

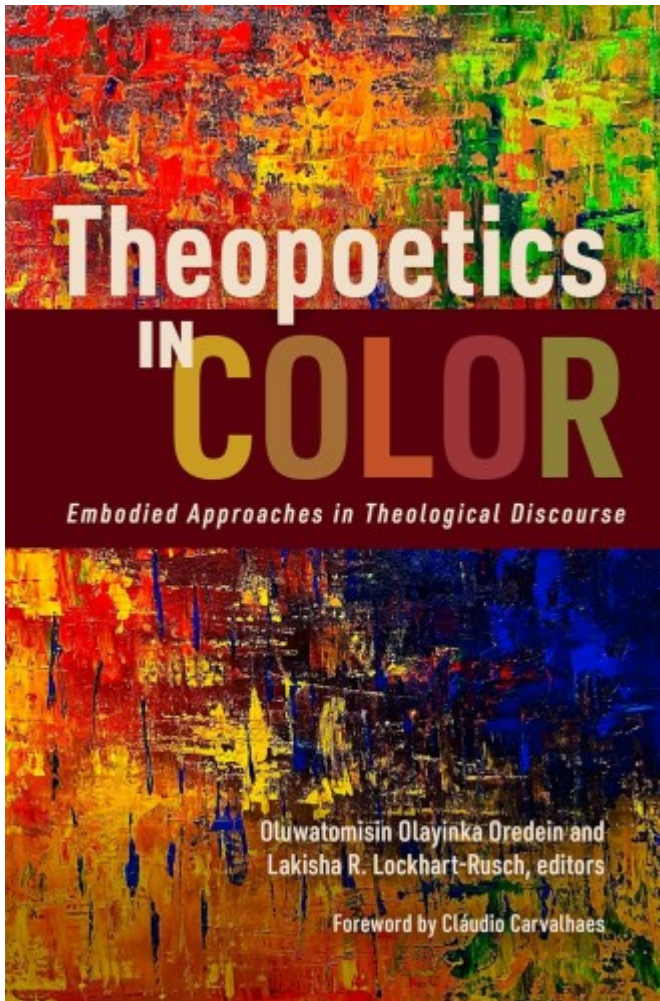
## The heart of embodied theopoetics beats for liberation

A new edited volume seeks not to replace traditional, White male-focused theopoetics so much as to reshape the subject altogether.

by [Adriana Rivera](#)

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## In Review



## Theopoetics in Color

Embodied Approaches in Theological Discourse

Edited by Oluwatomisin Olayinka Oredein and Lakisha R. Lockhart-Rusch

Eerdmans

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RW-REPLACE-TOKEN

When white light hits a prism, it refracts into a colorful spectrum of various wavelengths. Shining a light on the theological academy, *Theopoetics in Color* emerges as one such spectrum. Fourteen contributors add their tints to the study and practice of theoetics, which is concerned with imaginative and embodied forms of theological meaning-making.

As an academic subject, traditional theoetics centers the experiences of White scholars and especially White men, leaving other scholars unseen and unheard. There has been a mounting resistance to the theological academy's "phallogocentrism" (a term treated by Lis Valle-Ruiz in the second chapter), which marginalizes the embodied experiences and knowledge of anyone deemed other. However, the goal of this collection is not simply to replace traditional theoetics and assert the dominance of theoetics in color. Rather, it aims to reshape the subject, putting flesh on its bones and breathing new life into it.

In this way, *Theopoetics in Color* seeks a mutual rehumanization, correcting what Paulo Freire calls the "distortion of the vocation of becoming more human" that is oppression. The heart of this embodied theoetic movement beats for liberation and serves as a timely reminder of the work that still needs to be done. The theological world recently mourned the death of Peruvian theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez, the father of Latin American liberation theology. His theoetic—his "creative God-reflection from the space of the body and toward the totality of liberation," as coeditor Oluwatomisin Oredein writes in the introduction—is apparent in each chapter of this book, expanded and enriched by the content and contexts of the collaborators.

*Theopoetics in Color* includes four sections: Performance and Voice; Methods and Inquiries; Interlocutors; and Hermeneutics, Proclamation, and Claim. The first section starts with Patrick Reyes's call for resistance against the cyborg-making systems and structures of the theological academy. There is also a reclamation of wholeness, exemplified in Lakisha Lockhart-Rusch's processing of the experience of feeling fragmented by her adviser's suggestion that she write her dissertation more "Anglo-Saxon."

The theopoetic methods presented in the next section are attuned to collective identity, needs, and dreams. Contributors like Tiffany Trent make room for mixed-methods analysis that is pastoral and transformative by coding the sounds of a congregation with a theopoetic ear.

The discourse developed with the interlocutors featured in the third section demonstrates the power of art and aesthetics to name and narrate collective experience. Yohana Junker does this by examining how the visual art of Doris Salcedo images loss and longing, serving as a collective testimony against violence in Latin America. While the authors in this section are not explicitly theologians, their work is woven into embodied theological discourse, demonstrating the variety of definitions and applications of theopoetics in color.

The book's final section provides examples of various cultural hermeneutics put into practice. In a chapter called "We with God," Brian Bantum offers a full and admittedly (a)systematic theology that builds on an essay he wrote for the century ("A mosaic of story," February 2023). Through this theopoetic interpretation, Bantum envisions theology as more of a dynamic process than a static product.

The contributions overall are richly descriptive and contextual, shying away from the prescriptive nature of traditional theological discourse. While there is diversity among the contributors in terms of race, gender, and geographic location, along with a common thread of decolonial approaches and values, there remains a gap for Indigenous voices. This is not the fault of the editors so much as a reflection of the theological academy and a reminder of why a book like this is necessary.

Readers may be frustrated that the book does not yield a conclusive definition of "theopoetics in color" that can stand against traditional theopoetics, but that is precisely where the book's power lies. Each author contributes their own working definition of theopoetics and applies that definition to their context, simultaneously destabilizing and reinvigorating the category. The goal of the volume is not to provide a "how to" on doing embodied theological discourse but rather to explore "why not?" from multiple angles. It issues an open invitation for scholars and communities of color to center their theology, from God-talk to the "Lorde-speak" of Oredein's chapter on Audre Lorde. What results is a feast of knowledge and connection.

For aspiring BIPOC scholars like me, for whom education often feels like drowning in a sea of Whiteness, this book is a beacon of hope that shows what the theological academy can become. To see names and experiences like mine highlighted in a volume that is sure to become a seminary staple affirms my place in theology. Oredein says of her brainchild: “This book needs to exist now because those of us who are in this work have always been around doing our work; it is the rest of the world who is now catching up to how we sound and who we already are.”

The volume may have benefited from a deeper look back to some of those early contributions. Instead, it highlights the work of more recent scholars. This is a bold move, and it works because it shows the ever transforming nature of embodied theological discourse. *Theopoetics in Color* is a beautifully textured snapshot of the current state of theology. By utilizing theopoetics for both research and resistance, this book invites a new generation to shine their light into the Whiteness of the theological academy.