Octopus-his-grip-on-Australia> (accessed December 21, 2011).

²⁶ See Gene Luen Yang, “Everyone Ruvs Chin-Kee,” in *American Born Chinese* (New York: First Second, 2006). For an image of the cartoon, see <http://www.michiganquarterlyreview.com/2011/04/giving-chin-kee-a-chance-gene-luen-yangs-american-born-chinese> (accessed December 21, 2011).

²⁷ See Lee and Fraser, *Rainbow Bridge*, 2-33 (“The Bridge to the Gods”).

²⁸ For a definition of “hybridity” in a postcolonial context, see Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies*, 118-21.

²⁹ See <http://www.foodnewsie.com/pearapple-cross-breed-or-mutant> (accessed on December 21, 2011).

³⁰ See Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 5.

that is reflected back to us upon a screen of water drops. Think of the rainbow as a giant screen of tiny little prisms that projects refracted rays of the sun back to us.³¹ Because of this, rainbows do not really “exist” as a thing, and no two people ever see a rainbow in the same way. But, on the other hand, rainbows are in fact a physical phenomenon and can be photographed and studied in terms of their physical properties. So rainbows are a hybrid third thing between illusion and reality.

II. Rainbows and Queer Asians of Faith

In this second part of the lecture, I want to show how the rainbow—and its characteristics of multiplicity, diaspora, and hybridity—can speak to the specific experiences of queer Asian people of faith. During the last fifteen years, the voices of queer Asians of faith have started to emerge, particularly as the legal and culture wars over same-sex marriage (such as California Proposition 8) have started to impact Asian American communities.³² Two of the earliest articles about the queer Asian spiritual experience were published in 1996 and 1997 respectively by Leng Lim and Eric Law, both of whom are gay Asian Episcopal priests.³³

Here in the San Francisco Bay Area, there are a number of organizations involving queer Asians of faith and our allies, including the Asian Pacific Islander Roundtable project of CLGS led by Elizabeth Leung,³⁴ the Network on Religion and Justice for API LGBT People chaired by Sharon Hwang Colligan,³⁵ and the GRACE faith-sharing group led by Michael Leslie.³⁶ In Southern California, there are organizations such as API Equality Los Angeles led by Jonipher Kwong.³⁷ And there are other groups nationally, such as Queer Asian Spirit.³⁸

As someone who has ministered to queer Asian people of faith for over a decade through the Queer Asian Spirit network, I have come to realize that there is a huge pastoral need to address the spiritual, emotional, and even physical violence that is experienced by many LGBT Asian people of faith around the world. This is not simply a historical issue. The need is right here, right now. Earlier this month, I received an email from a closeted seminarian in Asia who has a white evangelical visiting professor from the United States. The visiting professor takes every possible opportunity during his lectures—which, by

³¹ See Whelan, *Book of Rainbows*, 32; Lee and Fraser, *Rainbow Bridge*, 111-14, 321-22.

³² For a queer Asian perspective on same-sex marriage, see Patrick S. Cheng, Roundtable Response to Mary E. Hunt, “Same-Sex Marriage and Relational Justice,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 20, no. 2 (Fall 2004): 103-07.

³³ See Leng Leroy Lim, “Exploring Embodiment,” in *Boundary Wars: Intimacy and Distance in Healing Relationships*, ed. Katherine Hancock Ragsdale (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 1996), 58-77; Eric H.F. Law, “A Spirituality of Creative Marginality,” in *Que(e)rying Religion: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gary David Comstock and Susan E. Henking (New York: Continuum, 1997), 343-46. Other works by Lim include: Leng Lim, Kim-Hao Yap, and Tuck-Leong Lee, “The Mythic-Literalists in the Province of South Asia,” in *Other Voices, Other Worlds: The Global Church Speaks Out on Homosexuality*, ed. Terry Brown (New York: Church Publishing, 2006), 58-76; Leng Leroy Lim, “‘The Bible Tells Me to Hate Myself’: The Crisis in Asian American Spiritual Leadership,” *Semeia* 90-91 (2002): 315-22; You-Leng Leroy Lim, “Webs of Betrayal, Webs of Blessings,” in *Q&A: Queer in Asian America*, ed. David L. Eng and Alice Y. Hom (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 323-34; Leng Leroy Lim, “Webs of Betrayal, Webs of Blessing,” in *Our Families, Our Values: Snapshots of Queer Kinship*, ed. Robert E. Goss and Amy Adams Squire Strongheart (Binghamton, NY: Harrington Park Press, 1997), 227-41; and Leng Leroy Lim, “The Gay Erotics of My Stuttering Mother Tongue,” *Amerasia Journal* 22, no. 1 (1996): 172-77.

³⁴ See http://www.clgs.org/programs/api_roundtable (accessed December 21, 2011).

³⁵ See <http://www.netrj.org> (accessed December 21, 2011).

³⁶ See <http://gayasianchristians.org/wp> (accessed December 21, 2011).

³⁷ See <http://www.apiequalityla.org> (accessed December 21, 2011).

³⁸ See <http://www.queerasianspirit.org> (accessed December 21, 2011).

the way, are not supposed to be about sexual ethics³⁹—to condemn queer people. It has been a soul-crushing experience for my friend. He wrote to me: “I’m having an emotional breakdown for a week. Praying and mourning to God for not having such knowledge to defend the truth about me.”

Just two weeks ago, some sixty-six young men in Malaysia between the ages of thirteen and seventeen were labeled as being too “effeminate” by their teachers and reported to the government authorities. The youths were enrolled in a four-day “boot camp program” that was intended to prevent them from growing up gay or transgender. The boot camp included elements of religious indoctrination, and it was described by the Malaysian department of education as a program to guide them back “to a proper path in life.”⁴⁰

And this spiritual, emotional and physical abuse is not just an overseas issue. Earlier this month, two Christian student organizations at Yale University—my alma mater and John Boswell’s academic home for many years—invited Christopher Yuan, an HIV+ evangelical Asian American minister to speak on campus. Yuan, who has been involved with Exodus International and the ex-gay movement, has identified himself as a “former homosexual.”⁴¹ After hearing about this event, I reached out to the sponsoring organizations, the Yale Christian Fellowship and Yale Students for Christ. I offered to visit Yale and provide them with a somewhat different perspective on LGBT Asian issues, but I have yet to hear back from them.

Indeed, there is much that needs to be done, right here and right now. Along those lines, I believe that the rainbow—and its associated characteristics of multiplicity, diaspora, and hybridity—can be a helpful way of understanding the painful experiences of queer Asians of faith.

First, multiplicity. Those of us who are queer Asians of faith experience multiplicity all of the time. We belong to multiple communities—the queer community, the Asian community, and our spiritual and religious communities—and yet we are often asked to choose one over the other. Am I queer today and, if so, do I downplay my Asianness and my spirituality? Or am I Asian today and therefore downplay my queerness and my spirituality? Or am I a person of faith today, and downplay my queerness and my Asianness?

Furthermore, even the three subcategories of queerness, Asianness, and spirituality contain multiple identities. For example, as we have seen, queerness involves an alphabet soup of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, questioning, two-spirit, and allied identities. Asianness involves a multiplicity of geographical identities such as East Asian, South Asian, Southeast Asian, Pacific Islander, Middle Eastern, or Asian North American. It also involves a multiplicity of ethnicities, languages, dialects, and generational differences. And our spiritualities involve a multiplicity of traditions, whether Christian—and its subcategories of Roman Catholicism, Anglicanism, Protestantism, and Eastern Orthodoxy—or world traditions such as Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Daoism,

³⁹ For an overview of queer ethics, see Patrick S. Cheng, “LGBT Liberative Ethics,” in *Ethics: A Liberative Approach*, ed. Miguel De La Torre (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, forthcoming 2012). See also Patrick S. Cheng, *From Sin to Amazing Grace: Discovering the Queer Christ* (New York: Seabury Books, forthcoming 2012); Patrick S. Cheng, “Rethinking Sin and Grace for LGBT People Today,” in *Sexuality and the Sacred: Sources for Theological Reflection*, 2nd ed., ed. Marvin M. Ellison and Kelly Brown Douglas (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 105-18.

⁴⁰ See “‘Effeminate’ Boys in Malaysia Sent to ‘Anti-Gay’ Camp,” *BBC News Asia-Pacific* (April 19, 2011), at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-pacific-13133589> (accessed December 21, 2011).

⁴¹ Jordi Gassó, “Controversial Minister Draws Outcry,” *Yale Daily News* (April 1, 2011), at <http://www.yale-dailynews.com/news/2011/apr/01/controversial-minister-draws-outcry> (accessed December 21, 2011).

Confucianism, Shinto, Judaism, shamanism, and other indigenous traditions.⁴² We have already seen how the rainbow is a multivalent symbol with many meanings, including meanings that are queer, Asian, and spiritual. As such, I believe that the rainbow can be a helpful way to understand multiplicity and the queer Asian spiritual experience.

Second, diaspora. Those of us who are queer Asians of faith experience a profound sense of metaphorical homelessness. We are never quite at “home.” As Asian Americans, we constantly experience the annoying questions of “where are you really from?” or “where are you originally from?” But often the greater challenge for queer Asians is the inability to find a place to which we truly belong. Although we are ostensibly part of the LGBT community, we often find ourselves excluded from a racist and Eurocentric culture that privileges whiteness over other shades of the rainbow in terms of beauty and success.⁴³

Take, for example, the current issue of Out Magazine that just came out last week. It features the fifth annual LGBT “Power 50,” of whom not a single person is of Asian descent.⁴⁴ In fact, other than Perez Hilton and Anthony Romero, every person on the list is white. As the Angry Asian Man blog stated so eloquently, “Where the hell are all the people of color?” And the Angry Asian Man is not even gay! The blog concludes: “Intentional or not, the disheartening point has been made: it really sucks to be a minority within a minority.”⁴⁵ Amen. Perhaps Out Magazine needs to broaden its candidate pool (since their list clearly doesn’t look like my list), or rethink how they define “power.”

On the flip side, although we are ostensibly part of the Asian American community, queer Asians often find ourselves excluded from a homophobic culture of “family values” that ironically fails to honor the rainbow spectrum of families that are in its midst. “Michael Kim” is the pseudonym for a Korean American gay young man who remains closeted from his extremely religious family. In a powerful essay that he wrote for the anthology *Asian American X*, Kim writes that he could do everything to be a model son and be a Harvard-educated doctor, and yet if he were openly gay, he would “end up with a big fat zero” with his family and the broader Korean American community.⁴⁶ Sadly, Kim can never be fully home in the Asian American community.

Take also the example of queer theological reflection. There have been literally hundreds of books written about LGBT religious and theological issues since the 1950s.⁴⁷ And yet, there has been virtually no reflection on the experiences of queer Asian people in those works, despite the fact that Asians have been part of the fabric of North American life since Filipino sailors first reached Mexico in the 1600s, since Chinese and Japanese men immigrated to Hawaii and the Mainland in the 1800s to work on sugar plantations and the railroads, and since Asian Americans have been a part of the civil rights and antiwar

⁴² For a discussion of reclaiming multiple spiritual traditions in the lives of queer Asians, see Patrick S. Cheng, “Reclaiming Our Traditions, Rituals, and Spaces: Spirituality and the Queer Asian Pacific American Experience,” *Spiritus* 6, no. 2 (Fall 2006): 234-40.

⁴³ For a discussion of anti-Asian racism in gay male cyberculture, see Patrick S. Cheng, “‘I Am Yellow and Beautiful’: Reflections on Queer Asian Spirituality and Gay Male Cyberculture,” *Journal of Technology, Theology, and Religion* 2, no. 3 (June 2011): 1-21.

⁴⁴ See “Fifth Annual Power 50,” Out Magazine website, at <http://www.out.com/out-exclusives/power-50/2011/04/11/fifth-annual-power-50#slide-1> (accessed December 21, 2011).

⁴⁵ See Phil Yu, “Out Magazine’s Power 50: Really Really White!,” Angry Asian Man blog (April 19, 2011), at <http://blog.angryasianman.com/2011/04/out-magazines-power-50-really-really.html> (accessed on December 21, 2011).

⁴⁶ Michael Kim, “Out and About: Coming of Age in a Straight White World,” in *Asian American X: An Intersection of 21st Century Asian American Voices*, ed. Arar Han and John Hsu (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2004), 146.

⁴⁷ See, e.g., Cheng, *Radical Love*, 141-54.

movements since the 1960s.⁴⁸ Indeed, it is troubling that key anthologies of queer theology and masculinity studies, such as *Queer Theology: Rethinking the Western Body and Men and Masculinities in Christianity and Judaism* are almost uniformly silent on the queer Asian experience.⁴⁹

Similar silences exist in the realm of Asian American theological reflection. There have been numerous works by Asian American theologians and religious studies scholars in the last few decades. Ironically, many of these works, such as *Realizing the America of Our Hearts and Journeys at the Margin*, are reflections about diasporic existence and finding a home in America.⁵⁰ And yet virtually all of these works are silent about sexuality issues, let alone queer issues. There are some exceptions, of course, by our allies such as Kwok Pui-lan and Benny Liew, but they are by far the exception and not the rule.⁵¹ So, like the diasporic symbol of the rainbow, queer Asians of faith are never quite at home.⁵² Third, hybridity. Those of us who are queer Asians of faith live and exist in a “third space” that is created by the intersections of our sexualities on the one hand, and our racial identities on the other. As we have seen, the hybrid third space serves to deconstruct the binary of the colonizer and the colonized in postcolonial discourse. It is in that third space that both the colonizer and the colonized are transformed. Similarly, the queer Asian hybrid third space challenges the fiction that queerness and Asianness are mutually exclusive categories and have nothing to do with each other.

A few years ago, there was a “humor” feature in *Details* magazine that featured a photo of a nicely dressed young Asian man with the caption—“Gay or Asian?” The article began: “One cruises for chicken; the other takes it General Tso-style. Whether you’re into shrimp balls or shaved balls, entering the dragon requires imperial tastes. So choke up on your chopsticks, and make sure your labels are showing. Study hard, Grasshopper: A sharp eye will always take home the plumpiest eel.”⁵³ Seriously, I could not make up this racist stuff even if I wanted to!

This article caused an uproar in the queer Asian community, both because of its offensive-

⁴⁸ See Sucheng Chan, *Asian Americans: An Interpretive History* (Detroit, MI: Twayne Publishers, 1991), 192-99.

⁴⁹ See Gerard Loughlin, ed., *Queer Theology: Rethinking the Western Body* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007); Björn Krondorfer, ed., *Men and Masculinities in Christianity and Judaism: A Critical Reader* (London: SCM Press, 2009). It should be noted, however, that Krondorfer recently assembled and edited a collection of essays in *CrossCurrents* on global masculinities entitled “Embattled Masculinities in the Religious Traditions.” See *CrossCurrents* 61, no. 4 (December 2011).

[50] See Fumitaka Matsuoka and Eleazar S. Fernandez, eds., *Realizing the America of Our Hearts: Theological Voices of Asian Americans* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2003); Peter C. Phan and Jung Young Lee, eds., *Journeys at the Margin: Toward an Autobiographical Theology in American-Asian Perspective* (Collegetown, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999).

⁵¹ See, e.g., Kwok Pui-lan, “Body and Pleasure in Postcoloniality,” in *Dancing Theology in Fetish Boots: Essays in Honour of Marcella Althaus-Reid*, ed. Lisa Isherwood and Mark D. Jordan (London: SCM Press, 2010), 31-43; Kwok Pui-lan, “Asian and Asian American Churches,” in *Homosexuality and Religion: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Jeffrey S. Siker (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2007), 59-62; Tat-siong Benny Liew, “Queering Closets and Perverting Desires: Cross-Examining John’s Engendering and Transgendering Word across Different Worlds,” in *They Were All Together in One Place?: Toward Minority Biblical Criticism*, ed. Randall C. Bailey, Tat-siong Benny Liew, and Fernando F. Segovia (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), 251-88.

⁵² See Patrick S. Cheng, “Gay Asian Masculinities and Christian Theologies,” *CrossCurrents* 61, no. 4 (December 2011): 540-48; see also Patrick S. Cheng, “Hybridity and the Decolonization of Asian American and Queer Theologies,” *Postcolonial Theology Network* website (October 17, 2009), at <https://www.facebook.com/topic.php?uid=23694574926&topic=11026> (accessed December 21, 2011).

⁵³ See Karen Sakai, “‘Gay or Asian?’ Spread Causes Minority Uproar,” *Asia Pacific Arts* (April 9, 2004), at <http://www.asiaarts.ucla.edu/article.asp?parentid=9755> (accessed December 21, 2011).

ness and because of its basic assumption that one could be either gay or Asian, but never both. We see this false binary all the time in debates about marriage equality that pit Asian American communities on the one hand against queer communities on the other, as if all Asian Americans are straight and all queer folk are white.⁵⁴ The notion of a hybrid third space is made even more complicated with the addition of spirituality, which creates further false binaries that need to be deconstructed (for example, that one cannot be both spiritual and fully queer, or be both spiritual and fully Asian).

In recent years, there have been a number of important postcolonial queer reflections on how race and sexuality cannot—and must not—be separated into neat little boxes. In a powerful essay entitled “Broadening Postcolonial Studies/Decolonizing Queer Studies,” William Spurlin, an English professor at the University of Sussex, asserts that despite focusing on marginalization and the subaltern, “postcolonial studies have seriously neglected the ways in which heterosexism and homophobia have also shaped the world of hegemonic power.” Spurlin further argues that non-Western homosexualities are “at best, imagined or invented through the imperialist gaze of Euroamerican queer identity politics, appropriated through the economies of the West, or, at worst, altogether ignored.”⁵⁵

Similarly, Joane Nagel, a sociologist at the University of Kansas, has focused on the intersectional relationship between race, ethnicity, nationalism, and sexuality. For Nagel, “sexual matters insinuate themselves into all things racial, ethnic, and national.” Nagel describes these intersectional locations as “ethnosexual frontiers,” or territories in which “ethnicity is sexualized, and sexuality is racialized.”⁵⁶ Just think, for example, about the strikingly different images and stereotypes that comes to mind when we talk about black gay men (masculine and well-endowed), Latino gay men (hot and sexy), and Asian gay men (bottoms with small penises).⁵⁷ It is critical that theologians and religious scholars bring this ethnosexual analysis into our work in theology. Laurel Schneider, a lesbian professor at Chicago Theological Seminary, has written a wonderfully provocative article, “What Race Is Your Sex?,” which challenges precisely the kind of binary thinking that is resisted and deconstructed by queer Asian bodies.⁵⁸

Like the hybrid nature of the rainbow, queer Asian people live in a third space in between ethnicity and sexuality. As the gay Asian author Eric Wat has written so powerfully: “[We] are run over at the intersection of racism and homophobia. . . . We are forever left in the middle of the road, unacceptable to those at either side of the street. . . . Somehow, sometime, somewhere, gay Asian [people] must find that third side of the street . . . so that eventually we can join them at both sides of the street.”⁵⁹ In sum, the three-fold rainbow characteristics of multiplicity, diaspora, and hybridity speak powerfully to those of us who are queer Asians of faith.

⁵⁴ For an anthology that challenges the false binary of queer sexuality and the two-thirds world, see Brown, *Other Voices, Other Worlds*.

⁵⁵ William J. Spurlin, “Broadening Postcolonial Studies/Decolonizing Queer Studies: Emerging ‘Queer’ Identities and Cultures in Southern Africa,” in *Post-Colonial, Queer: Theoretical Intersections*, ed. John C. Hawley (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001), 185.

⁵⁶ Joane Nagel, *Race, Ethnicity, and Sexuality: Intimate Intersections, Forbidden Frontiers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 14.

⁵⁷ See, e.g., Richard Fung, “Looking for My Penis: The Eroticized Asian in Gay Video Porn,” in *Asian American Sexualities: Dimensions of the Gay and Lesbian Experience*, ed. Russell Leong (New York: Routledge, 1996), 181-98; Cheng, “I Am Yellow and Beautiful.”

⁵⁸ Laurel C. Schneider, “What Race Is Your Sex?,” in *Disrupting White Supremacy from Within: White People on What We Need to Do*, ed. Jennifer Harvey, Karin A. Case, and Robin Hawley Gorsline (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2004), 142.

⁵⁹ See Eric C. Wat, “Preserving the Paradox: Stories from a Gay-Loh,” in Leong, *Asian American Sexualities*, 79-80.

III. Rainbow Theology

As I mentioned earlier in this lecture, tonight I want to claim my identity as a rainbow theologian. Not a liberation theologian, not a post-colonial theologian, and not a queer theologian, although I do draw upon—and am indebted to elements of—each of those traditions. Rather, I see myself as a rainbow theologian because, as an openly-gay Asian American theologian, I constantly experience the themes of multiplicity, diaspora, and hybridity in my body and in my work.

So what would a rainbow theology—that is, a theology that speaks to the experiences of queer Asians of faith—look like? In this third part of the lecture, I'd like to explore how a rainbow theology draws from the three themes that we've been discussing throughout this lecture: multiplicity; diaspora; and hybridity.

First, multiplicity. As a rainbow theologian, I have been shaped by my multiple sexual, racial, and spiritual identities. For example, I am shaped by my queerness: I have been out as a gay man since the age of 17—nearly a quarter of a century by now—and I have been blessed to be in a relationship with my husband Michael for almost two decades. (We'll be celebrating twenty years together in July of this year, and I'm pleased that he could be here with me tonight.) Also, for much of the last decade, I have been immersed in queer theory in the academy, as well as the pastoral care of queer people with many different sexualities and gender identities as an ordained minister with the Metropolitan Community Churches.

However, I am also shaped by my Asianness: I am a first generation Chinese American man. I was born in Hong Kong, and I immigrated with my parents to the United States as a baby. I was raised in a bilingual household in the San Francisco Bay Area, and I grew up speaking Mandarin at home. I was teased in elementary school for bringing sardine sandwiches and sticky rice for lunch when everyone else was eating peanut butter and jelly. (My mom is also here tonight, so I don't want her to feel too bad.) I've also been involved with Asian American activism since my early college years, and so I find a deep sense of belonging with my Asian and Asian American friends both inside and outside the academy.

Finally, I am shaped by my spirituality: I was raised in the Roman Catholic church. I loved going to St. Dunstan's Church as a child. I still have a passion for ecclesiastical Latin, and I have even served the traditional Latin Mass as an altar boy and as a master of ceremonies. I fell away from Roman Catholicism, however, when I came out of the closet in college. I remember calling up a priest anonymously one night to talk about my sexuality, and his very unpastoral response was to ask me whether I was drunk. I rediscovered my love for Christian theology at Union Theological Seminary in New York City, an ecumenical protestant seminary with Presbyterian roots. I worked for the Episcopal Church for a decade. I am ordained with the Metropolitan Church, and I now teach at an Episcopal seminary. So how's that for multiplicity? Not surprisingly, I describe myself as a theological and ecclesiastical "mutt."

For me, a rainbow theology would highlight scriptural and other texts that value multiplicity and thus not do not force me to choose certain aspects of myself over other aspects. As a rainbow theologian, the biblical texts of multiplicity speak to me. I appreciate the fact that there are four distinct gospel narratives of the life of Jesus (not to mention dozens of other noncanonical texts). I appreciate the multiple re-tellings of Israelite law (for example, the two versions of the ten commandments in Exodus and in Deuteronomy) as well as of Israelite history (that is, Kings and Chronicles). I have written in Semeia about

the concubine in Judges 19 who is gang raped and dismembered as a symbol of multiplicity: multiple naming, multiple silencing, multiple oppression, and multiple fragmentation.⁶⁰ For me, the Bible is not simply a one-dimensional rule book, but it is rather a collection of multiple stories and narrative forms that bear witness to the power of God in the lives of our ancestors in the ancient Jewish and Christian faiths.⁶¹

In terms of traditional theological categories, the doctrine of the Trinity speaks to me powerfully as a rainbow theologian. The fact that God is understood to be both three and one, both multiple and singular, is a powerful way for me to understand my own multivalence. The ancient idea of perichoresis, which describes the constant mutual indwelling and dancing together of the three persons of the Trinity, is a doctrine that allows me to recognize myself as made in the image of God. It is through the multiplicity of the Trinity that I can weave together my queerness, my Asianness, and my spirituality.⁶²

Second, diaspora. As a rainbow theologian, I am also shaped by diaspora, or a sense of literal and metaphorical homelessness. I left my original homeland at an early age; I was born in Hong Kong and immigrated to the United States with my parents at the age of one. One of my earliest memories of being a stranger in my own land was being taunted by the words “Ching Chong Chinaman” in kindergarten and my teacher telling me to be quiet because “sticks and stones may break your bones, but words will never hurt you.” When I went to college on the East Coast, one of my first experiences was having someone shout “Chink go home” to me, even though I was in my home country. Compounding this sense of homelessness is the fact that I never had an Asian American tenured or tenured-track professor in all of my years of elementary, junior high, high school, college, law school, and seminary schooling. As such, I have never felt fully at home in the United States.

My family has also been shaped by diaspora. My late father fled Shanghai at the age of twenty-two in 1949 and lost contact with his family for decades thereafter. My mother was born outside the borders of China during World War II when her family was fleeing the attacks by the Japanese. In the 1970s, I grew up with my maternal grandparents, who had moved to the United States to live with my family. They also were in diaspora and in fact no longer had a home in Asia. After living with us for many years, they moved to live with my other uncles and aunts in the United States. When I visited Asia briefly during my junior high school years, I was struck by how I never felt fully at home in Asia either. Although I looked like everyone else, I could not speak Chinese in the same way as they did. I had an American mindset and could not fully grasp (and in fact secretly resented) many of the cultural traditions of my parents and their friends.

As a gay Asian Christian, I have also felt a profound sense of diaspora. I am never fully home in the predominantly white, upper middle class gay community. I rarely see images of people who look like me in the *Advocate*, *Out Magazine*, or other mainstream gay publications—or in gay porn for that matter.⁶³ I am angered by the fact that “No fats,

⁶⁰ See Cheng, “Multiplicity and Judges 19.”

⁶¹ For a queer Asian reading of Galatians, see Patrick S. Cheng, “Galatians,” in *The Queer Bible Commentary*, ed. Deryn Guest, Robert E. Goss, Mona West, and Thomas Bohache (London: SCM Press, 2006), 624-29. For a queer Asian reading of the biblical texts from the Good Friday liturgy, see Jeanette Mei Gim Lee, “Queerly a Good Friday,” in *Restoried Selves: Autobiographies of Queer Asian/Pacific American Activists*, ed. Kevin K. Kumashiro (Binghamton, NY: Harrington Park Press, 2004), 81-86.

⁶² See Patrick S. Cheng, “A Three-Part Sinfonia: Queer Asian Reflections on the Trinity,” *Journal of Race, Ethnicity, and Religion* 2, no. 13.9 (November 2011): 1-23. This essay will be published in Eleazar S. Fernandez, ed., *New Overtures: Asian North American Theology in the 21st Century* (Essays in Honor of Fumitaka Matsuoka) (Louisville, KY: Sopher Press, forthcoming 2012).

⁶³ See Fung, “Looking for My Penis.”

fems, or Asians” is a widespread mantra on hookup sites like Manhunt or Grindr.⁶⁴ I am also saddened by the fact that, as a gay Christian, I am seen as the “enemy” by so many people in the LGBT community who have been hurt by Christianity and organized religion.

Nor am I fully at home in the predominantly straight Asian American community that is quite often obsessed with “family values.” I am angered by Asian American anti-marriage activists who refuse to recognize me and my queer siblings as part of the Asian American extended family. And I often feel doubly excluded in the church and in the world of Christian theology—a world that often refuses to understand how the gospel is inextricably tied to both our sexual and racial identities.⁶⁵

As a rainbow theologian living in the midst of diaspora, I find solace in the biblical texts of exile. Whether it is the narratives about the ancient Israelites wandering for forty years in the desert,⁶⁶ or living in exile in Babylon following the destruction of the first temple,⁶⁷ or Jesus Christ emptying himself of his divinity in the incarnation (as articulated in the wonderful kenosis hymn of Philippians 2)⁶⁸ and journeying to the “far country” as Karl Barth put it,⁶⁹ I can relate to biblical stories of homelessness.

But I also take heart in the doctrine of eschatology and the fact that we are all homeless, so to speak. According to the doctrine of last things, we are all pilgrims on a journey toward our final destination, that is, a teleological end when we will come home to the One who is pure love itself. I am particularly drawn to the doctrine of apokatastasis—that is, the restoration of all things—by my favorite (and heretical) theologian Origen. Apokatastasis describes the belief that “all created intelligence will be restored to God at the end of time.”⁷⁰ This is because God’s love is so powerful that nothing can resist it in the end. Rob Bell isn’t the first person who has argued for the concept that “Love Wins.”⁷¹

Third, hybridity. As a rainbow theologian, I recognize that I am shaped profoundly by hybridity. As a gay man who chooses sexual and emotional intimacy with other men, I occupy the third space between what is expected of a “man” on the one hand and a “woman” on the other. As an Asian American, I occupy the third space between Asia and America. And as a queer Asian person, I occupy the third space between sexuality and ethnicity, two categories that are often seen as mutually exclusive. I cannot divorce my sexuality from my ethnicity, nor can I divorce my ethnicity from my sexuality. And when I add my spirituality to the mix, there are still other layers of hybridity and intersectionality.

My education and spiritual practices also have been shaped by hybridity. Although I am a theologian, I am also trained (and have practiced for over fifteen years) as a lawyer. I literally sit at the intersections of law and grace. I walk the Christian path, but I also find great solace and comfort in East Asian traditions of spirituality such as Buddhist meditation and

⁶⁴ See Cheng, “I Am Yellow and Beautiful!”; see also Patrick S. Cheng, “‘Mr. Wong’s Dong Emporium’: Racism and the Gay Community,” *Huffington Post* (September 28, 2011), at http://www.huffingtonpost.com/rev-patrick-s-cheng-phd/mr-wongs-dong-emporium-ar_b_977220.html (accessed December 21, 2011).

⁶⁵ See Eunai Shrake, “Homosexuality and Korean Immigrant Protestant Churches,” in *Embodying Asian/American Sexualities*, ed. Gina Masequesmay and Sean Metzger (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009), 145-56.

⁶⁶ Josh. 5:6.

⁶⁷ Psa. 137.

⁶⁸ Phil. 2:5-11.

⁶⁹ See Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/1, §59.1, 157-210 (“The Way of the Son of God into the Far Country”).

⁷⁰ Frederick W. Norris, “Apokatastasis,” in *The Westminster Handbook to Origen*, ed. John Anthony McGuckin (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 59.

⁷¹ Rob Bell, *Love Wins: A Book About Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived* (New York: HarperOne, 2011).

Daoist philosophy. When I have been asked to organize worship spaces at gatherings of queer Asian activists, I am proud to draw upon Christian scripture as well as Asian bells, drums, and meditation practices. Indeed, I have written about the ways in which queer Asians often occupy a hybrid third space with respect to our religious and liturgical traditions and practices.⁷² (My family of origin is also a hybrid entity, religiously speaking. My brother is a convert to Judaism, and I was privileged to be part of his conversion ceremony at Congregation Beth Am in Los Altos several years ago.)

Finally, I experience hybridity because I am both theologically orthodox and also radically queer. I love the life of the mind, and few things in life make me happier than flipping through the *Patrologia Graeca* and *Patrologia Latina*, or browsing Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae* or Barth's *Church Dogmatics*. And yet I also recognize the critical importance of loving one's own body—whether in the context of the sensual Catholic mass, or erotic bodywork and BDSM practices at queer-friendly retreat centers such as Easton Mountain in New York and Wildwood here in the San Francisco Bay Area. I have written about the Shulamite woman in the *Song of Songs* and the importance of her self-affirmation as being “Black and beautiful.”⁷³ Similarly, we rainbow theologians are called to proclaim that our bodies are “Yellow and beautiful” and that we claim our wholeness in belonging to all kinds of spaces, including erotic spaces.

As a rainbow theologian living in the midst of hybridity, I am particularly drawn to the doctrine of christology. I find the ancient christological debates about Christ's divinity and humanity as a wonderful way of thinking about hybridity and the third space. Jesus Christ is the ultimate *tertium quid*, or a “third thing” between the divine and the human. The Chalcedonian formula that rejects confusion or change on the one hand, and division or separation on the other,⁷⁴ is a marvelous way of thinking about hybridity and holding open that interstitial space between the two binaries of humanity and divinity. And even traditional notions of substitutionary atonement—that is, Anselm's claim that the incarnation was necessary because only a God-human (that is, a hybrid being) could repay humanity's debt to God⁷⁵—is an powerful way of understanding the centrality of hybridity in Christian theology. Like the rainbow that is a hybrid third space that connects east and west, and heaven and earth, Jesus Christ plays the same function in terms of bringing together divinity and humanity.⁷⁶

In sum, a rainbow theology draws upon various theological sources—including scripture, tradition, reason, and experience—that relate to the rainbow themes of multiplicity, diaspora, and hybridity. A rainbow theology can also include reflections on classical Christian doctrines such as the Trinity, eschatology, and christology. Although living at the intersections of multiplicity, diaspora, and hybridity may seem like a painful existence to many people, perhaps God is actually calling all of us to live in those rainbow spaces. And perhaps that is the gift that queer Asians of faith have to offer to the world.

IV. Future of Rainbow Theology

So where is rainbow theology headed? What is the future of queer Asian theology and religious studies? In this fourth and final part of the lecture, I would like to examine some of the exciting work that is currently being done by EQARS, the Emerging Queer

⁷² See Cheng, “Reclaiming Our Traditions,” 236-37; see also Patrick S. Cheng, “Kuan Yin: Mirror of the Queer Asian Christ” (2003), at http://www.patrickcheng.net/uploads/7/0/3/7/7037096/kuan_yin_mirror_of_the_queer_asian_christ.pdf (accessed on December 21, 2011).

⁷³ See Cheng, “I Am Yellow and Beautiful,” 15.

⁷⁴ See *Symbolum Chalcedonense* (451).

⁷⁵ See Anselm of Canterbury, *Cur Deus Homo* (1098), in *A Scholastic Miscellany: Anselm to Ockham*, ed. Eugene R. Fairweather (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1956), 100-83.

⁷⁶ See Cheng, *Radical Love*, 78-86 (discussing queer christologies).

Asian Religion Scholars group.⁷⁷ EQARS is an independent organization of queer Asian theologians and religion scholars that was formed in 2009. We are located around the world, from Malaysia to Tokyo, from the San Francisco Bay Area to New England. We communicate by email, and we gather once a month by Skype to talk about our work and provide intellectual, emotional, and spiritual support to each other. Not surprisingly, the cutting-edge work of EQARS reflects the three rainbow themes of multiplicity, diaspora, and hybridity.

First, in terms of multiplicity, EQARS's membership consists of theologians and religion scholars with multiple identities, perspectives, and social locations. Some of us are lesbian, others of us are gay. Still others are bisexual, queer, and/or gender-fluid. Some of us live in Asia, others of us live in the United States. Some of us are in the academy, others are in the church, and still others are involved with day-to-day activist work. Some of us draw upon social science data in doing our work, others draw upon cultural theory, and still others draw upon systematic theology. However, we are all committed to doing queer Asian theology and religious studies, while at the same time developing our unique scholarly voices.

In my view, rainbow theology must continue to embrace these multiplicity of perspectives with respect to queer Asians of faith. One critical area of inquiry is examining the intersections of spirituality with transgender and gender non-conforming identities. Michael Sepidoza Campos is an EQARS scholar who has done work in precisely this area. Mike – or “Dr. Mike,” I should say – is a Roman Catholic Filipino American queer scholar who just completed his Ph.D. from the Graduate Theological Union (GTU) in Berkeley, California. His work focuses on a theological reading of the *baklâ*, the “effeminate gay man who personifies Filipino popular conceptualizations of homosexuality.” Mike weaves together Christian theology with the work of anthropologists and literary theorists to create a brilliant postcolonial queer analysis of how the *baklâ* engages in a “complex navigation between self, God, love, and others.”⁷⁸

Joseph N. Goh is another EQARS scholar who is doing work on the intersections of spirituality and gender identity. Joe received a graduate degree in systematic theology from the Jesuit School of Theology. He now works in Malaysia at the PT Foundation, a community-based non-governmental organization (NGO) that is dedicated to HIV/AIDS awareness among sex workers, transgender folk, and MSMs (that is, men who have sex with men). Joe has written a provocative paper entitled “Transgressive Empowerment: Queering the Spiritualities of the Mak Nyahs of PT Foundation,” which examines the spiritual lives of *mak nyahs* (that is, transwomen) in Malaysia.⁷⁹ In my view, another critical area for rainbow theology is embracing the multiplicity of interfaith traditions that impact queer Asian people of faith. For example, Joe Goh's work not only involves looking at transgender issues in Malaysia, but it also examines the impact of Islamic law on trans women in that country.

⁷⁷ See <http://www.eqars.org> (accessed December 21, 2011).

⁷⁸ See Michael Sepidoza Campos, “From Bodies Displaced to Selves Unfurled: A Queer and Postcolonial Filipino-American Anthropology” (Ph.D. thesis, Graduate Theological Union, 2011); see also Michael Sepidoza Campos, “The Bakla: Gendered Religious Performance in Filipino Cultural Spaces,” in *Queer Religion*, vol. 2, ed. Donald L. Boisvert and Jay Emerson Johnson (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, forthcoming 2011).

⁷⁹ See Joseph N.G.L. Goh, “Transgressive Empowerment: Queering the Spiritualities of the Mak Nyahs of PT Foundation” (2011). Other works by Goh include Joseph N.G.L. Goh, “Balanced Genitals: YouTube Confessional Disclosures and Considerations for Malaysian Gay Spiritualities” (2011); Joseph N.G.L. Goh, “Online Nomads: Queer Theology Responds to Online Intercultural Homoerotic Pursuits in Malaysia” (2011); Joseph N.G.L. Goh, “The Word Was Not Made Flesh: Theological Reflections on the Banning of *Seksualiti Merdeka* 2011” (2011). As of December 2011, Goh is pursuing a Ph.D. in gender, sexuality, and theology at Monash University in Malaysia.

Another EQARS scholar doing work in this area is Yip Lai-shan, a doctoral student from Hong Kong who is at the GTU. Lai Shan is currently studying Roman Catholic moral theology and Chinese philosophy from a postcolonial, feminist, and queer perspective. She also has been an activist in various social justice and feminist movements in Hong Kong. Lai Shan recently published an article on constructing a Catholic bisexual theology for *nü-tongzhi* (that is women-loving-women).⁸⁰ Lai Shan's work is innovative in that it not only draws upon traditional Western feminist and queer theological sources, but it also draws upon traditional Chinese yin and yang cosmologies, as well as Chinese myths and folklore about same-sex and gender-variant practices.

Second, in terms of diaspora, EQARS is literally homeless in that it lacks a physical home. Our members are scattered all over the globe and gather virtually through email conversations or Skype chats. As such, it is not surprising that much of the work of EQARS scholars involve issues of migration and diaspora. Hugo Córdova Quero, who holds a Ph.D. from the GTU, currently lives in Tokyo where he is Postdoctoral Visiting Researcher at the Iberoamerican Institute at Sophia University, a Jesuit institution. He also teaches online courses as an adjunct faculty member at the Starr King School for the Ministry at the GTU. Hugo writes extensively about diaspora, and has recently presented a paper on the sexual lives of Brazilian immigrants of Japanese descent who move to Japan.⁸¹

Being in diaspora is hard for many people of Asian descent, especially given our close family and community ties. It is particularly hard for queer Asian people of faith, however, because we are scattered throughout the world. Groups like EQARS and the Queer Asian Spirit listserv actually serve as a virtual home for those of us who are metaphorically homeless. EQARS is much more than just an intellectual enterprise; it also serves a deep pastoral need. For example, EQARS had a conference call scheduled on the day after the recent 8.9 magnitude earthquake and tsunami in Japan. Hugo had been separated from his partner for nearly 24 hours, and he was sitting alone in his apartment in Tokyo. But he was able to join us, and we were able to be with him. In fact, we were all on line together when his partner finally arrived home.

I myself have experienced the loneliness and challenge of doing rainbow theology in diaspora, without being in a physical community of other queer Asian people of faith. A few years ago, I was going through a particularly difficult time with my scholarship. My father had recently passed away after a long illness, and I was struggling with my dissertation, questioning the usefulness of my theological work. One day, out of the blue, Elizabeth Leung, the coordinating minister of the API Roundtable Project, called me up along with Sharon Hwang Colligan (who was then working for the PANA Institute) and asked me to help them with queer Asian spiritual organizing on the East Coast. I look back on that

⁸⁰ See Yip Lai-shan, "A Proposal for Catholic Lesbian Feminist Theology in Hong Kong," *In God's Image* 29, no. 3 (September 2010): 21-32; see also Lai Shan Yip, "Listening to the Passion of Catholic 'Nü-Tongzhi': Developing a Catholic Lesbian Feminist Theology in Hong Kong," in Boisvert and Johnson, *Queer Religion*. For more about the tongzhi community in Hong Kong, see Rose Wu, *Liberating the Church from Fear: The Story of Hong Kong's Sexual Minorities* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Women Christian Council, 2000).

⁸¹ Hugo Córdova Quero, "Queering Migrant Bodies: Sexuality and Intimacy Among Japanese Brazilian Immigrants in Japan" (January 13, 2009). Other works by Córdova Quero relating to queer Asian theology include Hugo Córdova Quero, "Chang-ji-yi-ke-jin-tian-guo: Mo-da-la-de-ma-li-ya-de-ku-er-je-tu [The Prostitutes Also Go into the Kingdom of God: A Queer Reading of Mary of Magdala]," in *Ku-Er-Hsin-Sheng* [Queer Soundings], ed. Center for the Study of Sexualities, trans. Bo-Hsu Chen (Jhongli, Taiwan: National Central University, 2009), 255-293; and Hugo Córdova Quero, Patrick S. Cheng, and Michael Sepidoza Campos, eds., *Trans-Pacific Affairs: Queering Migrations to, from, and Within Asia* (forthcoming 2012). Córdova Quero also has published a number of works in queer theology, including Hugo Córdova Quero, "Risky Affairs: Marcella Althaus-Reid Indecently Queering Juan Luis Segundo's Hermeneutical Circle Propositions," in *Dancing Theology in Fetish Boots: Essays in Honour of Marcella Althaus-Reid*, ed. Lisa Isherwood and Mark D. Jordan (London: SCM Press, 2010), 207-18.

day as a resurrection moment of sorts for me; I'm not sure I'd be here talking to you today were it not for Elizabeth and Sharon's outreach and pastoral care during that critical juncture in my vocation as a rainbow theologian.

As such, I believe that the future of rainbow theology requires our deeper engagement with issues of diaspora, migration, and border crossings of all types. I also believe that the future of rainbow theology will involve the crossing of ethnosexual boundaries and engaging in dialogue with our queer Black, Latin@, and American Indian siblings, and understanding how issues of multiplicity, diaspora, and hybridity affect their own particular contexts.

Finally, in terms of hybridity, EQARS is an organization in that it is committed to a blend of both scholarship and activism in terms of its theological work. EQARS is not just an intellectual enterprise. Rather, it is deeply committed to the intersections of theory and praxis. In that sense, it is a hybrid organization. For example, one of our members, Miak Siew, is an M.Div. student at the Pacific School of Religion. He has written a paper on the central role of a particular Anglican church in Singapore—the Church of Our Savior—in the ex-gay and reparative therapy movement in that country.⁸² Miak also was selected to be a participant at last year's Human Rights Campaign summer institute for LGBT and allied graduate students in theology and religious studies. Miak's scholarship is grounded in his social activism, and his work has been widely cited and used as a resource by the LGBT community in Singapore.

No discussion about EQARS would be complete without mentioning the work of Elizabeth Leung, who has been the coordinating minister of the API Roundtable at CLGS since 2007. Elizabeth, a United Church of Christ minister from Hong Kong who holds a Ph.D. in Christian spirituality from the GTU, is a scholar-activist in the best sense of the word. Not only does she present at workshops, panels, and retreats around the country—and teach courses as an adjunct professor at GTU—but she has also networked tirelessly with other queer Asian theological types around the country for the last several years. Over the years, Elizabeth has worked with my friends Debbie Lee and Sharon Hwang Colligan with respect to the Network on Religion and Justice for API LGBT People (NRJ). NRJ's work has included outreach to Asian American churches as well as producing the documentary *In God's House*,⁸³ which is a wonderful tool for initiating conversations about LGBT issues in Asian American churches. Elizabeth is currently writing a curriculum that can be used by churches that are interested in this kind of work.

In my view, the future of rainbow theology must continue to be rooted in praxis and social activism, particularly with respect to our queer Asian communities of accountability. Furthermore, rainbow theology must continue to engage with hybrid and intersectional voices and movements, such as the LGBTQ rights movements in Asia, as well as issues of class and economic justice.

The future of rainbow theology looks promising. The Asian North American Religion, Culture, and Society group of the American Academy of Religion will be sponsoring a groundbreaking panel this fall on queer Asian American religious issues at the AAR's annual meeting.⁸⁴ The theme will be "coming home," which seems particularly appropriate

⁸² Miak Siew, "The Conservative Majority: Examining the Emergence of a Vocal Conservative Minority in Singapore" (August 23, 2009).

⁸³ *In God's House: Asian American Lesbian and Gay Families in the Church*, directed by Lina Hoshino (PANA Institute, 2009).

⁸⁴ "Coming Home: LGBTQ Asian Americans and Religious Communities," Asian North American Religion, Culture, and Society Group panel, 2011 Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion, San Francisco, CA (November 21, 2011).

since the meeting will be held in San Francisco, a long-time home to many Asian Americans and LGBT people. In addition to Mike, Elizabeth, and myself, the AAR panel will include Professor Gina Masequesmay from Cal State Northridge (who is here tonight and speaking at tomorrow's interdisciplinary colloquium sponsored by EQARS)⁸⁵ and Professor Su Pak from Union Theological Seminary in New York.⁸⁶

While all of this is wonderful and exciting, I would like to close with a fourth and final characteristic of the rainbow: its ephemeral nature. Rainbows can only come into existence when the conditions are just right. These conditions consist of rain that is illuminated by bright sunshine at an angle of 42 degrees behind one's head, a condition that can occur only during certain times of the day.⁸⁷ And even after they have come into being, rainbows do not last for a long time. The parallels to rainbow theology are clear: I believe that the continued growth and development of queer Asian theology is never something that can be taken for granted. It will take time, money, and institutional commitments. Without this continued support, rainbow theology will merely be an ephemeral phenomenon and cease to exist.

As such, I would like to publicly thank CLGS, and especially Bernie Schlager, Jay Emerson Johnson, Roland Stringfellow, and Elizabeth Leung, for their support of—and commitment to—queer Asian and rainbow theologies. Queer Asian theology and religious studies has come a long ways since the mid-1990s, when Leng Lim and Eric Law first published their groundbreaking articles on this topic.⁸⁸ However, there is still much more work to be done. Some areas that I believe are critical to explore in the future include queer Asian theological reflection on transgender issues, interfaith issues, class issues, global queer rights issues, disability issues, aging issues, queer adoption and family issues, as well as the lifting up the voices of South Asian, Pacific Islander, Middle Eastern, and other marginalized queer Asian voices.

On a personal note, many of you may know that I have a new book out, *Radical Love: An Introduction to Queer Theology*.⁸⁹ In it, I argue why I believe that Christianity is, at its core, a queer faith. The book covers all of the traditional Christian doctrines—from revelation to christology to eschatology—from a queer lens. Since the book's release last month, I have already been attacked by the Catholic League in a press release, and I was told that Amazon.com has been banned from selling the book in Romania. Just yesterday, Stand Firm in Faith, a right-wing Episcopal and Anglican organization, said on its website that my book publisher's catalog should be shipped in a brown wrapper because of its "nasty" content, which includes my book.⁹⁰ So, indeed, there is still much work to be done.

In sum, I have argued in this lecture that the rainbow can serve as a powerful symbol for queer Asian theologies. The rainbow shares the characteristics of multiplicity, diaspora, and hybridity with queer Asian people of faith. It also serves a christological function in terms of bridging and bringing together different worlds: east and west, divine and human, and spirit and matter. It is my hope that a multivalent, diasporic, and hybridized "rainbow space" can be the place where queer and Asian theologies are brought together, and where previously silenced voices and perspectives can emerge and challenge the dominant theological discourse. Thank you.

⁸⁵ Dr. Masequesmay's publications include Masequesmay and Metzger, *Embodying Asian/American Sexualities*.

⁸⁶ Dr. Pak's publications include Su Yon Pak, Jung Ha Kim, Unzu Lee, and Myung Ji Cho, *Singing the Lord's Song in a New Land: Korean American Practices of Faith* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005).

⁸⁷ See Whelan, *Book of Rainbows*, 32; Lee and Fraser, *Rainbow Bridge*, 111-14, 321-22.

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