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Welcome to this second online issue of ARTS! We are pleased with the responses we have had to moving ARTS to a quarterly publication with two issues online and two issues in print each academic year. We hope that you will find what we are doing with the online issues to be enjoyable and engaging.

This issue has articles that treat four art forms: painting, drama, jazz, and graphic comics art. Our lead article is about the work of Melvin and Rose Smith, two nationally known artists, who most often treat African American themes from experiences that flow out of their own cultural background. Cindi Beth Johnson, the author of this article has worked with the artists over a number of years exhibiting their works in United Theological Seminary’s gallery and calling on them for formal presentation in the school’s religion and arts program. They each have distinct styles which provide the viewer a counterpoint of moods, colors, themes, and presence. The power of their art to speak to matters of the spirit is profound.

Our second work is a reprint of an article we published in 2005 (17:2) which was very well received by our readers. The article by Elisabeth Svalin gives us an introduction to the artist and this series of paintings titled Apostles. Capturing with a minimum of strokes, abstract forms, and a dynamic use of color, Ostlund offers us an interpretation of each Apostle. The works invite reflection and meditation as they call us into the lives of these religious forebears, the mystery of their faith, and a central characteristic of their of life.

There is a rich history of interest in what jazz might metaphorically say to the way we do theology. Some of the early writings, published in the 1950s and ‘60s in motive magazine, stimulated wide discussion of the relationship and the 1959 Convocation of Methodist Youth and Students for 6000 participants held at Purdue University bought the relationship alive by featuring Odetta, Martha Graham, and Dave Brubeck weaving religious themes out of their artistry. A jazz mass was also commissioned for that event. This interest in the intersections of jazz, religious experience, and theological discourse has continued down to the present. Elise Edwards in her essay, The Jazz Aesthetic as a Model for Theological Discourse, continues this conversation with a focus on how theologians can find affinities with jazz and insights from its aesthetic that will enhance and potentially reshape their theological work. She calls upon the writings of jazz musicians, cultural critics and theologians in providing us all a new chapter in thinking about this ongoing conversation.

Theresa Mason writes about two plays by the Filipino playwright, Anton Juan in her article Symbols of Resistance in Anton Juan’s Plays El Flamenco Senaculo and Golgotha: Intersections of Filipino Culture, Religion, Ritual, and Theology. The plays are based on, a traditional Filipino ritual and theatre form. In each, Juan transform Christ’s Passion into a lament for global suffering and an invitation of hope to create a world of peace and justice. Mason moves us into the plays and provides us with a striking understanding of Juan’s powerful interpretation of the cross against the backdrop of human suffering, oppression, and marginalization.

In Isaac and Christina Alderman’s essay Graphically Depicted: Biblical Texts in Comic Form, we are invited into the world of the religious graphic novel. The authors look at the three artists, Siku, R Crumb, and Iva Hoth, and their treatments of the Genesis stories of Adam and Eve, Noah and the Ark, and Cain and Abel. The writers explore the nature of the graphic novel and the blending of image and word in one popular art form. The contrasts of the works reveal different interpretations of the stories and different theological statements. The integration of the “comics” form of speaking figures within sequential frames is shown to be an important contemporary artistic
expression—one that attracts millions of people—that theologians should take seriously for both their cultural significance and their implications for the creation of theology.

Following these comments, Robin Jensen, the President of the Society for the Art in Religious and Theological Studies (SARTS), calls our attention to the SARTS meeting in San Francisco on November 18-19 preceding the opening of the American Academy of Religion Conference. I join Robin in inviting you to attend our sessions and join SARTS if you are not a member. The SARTS website is: www.societyarts.org. You will also find information about ARTS on this website.

In the last pages of this issue we feature the ARTS partner schools and links to their websites. These schools are important to our own life as a publication and through their own courses and programs to the larger field of religion and the arts. The schools and institutions include: Andover-Newton School of Theology; the Center for the Arts, Religion and Education (CARE) at the GTU; Drew Theological School, Fuller Seminary; The Museum of Contemporary Religious Art at St. Louis University; St. John’s University School of Theology; United Theological Seminary; Union Theological Seminary; Wesley Theological Seminary; and Vanderbilt Divinity School.

I want to apologize to all of you who are readers and subscribers of ARTS for the delay in the 2011 Spring issue (22:3). It should have gone to the printer in late May. The delay was unavoidable, but you should have it by late October.

-WY

Announcing the 2011-12 Luce Fellowship Recipients

Elise Edwards
Designers as Agents: Theological Interpretations of Architecture’s Ethical Task

Jennifer Awes Freeman
The Opus Caroli Regis and Medieval Western Theology of the Image

Rev. Michael Patella, OSB
The Hermeneutics of the Saint John’s Bible

For more information on these projects and the Luce Fellowship Program, visit www.societyarts.org.
I wish to fill you in on our schedule of events for this year’s jointly held annual meetings of the American Academy of Religion and the Society of Biblical Literature in San Francisco. We hope you will join us for any or all of these events.

FIRST: On Friday afternoon (November 18), from 3-5:00 SARTS is co-sponsoring a session with the Art, Literature and Religion Section of the AAR. The title of this session is “New Frontiers in Theological Aesthetics: Taking Stock and Charting Courses.” This will be a panel discussion, designed to honor the work of our late, dear friend, Alessandro Garcia-Rivera on the future of theological aesthetics. This panel will be a round table discussion of noted scholars and graduate students. Among those participating are Mia Mochizuki, Ronald Nakasone, William O’Neill, Thomas Scirghi, Cecilia Gonzalez-Andrieu, Oleg Byrchov, and Frank Burch Brown.

SECOND: On Friday evening (November 18) from 7-9:00, we will be holding our annual SARTS reception. This will be a special evening to honor the work of the late Stephen De Staebler and will feature the recent double issue of ARTS, edited by Diane Apostolos-Cappadona along with Wilson Yates and supported by the Center for the Arts, Religion, and Education (CARE) at the Graduate Theological Union. Diane and Wilson will join us to say a few words about the history of the project and acknowledge the contributions of Doug Adams to its inception. Carin Jacobs, Director of CARE, will also participate in the program.

THIRD: On Saturday morning (November 19) we will have two presentations. From 9:00 to 10:00 or so we will have a brief business meeting of the Society and a presentation by our 2011 Luce Fellow, Sara Patterson of Hanover College (“A Gimme Mountain: Religious Expression and Experience at Salvation Mountain”). Then, from 10:00-11:30 SARTS will sponsor a reading and discussion of her poetry with San Francisco poet Jane Hirschfield. This presentation, “Given Sugar, Given Salt: Poetry, Art, and Inclusion” will be advertised to all AAR and SBL members, so be sure to get there early to get a good seat for this exceptional event.

Please put all of these wonderful events into your program planner. This year will be a rich feast, indeed, as well as a time to honor and remember some very special friends of SARTS. We look forward to seeing you in San Francisco. If you have any questions about these events, please don’t hesitate to email me: robin.jensen@vanderbilt.edu.

—RJ

ABOUT THE SOCIETY

The Society for the Arts in Religious and Theological Studies had its charter meeting at the 2002 AAR/SBL. The Society was organized to provide a forum for scholars and artists interested in the intersections between theology, religion, and the arts to share thoughts, challenge ideas, strategize approaches in the classroom, and to advance the discipline in theological and religious studies curricula.

The goal of the Society is to attract consistent participation of a core group of artists and scholars of theology and religion in order to have dialogue about theological and religious meaning of the arts, and the artistic/aesthetic dimension of theological and religious inquiry.

For more information and to become a member of SARTS, visit: www.societyarts.org.
Melvin and Rose Smith met on a blind date when they were students at the University of Minnesota. Rose was an art major. Melvin, acknowledged as a child for his artistic abilities, was studying journalism. Melvin says he fell in love with Rose's art before he fell in love with her. Rose continued to paint while Melvin pursued a career in journalism. Rose and Melvin married and had children. Two decades later, Melvin again picked up his brush. The way the story goes, Melvin gave Rose one too many suggestions about what to do with a particular painting. As Melvin tells it, “Her response to my suggestion was to encourage me to make my own art!” And for over twenty-five years, they have been blending their lives as partners and as artists with complementary but distinct styles. They embody a deep admiration for each other as artists while at the same time they stretch, encourage, and inspire each other.

The Smiths are prolific artists. Rose is primarily a painter, who works in acrylics, oil, and watercolor. Melvin creates works in collage and sculpture. Working from the depth of their own creativity and the breadth of their roots in African American culture, the Smiths create deeply personal works that command the viewer’s attention. Their art often portrays people they have known, visual stories of family members, acquaintances, communities, neighbors and places that they have visited. Through images and sculpture, the Smiths tell moving and evocative stories about society.

Their work, described by them as often arising from their subconscious, evokes a variety of experiences and emotions, often contradictory in nature. Subjects and scenes that treat solitude, community, struggle, dignity, innocence and poise, come alive on canvas through the use of exquisite color combinations, or through the alignment of scraps and the creation of sculpture. The full range of human expression—sorrow, joy, wonder, and delight—can be seen in response to the human condition.

The Smiths, who grew up in the Midwest, knew that their creative roots were connected in some way to the influence, creativity, and imagination that had come out of Harlem. In the early 1990’s, they journeyed to New York to see Harlem firsthand, walking streets, riding buses, and taking cabs. They returned and began a new body of work that included depictions of taxicabs, famous New York landmarks, and street scenes. Their work reflects the energy of the Harlem Renaissance, but they have forged their own identity for a new time, creating works that are distinct in style and subject matter. They are a husband and wife team whose art focuses on capturing and interpreting the African American experience.

**Rose J. Smith**

*My drawings, watercolors, oils and acrylics have always been for me the means by which I render my true feelings to the world. In essence, my art is a confession made to clarify what I have witnessed in life.*

—Rose J. Smith

**Melvin R. Smith**

A self-taught artist, Melvin Smith’s work frequently includes scenes from Sandtown, Oklahoma, near Oklahoma City, where he was born and raised as a child. Melvin’s art often tells stories of the African American experience, depicting urban scenes and family relationships in bold colors and strong shapes. Accomplished in a variety of media, Melvin is perhaps best known for his work in sculpture and collage.
Rose J. Smith, a native of Kansas City, Missouri, grew up in St. Paul, Minnesota. Rose says that she has been painting ever since she discovered, at the age of five, how easily in a brush stroke one can journey to others’ worlds. In addition to the University of Minnesota, she studied at the Minneapolis School of Art and Design. She is the recipient of several Minnesota art awards.

Her large but elegant figures, often disproportionate in shape, fill the canvas, easily expressing emotions such as loneliness, dignity, solitude, peace, and tranquility. Her exquisite use of color and shape create women who are strong and unforgettable, beautiful and powerful, innocent and strong. The starkness of her backgrounds encourages a focus on the figure, bringing the viewer’s attention to the power she bestows on each woman. Smith says of her art,

While practicing free association, I move back and forth between my conscious and unconscious worlds in search of my innermost feelings about nature. Surrealism has always been a strong force in my paintings. I don’t know where it came from; it was just always there like the color of your skin. My images have evolved and are wedded in patterns of light and color, reflecting my visual reactions to the world around me. I create dreamlike characters from another place and time.

In a society where so much emphasis is placed on the human figure, her depiction of these women with elongated arms and legs, lengthy fingers, oversized feet, and small heads present themselves as exquisite in their perfection. The women are stunning in their beauty; their elegance and dignity emanate from the canvas.

Melvin R. Smith

My intention is for my art to evoke time beyond events or hours or years. Hopefully, the underlying metaphor of much of my imagery will lie somewhere in this direction and has something to do with time lived and felt, moment by moment.

—Melvin R. Smith

A self-taught artist, Melvin’s work frequently includes scenes from Sandtown, Oklahoma, near Oklahoma City, where he was born and raised as a child. For a number of years, Rose and Melvin divided their time living in Minnesota and Oklahoma. His love for Oklahoma, combined with a desire to raise the visibility of African American artists in his home state, led the Smiths to open the Oklahoma Museum of African American Art. They hoped to inspire other African Americans from Oklahoma to follow their example and become artists. Their art was exhibited at the State Capitol, and Oklahoma Public Television prepared and broadcast a documentary on the Smiths’ work.

Melvin’s art often tells stories of the African American experience, depicting urban scenes and family relationships in bold colors and strong shapes. Accomplished in a variety of media, Melvin is perhaps best known for his work in sculpture and collage. He creates much of his work out of discarded objects. In the documentary about his work, he refers to a junkyard as an “art supply store,” stating that a visit leaves him in a fit of ecstasy.

When working in collage, Melvin compares his process to jazz or improvisation. He begins by assembling all of the materials he will work with, including colorful scraps of...
paper, newsprint, or magazines. He does not start the creation of the collage until he
determines the exact number of pieces needed to complete the work. The result is
disciplined improvisation—room to create freely within a pre-established boundary.
Melvin says, “in a sense, my collages have a kind of improvisatory spirit about them—the
same ‘Psychic Automatism’ which many jazz musicians use during the expression of their
art. In this process, instruments free play to call forth sounds and feelings that exist below
the level of consciousness.”

An Interview with the Artists

Cindi Beth: Describe your art, your style and say something about the artists that have
had the most influence on you.

Melvin: I don’t lean toward any particular camp. My style is Modernism, that’s probably
the best definition. I like the work of Jacob Lawrence and Romare Bearden, they were
both luminaries. Their mission was to express the feelings and history of African
Americans, which we are also trying to do. They were transferring information about the
African American culture. The artist who influenced me the most is Romare Bearden
though I had been doing art for years before I actually saw Bearden’s work. The earliest
influence on my art was actually Kurt Schwitters.

Rose: When I was growing up, Norman Rockwell was my favorite artist. I liked the way
that Rockwell drew the body, I was very influenced by him. When I got older people said
my art was similar to Milton Avery.

Cindi Beth: What is your favorite medium, what medium best expresses your work as
an artist?

Melvin: My favorite medium is collage. When I first
started I thought my collage work would be
abstract. I was doing small poetic pieces
but then images started popping up. I
realized that they were figures and that the
figures were often family members. My
family would visit, look at one of my art
works, and say, “There’s mom,” or “that’s
your brother.” I realized then that the
images don’t come from me, they come
through me.

Rose: I started drawing when I was in
second grade. No one told me about art, I
just started drawing. I don’t know where it came from. I started doing it and I wanted to
do more. Being an artist is something that is in you and that you don’t control, it is just
there. I like working with pen and ink, watercolor, and oil, but I really like oil because it is
so flexible. In oil I can rework images many times.

Cindi Beth: Melvin, how did you start doing sculpture?

Melvin: John Hock, director of Franconia Sculpture Park in Minnesota, encouraged me
to try doing sculpture and to work on a large scale. That wasn’t a big transition, collage
is stacking and gluing, sculpture is stacking and welding. The first piece I did was a large
warrior, and it sold right away. I’ve been doing sculpture ever since.

Cindi Beth: What is your primary motivation as an artist?

Melvin: It wasn’t something that I chose, it chose me. Being an artist is a calling, it is
more than a profession for me. It is who you are, not what you do. I went to the University of Minnesota to study journalism. At that time journalism was considered one of the most esteemed jobs in the country. My program included a prerequisite course, and I took an art class to complete the requirement. I realized art was going to be my mission in life. I also met Rose then, my future wife. I went on this artist journey with Rose, and I’m still on that journey, with her.

**Rose:** I want to record the history and experiences of African Americans, to put it on paper so it will always be there. I’ve been especially interested in recording the story of African American women. I want to document this so people don’t forget that history. My current project is on African American males. It is a hard life if you are a black man in our society. I want to tell that story.

**Cindi Beth:** You refer to yourself as “messengers,” can you say more about what you mean by that?

**Melvin:** We are witnesses in telling the story. Rose first talked about this, the fact that we are like poets. Poets tell the truth about what they have seen. They bear witness to the story.

**Cindi Beth:** What have been some of the highlights of your career?

**Melvin:** A highlight for us was an invitation to come to the Southside Community Art Center in Chicago. Writers like Charles White, Gwendolyn Brooks, and Richard Wright came out of that institution. It was an incredible validation of our work.

**Cindi Beth:** You have often done a body of work related to a trip, a visit to places like Oklahoma, the Bahamas, Harlem and New Orleans. Which trip was most meaningful to you, which influenced your art the most?

**Melvin:** Going back to Oklahoma was probably the most meaningful trip for me. It was where I was born and raised. We spent quite a bit of time living there. We had the opportunity to open a museum there. I was an artist-in-residence at various schools in Oklahoma.

**Rose:** Going to New York and visiting Harlem was very significant for me. I learned a great deal about the history of the Black movement. We spent time walking on streets, riding in buses and taking the subway. Different modes of travel allow us to see different views, to actually see how people live. We have always taken different modes of travel on our trips. The mode of travel gives you a different point of view.

**Cindi Beth:** How have you been influenced by each other as artists?

**Melvin:** Rose influenced me most by giving me the first opportunity to show a work of art. She was having a show at the University of St. Thomas and she encouraged me to put one of my collage works in, to see what might happen. People responded to the piece, it received lots of attention, and I kept going.

**Rose:** We have different styles that are distinct but they go together. We can look at the
same thing and while we each have an artistic interpretation they are related in some way.

**Cindi Beth:** *What do you hope people take away after they see your art?*

**Melvin:** I hope that they can feel life, enhance their life, know that they are out there and alive. I hope that it makes life more bearable. Anything that can enhance a person’s journey through this maze called life is a welcome thing to have. It is a tough journey to take. You need something to enhance it in some way.

**Rose:** I hope that they can see what I am trying to say, to hear the stories that we are trying to tell.

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**Interview about the *New Orleans: After the Storm* paintings**

In February, 2011 Rose & Melvin Smith installed a large exhibition of each of their works at United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities entitled, *New Orleans: After the Storm.* The body of work, done after a trip to New Orleans conveyed the complexity and beauty of this well-known but often troubled city. Their images of individuals and their stories affected by Hurricane Katrina, engaged and educated the viewer about not only the challenges confronted by the residents of New Orleans after Katrina, but also draw us into an understanding of the human pathos in this struggle with nature and social conflict. The images shown are part of that exhibition. What follows is an interview with the Smiths.

**Cindi Beth:** *Would you be willing to say something about a few of the works in the show?*

**Melvin:** *Can you Feel Me?*

We went to New Orleans in 2007, to see what New Orleans was like after Katrina. We met people who had been waiting for a long time for assistance. We talked to African Americans who resented those organizations that were making a profit off of their misery. People were coming into their neighborhoods on buses, looking at them. They said that they felt like monkeys in a cage. We talked with people and what often came through was their sense of anger. The anger can be seen in their faces and in their words. People were making money off of their misfortune. That anger is what came through in “Can you Feel Me?”

**Melvin:** *Jitterbug No. 11.* It is part of a whole series that I did on the Jitterbug. The dancer in this work is actually my cousin Richard. When I was growing up I would visit him in the summer. He took me to the places he enjoyed and he loved dancing, he danced all summer long. He was one of the best dancers. I am intrigued by how important the Jitterbug was to African Americans. The Jitterbug is done all of the world but it started in New Orleans, at Congo Square.
Rose: Playing Between the Lines
This is actually an image of my father. At the time I am creating an image I can’t see or know who it is. When you are painting you are sort of in a ‘trance,’ you move the brush and the brush puts the picture there. You don’t always know what you are doing until it is done but something is expressed. You know what you want to put on the paper but you let your hand do it and it does it for you.

Rose: The Persistence of Despair
After Katrina many people in New Orleans lost everything. People ended up having nervous breakdowns, needing medical care. They didn’t have a house, clothes, or any of their belongings. I wanted to try to convey what it would be like to lose everything. This is my attempt to capture on canvas the experience of losing everything.

The artistic husband and wife team of collagist Melvin and painter Rose spent years traveling by bus, care, and train in an effort to see African America. Their work is an extraordinary coming together of history, social observation, and artistic commentary. They are messengers who share their art with a missionary zeal.
Symbols of Resistance in Anton Juan’s Plays El Flamenco Senaculo and Golgotha: Intersections of Filipino Culture, Religion, Ritual, and Theology

-Theresa Mason

Shortly after Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos declared martial law, Anton Juan directed a production of Marat/Sade.1 The military closed the theatre after the first performance, so the young director turned to Roman Catholic rituals to protest against the Marcos’ regime and to depict the injustices of society. As Juan said,” “[the government] closed my theatre . . . but they could not . . . punish me for putting on a Passion of Christ, where Christ would symbolize the Filipino people (Fox). Since then, he has become an internationally acclaimed playwright and director, known for pushing the edges of theatre. He also earned a doctorate in Semiotics, taught at the University of the Philippines, and now teaches at the University of Notre Dame. This article explores two of Anton Juan’s recent plays, El Flamenco Senaculo and The Waters of Golgotha, which are based on the Senaculo, a traditional Filipino ritual and theatre form. Both plays transform Christ’s Passion into a lament for global suffering and an invitation of hope to create a world where peace and justice reign.

In order to understand these plays, it is important to understand the significance of Holy Week in Filipino culture. The predominately Roman Catholic country (80–85%) observes rituals, processions, street theatre, religious practices, and folk traditions that draw communities together, encompass all social groups, and reconfirm their Catholic beliefs (Diamond, 142).2 One of the primary dramatic rituals is the Senaculo, a Passion play. Each town that holds a Senaculo develops its own interpretations with thousands turning out in the streets, town squares, basketball courts, and churches. The Passion play was based on the Spanish auto sacramentales which Spanish colonizing friars brought to the Philippines in the 1700s. Originally, the Senaculo served the ideals of colonialism by replacing the adventurous hero in Filipino precolonial epics with a meek, obedient Jesus (Cruz-Lucero, 48). Since then, it evolved into a synchronistic ritual merging Catholicism with animist folk and agricultural cycles, which also symbolizes waiting for the transformation of the earth. Furthermore, the Filipinos have transformed the themes of compliance into a theatre of resistance. The religious symbols of Christ’s suffering have been dramatized to address unfair labor practices, martial law, and other injustices.

The Senaculo and other Holy Week rituals are accompanied by acts of penance in popular devotion. Thousands show their sympathy with Christ’s suffering during Holy Week by undergoing their own physical mortifications that include: depriving themselves of sleep to chant the Passion narrative at shrines and churches (Peterson, 314), crawling in the streets, carrying heavy crosses, and flagellation.3 Some offer themselves for crucifixion with actual nails in the Passion play (Peterson 326).4 In order to be nailed, they need to take a vow of sacrifice5 and be accepted for the role.

Figure 1
(A. Juan 4) (Original series)
A penitent woman gets crucified in Lenten rites in the Philippines. Photo courtesy of Anton Juan.
The first play, *El Flamenco Senaculo*, merges the Filipino passion Passion play with the Spanish dance-theater form flamenco. Although flamenco has become associated with shallow tourist performances involving castanets and dresses with giant flounces, Andalusian Gypsies in Spain developed music of the region into their own distinctive flavor (Leblon, 22) with strong complicated rhythms, emotional songs with heart rending cries, and forceful expressive dances that express human anguish or joy. The Andalusian Gypsies were a marginalized ethnic minority who were poor, persecuted, harassed by laws intended to exterminate them, and hounded by the Spanish Inquisition (Totten, 26). Juan was inspired to create a libretto including flamenco because it arose from the Gypsy’s struggles as an oppressed people and served as a symbol of resistance in a movement parallel to the Filipino Senaculo tradition (Juan, *El Flamenco Senaculo*, 3).

*El Flamenco Senaculo* has twelve scenes of dance, song, movement, and media. The performers include Jesus, Judas, the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mary Magdalene, two guitarists, a percussionist, and male and female singers who sing different roles. The libretto for *El Flamenco Senaculo* begins with a woman’s lamentation about Christ’s entry into Jerusalem that starts as a Senaculo and segues to a flamenco cry. A passionate percussive flamenco hosanna follows. Judas pleads with Jesus to be a hero rather than a martyr in a flamenco cry.

Mary Magdalene and other women encircle Jesus in a dance while a video document shows marginalized women and sex workers. Judas criticizes her for wasting perfume on Jesus. Then the Blessed Mother embraces both Judas and Jesus dancing her agony of her cleaved heart crying that all children are her children:

Rich and Poor
Man and Woman
Oppressor and oppressed
Two navels have I
And one heart,
Half a heart of light
Half a heart of night (8).

While Jesus agonizes between his political ambitions versus his divine call, Judas enters covered in white gauze as the Angel of Death and kisses Jesus. The Blessed Virgin sings a Passion flamenco lament to the rhythm of vulture shrieks and stamping feet. Then as Jesus is whipped, the screen flashes images—first of flagellants, then children running from bombing villages and other images of violence and oppression. The final scene is the crucifixion dance. As Jesus dances, the multimedia panorama shows scenes from current crises and global suffering. But the pain of the crucifixion ends with “ecstasy of Salvation and Victory of Hope” (11). Interspersed with images of global injustice are scenes of caring and human kindness. Jesus’s dance ends with his “hands outstretched with the mark of nails and His face up in a cry of Joy, like an athlete crossing the finish line to meet with Resurrection” (11).

*El Flamenco Senaculo* is a lament, but not just for Jesus’s pain and sacrifice—a lament for Christ made flesh in the agonies of all who suffer from injustice, violence, war, poverty, and abuse. Jesus is Liberator, yet not a political leader like Judas demands:

Must we eat bees and fast and move on again
When the next conqueror invades the land? Why not prove yourself and claim power for us? (4).

Jesus wrestles with the temptation to political power, but ultimately chooses suffering and sacrifice. The theme of sacrifice does not focus on personal salvation from sin (even Judas is embraced by the Blessed Virgin). But Jesus sacrifices out of love against the oppressive structure of society:

Because Love in order to teach
Must first know pain
Because love lies with Death. (7).
Jesus is not the sole liberator but is both an archetype and a leader to invite others to join in fighting injustice. He prays:
Many will even be nailed like me
Because of their fight for the Oppressed . . .
Make them who die for the sake of others live too
As I live through death (9).

By combining the two art forms developed by Filipinos and Andalusian Gypsies with histories of resistance, Juan forges his Passion theatre-dance from the artistic traditions of the disenfranchised, the oppressed, and outcast, for a liberation theology from the underside expressed in music, image, and dance.

Although this theatre-dance is a lament, the angel of death and crucifixion does not have the last word and picture. Jesus is not defeated by his death or the crisis of the world, but empowered by running the race for justice and his self-giving love. Juan states in the introduction, “the liturgical traditional rituals around the Passion and Death of Christ became a large symbolic source for hope of a better life” in the Filipino tradition (2). As Jesus sings in the garden:
It is not the Passion or my dying
But my rising again
That will give people a new sense of forgiveness
A new sense of hope (9).

Just as the suffering on the cross is made incarnate through multiple images of people suffering around the world, images of resurrection and hope are made incarnate through the final images of caring and human kindness. El Flamenco Senaculo calls Jesus’ followers to be agents of Resurrection.

The second play, The Waters of Golgotha, tells the story of a mother who requests to be elected as the Christ for the Good Friday Senaculo after her young son is dragged under the sea by nets from illegal trawler fishing called muro-amí.

Muro-amí, or reef hunting, is a system of net fishing in which children dive into the depths of the sea to scare fish out of the coral into huge nets. They hold their breath and wear no diving gear other than hand-made wooden goggles. As many as three hundred to four hundred young men and boys as young as seven are sent off for months on trawlers where they dive between seven and ten times a day, live in congested, rat-infested trawlers, and endure abuse from their guards. After the public was outraged when the bodies of one hundred swimmers, mostly children, were found in a graveyard, this form of fishing was banned in the 1980s. However, this illegal practice continues (Bengwayan; Macasil).

In Act I, Martha goes to the priest for confession, asking to be the Christ nailed to the cross on Holy Friday because the sea stole her only son. He is appalled that she would ask, first because she is a woman, and furthermore because she has become a prostitute for the seamen. Then in a flashback, Martha’s son Miguel dances an eerie dance in which he gets caught in the giant fish net and comes up trembling and shaking like an upside down Christ hanging on the cross.

6. An award-winning film, Muro Amí, was made about this abusive practice.
Act II begins with an image contrary to Martha’s down-to-earth faith. Rev. Dan Shane leads a flashy Hollywood-style of televangelism with false testimonies and tributes to Jesus, the Lamb, as Dolly the cloned sheep. (This false religiosity becomes a counterpoint to the peasant’s faith throughout the play.) Then, a chorus of women sings as they fish and gossip. (They also appear throughout the play depicting the joys and pathos of the community, their social conditions, and their disdain for Martha.) Then in a heart wrenching memory scene, Martha is peeling tuber crops (like hairy sweet potatoes). Miguel wants to try peeling one, but Martha explains that his hands are too small. If you scrape an eye of the tuber crop even with the slightest scratch, it will bleed inside the fruit and poison it. No visible sign or smell warns of the danger, until your neck begins to stiffen and you can no longer breathe. However, if you don’t hit the eye, you can boil the crop in salt, the eye disappears and you can eat it. The choices for survival are to fish or dig the tuber crop. Miguel volunteers to fish and claims “I have gills mother. . . . I . . . stayed longest in the water” (The Waters of Golgotha, 21). She pleads with him not to; her hand shakes and she knows she has made the tuber bleed.

In Act II, Miguel appears like a mirage to declare that he is teaching children to read under the sea. He has been chosen to be the angel in the early morning Easter procession.

In Act IV, after the women sing a Sinaculo Passion hymn the priest comes in carrying one of the women’s children—a boy with sea goggles, apparently dead. Martha heaves him upside down. She shakes him, cries to him, and brings him back to life. The women interpret her act as miracle and claim she deserves the right to be crucified. In the last scene Martha is crucified and has a vision of her son on another island.

The Waters of Golgotha continues the Filipino tradition in which the incarnation is made real in the lives of struggling people. Miguel first becomes a Christ figure. He is pulled from the ocean arm outstretched like Christ on the cross, in his sacrifice for his mother so they can eat. This child’s death explores the awful “price of human salvation” (1). In turn, Martha becomes a Christ figure when she brings the drowning boy back to life and when she is nailed to the cross. The Christ figure of Miguel is innocent and pure, but Martha is earthy, sensual, and very human. So this play illustrates that all are made in the image of God even with human sins. The focus on Christ is transformed as a symbol of the heroic sacrifices that children and families make out of the harsh choices of survival and out of love for one another. Furthermore, Martha’s crucifixion symbolizes how people have been nailed to poverty, colonization, and injustice throughout history.

Like El Flamenco Senuculo, The Waters of Golgotha is a lament. Like many of Juan’s plays, it uses memory to address grief and loss through injustice. Martha faces the excruciating choice between her son possibly dying by tuber crop poison or dying from fishing. If Miguel survives he could bring home money equivalent to a year’s low-income wages. While the play addresses the particularities of muro-ami, it lifts up child labor abuses everywhere, and the conditions of poverty that force agonizing life and death decisions that families have to make every day in order to survive.

Just as El Flamenco Senaculo offers images of hope and resurrection in addition to crucifixion, so too, The Waters of Golgotha raises two images of hope. First, Miguel appears to his mother, saying that he is teaching the other children to read and going
about his father’s business. Then he tells his mother that he is the angel who has pulled off the Virgin’s veil of mourning. This scene is clearly a Resurrection image based on the Filipino Easter rite with two processions, one with a statue of the Virgin Mary, and another procession with statue of Christ shown to be whole again, without blood or wounds.¹⁰

Martha has a vision of Miguel when she is on the cross. This time she sees him rising to the light to another island where fishermen see him, raise him, and he grows to be a handsome fisherman with a village girl for his wife. This is an image of paradise. As Rita Nakashima Brock and Rebecca Parker have shown in Saving Paradise, the early church depicted Jesus transformed in paradise in a way that also invites Christ’s followers to create peace, compassion, and justice in the present. Like ancient visual images of paradise, The Waters of Golgotha invites us to seek paradise now amid poverty, child labor, and child abuse, in order to create a world where peace and justice reign.

In 2010, when I asked Anton Juan where I could purchase copies of his plays, he said he would send me a couple as an attachment to an e-mail, and he graciously did. I expected that they would take a similar approach to religion, community, social conditions, and theology in general. I did not expect that both plays he would be sending would be Passion plays that transform Christ’s Passion into a lament for global suffering.

As I have said throughout the paper, both plays link Jesus’s suffering and Passion with the world’s suffering especially among poor and oppressed. Through the background of fishing abuse in The Waters of Golgotha and against a panorama of world crises in El Flamenco Senaculo, Christ comes as Liberator, who shows divine preferential option for the poor.

Yet, even as both plays give us agonizing images of injustice, they also represent Christ’s Passion with images of resurrection and hope as an invitation to join in the struggle to create a world with peace and justice. As the program notes for El Flamenco Senaculo state, the core intent is to give a “vision of hope” and “to put across the true message of the passion and Death of Christ: peace and reconciliation” (Juan, El Flamenco Senaculo, 3).

Works Cited


“*Muro Ami [Reef Hunters]*.”

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Michel Östlund’s *Apostles*

- Elisabeth Svalin

Their eyes meet our eyes and our hearts. Pictures floating in the gothic space of the cathedral, in a light that seems to make them come alive. “Apostles and Paul” have come to New York City’s Cathedral Church of Saint John the Divine.

“Apostles” is an art exhibition of the twelve apostles and Paul, interpreted by the Swedish artist Michel Östlund. Is now on display in the cathedral nave, hung between the pillars in a most surprising and breathtaking way. Suspended from the ceiling by nearly transparent wire, the pictures seem to float in the gothic space that is the Cathedral. Their giant faces are impossible to ignore—more than six feet tall and four feet wide. Flooded in stagelight, each apostle emerges as a bright beacon of color. Shadow and darkness frame each solitary face, adding to it the worldly and darker thoughts of our time. As you walk up the aisle, passing the faces of the apostles, their presence seems to follow your steps. They urge you to sit for a while in their air of tranquility to listen to their stories, to reflect on your life and God.

Why the Apostles?

The idea for painting the apostles came to Michel Östlund thirteen years ago as he was picking up his 83-year-old great aunt from a hospital in Stockholm. “I had promised to take her on a long rider through the city for the very special reason...[She] had been blind for six years and now, with the help of the medical profession, had regained her sight,” writes Östlund in the exhibition companion book. “Naturally, our conversation in the car circled around what it is like to be able to see again. But also, on how many people there are who never see, never perceive, even though they can.” This led the conversation on to the question of the artist’s role as an eye-opener, someone who gives a key to the observer and, in the long run, to the subject—in this case, of the apostles themselves. As Östlund’s aunt started to describe the character of each apostle to him, images began to evolve in his mind, each of them making a very strong impression. “Before the trip was over,” Östlund writes, “I had decided to paint the apostles.”

The Personality of the Paintings

Östlund based each painting on the apostle’s personality, as described in literature, but also creating each face to portray different human characteristics. Thomas appears doubtful; Philip, longingful; John, loving; Simon, rebellious; and Andrew, seeking. “What fascinates me is that their message—two thousand years later—is still alive.
as the basis for many of our values. The challenge today has been to use the portraits to open up eyes to something I do not see myself,” Östlund writes. A single color, whether rich blue, gold or crimson, dominates each painting, and each face is painted abstractly, not always revealing a complete face. But the abstract nature of the exhibition does not mean the show is inaccessible. Each painting carries with it an unavoidable feeling, be in contemplative or repentant. Though the artist uses a bright color palette, there is undoubtedly a melancholy sense of loneliness or sadness present in each painting. And yet each portrait also emanates a sense of peace, a fold in the flow of time, as if the apostles themselves are waiting for what is to come or contemplating things passed.

**An Exhibition for all Senses**

To accompany the paintings and to give the viewer an experience of all senses, the exhibition also consists of a book and music. In the book, short stories accompany each of the apostles, making a dialogue with the painting and the reader. The stories dwell upon the character of each apostle, trying to find the inner seed of each man’s personality. “Doubt,” “Skinless,” “Prayer,” and “Penance” are titles that connect with different apostles.

Alone with memories and shadows on an island in the sea. The nightly breeze brings with it a scent of sorrow and excruciating pain. The pen is dipped in running fire from hell and the letters it forms burn the fall of the universe onto the brittle surface of the parchment. The stars fall and perish, the water vaporizes with understanding into a dusky mist. Once a beardless youth with a long life ahead of him. Filled with far more suffering than he could have ever imaged. More death, more evil—and more miracles than one person can contain. A life full of longing for love, to experience it, spread it, see it shared by humans, and continue to seek for it. A life of attending to Mary, sharing the sorrow between the mother and the follower and also sharing the love for the dead one. Wonder at the resurrection at times when the light of the heart is capable of lifting everyday worries and losses. Steadfastly by Christ’s side, as a child, as a young man, as an adult. Closest to him on the last night, at his bosom when the meal was distributed. Always defending him as a brother in danger. Beloved, he claims he is, the most beloved of them all who followed Jesus. If he indeed was the one who wrote the gospel, was it love that guided his pen in Ephesus and painted Christ’s portrait in words? Was that what gave him the power to drive the friend’s thoughts further and deeper, tapping on the experiences of a lifetime, and which burned forth tales far beyond belief and knowledge, on the island in the sea? Was it love that wrote his gospel?

Another important part of the exhibition is music as a way to give the visitors a mix of sensations that hits both eye and ear. The hosting churches have given concerts with music either newly composed or arranged on the subject of the apostles. At St. John the Divine, eight apostles had new music composed for them for flute, organ and choir. The exhibition is now on a tour to include Minneapolis, Chicago and New York in the U.S., and cathedrals in Scandinavia.
Michel Östlund
_Apostles_
Above: Matthew: Penance
Below: Thomas: Doubt
Oil on canvas, 145 x 195 centimeters

Michel Östlund
_Apostles_
Above: Bartholomew: Skinless
Below: James, Son of Alphaeus: Prayer
Oil on canvas, 145 x 195 centimeters
Michel Östlund

_Apostles_

Above: Judas Iskariot: The Seed
Below: Judas Taddeus: The Master’s Image
Oil on canvas, 145 x 195 centimeters

Michel Östlund

_Apostles_

Above: Philip: Longing
Below: Simon the Zealot: the Rebel
Oil on canvas, 145 x 195 centimeters
Michel Östlund

Above: James, Son of Zebedee: The Chalice
Below: Andrew: the Seeker
Oil on canvas, 145 x 195 centimeters

Michel Östlund

Above: Peter: Power
Below: Paul: The Wisdom of the Madman
Oil on canvas, 145 x 195 centimeters
This article examines three texts of graphic novels each of which portrays biblical stories drawn from the book of Genesis: The texts are from Siku's *The Manga Bible*, Crumb's *Genesis*, and Iva Hoth's *The Picture Bible*. Through a survey of each of these accounts with an examination of the choices of content, design and comic style, we will explore how artistic (image) and editorial (script) decisions create meaning, how the sequential art form acts as an interpretive layer allowing different theologies to emerge, and how these graphic novels might be positioned meaningfully among other critical readings. Just as the biblical text needs to be interpreted, these graphic novels do as well.

In a recent study on critical biblical method, Corrie Carvalho's 2009 *Primer on Biblical Methods*, the author includes a section on cultural criticism which demonstrates its migration from the broader world of literature into the realm of biblical studies. Carvalho explains the method as one that is particularly interested in “the ‘ unofficial’ or non-controllable vehicles for cultural expression: street art, music, paperback novels, sitcoms, and so on.” Its aims are to undercut the monopolization of culture by the elite and privileged and to make room for culture that is not usually the subject of elite study. Thanks to cultural critics the study of both comics and graphic novels, known as sequential art, has been permitted into the arena of serious scholarly engagement and can be treated with the same seriousness and methods as other forms of art and literature.

The interplay between author, text, and reader, which is a foundation in the study of biblical literature, is an essential aspect of this article. Sometimes this is viewed as behind the text, within the text, and before the text, or pretext-text-context. There are many different iterations. This construction can also be applied to art criticism, as artist-art-viewer. At its core, the issue is that these provide for the interpreter three moments where meaning can be produced. What makes this interesting for our purposes here, is that we have additional complexity. When we examine these texts, which are themselves an examination of a text, with both the reader and the author engaging in this three-fold construction, we have increased complexity as we now have five interpretive points with an interpretive layer preceding our own. Thus our format becomes:

Author 1—Text 1—Reader 1 *cum* Author 2—Text 2—Reader 2

The crux is in the transition of Reader 1 into Author 2, which begins the process of separating us (Reader 2) from the original author and text. What we are reading is relevant as a text in its own right, but it is also an interpretation of the earlier biblical source material. This presents us with the opportunity to read for meaning emerging from two authors and two texts. So, to lay this out more clearly as an example, our construction in the case of the *The Manga Bible* might be,

Apostle Paul as author 1—Letter to the Romans as text 1—Siku as reader 1 *cum* Siku as author 2—Page 190 of the Manga Bible as text 2—Reader of Siku

One might ask how this is different from the interpretation of religious art such as a painting by Rembrandt or a stained glass church window. While there are, of course, similarities, it is different because of the complex nature of sequential art.

A good source to begin understanding these complexities is Scott McCloud’s now standard text, *Understanding Comics*. He writes that the reason sequential art had for so long been seen as low-brow is that it is commonly believed that art which has value is either visual or textual, and never the two shall meet. High art such as painting was wordless and serious literature was picture-less. Yet, the most obvious characteristic of sequential art is the interplay of words and pictures. This means that the artistic decisions
are not only visual, but editorial as well. These editorial decisions cover a wide range of issues such as script writing, script design, and the way in which the texts interact with the pictures. For example, the words may convey exactly what the picture is also conveying or perhaps the picture gives more meaning to the words or vice versa.¹

The implications for interpretation is that reading sequential art is not simply reading a text or looking at pictures or even doing one then the other. The two aspects cannot be separated; they must be dealt with in the same interpretive movement.

**Overview of Authors**

The oldest text we are examining is *The Picture Bible*, a work of the David C. Cook publishing house. With a script by Cook editor Iva Hoth and illustrations by Andre Le Blanc, *The Picture Bible* was released serially as Sunday school curricula throughout the sixties. In 1978, the comics were collected and released as books of varying formats. It is estimated that more than 75 million of various editions have been sold or distributed as educational materials. Ms. Hoth, a Midwest Methodist evangelical, seems to have been the driving force behind both the text and visual design, directing LeBlanc who, otherwise, illustrated texts with no particular religious themes.⁹

Our second author is a contemporary artist and theologian working within a multicultural context. Ajibayo Akinsiku, who goes by the *nom de plume* Siku, is a British Nigerian who works in the Japanese sequential art form known as manga. Although born in the UK, he studied art in Nigeria. After returning to the UK for work, he also studied at the London School of Theology. In addition to his own projects, such as *The Manga Bible*, Siku has worked for comic publishers including Marvel and eleven years with the UK’s number one comic weekly known as *2000AD*. He is currently involved in the production of video games.¹⁰ *The Manga Bible*, which has not been particularly popular with critics who feel it has strayed too far from traditional forms, has been extremely popular with Christians in the United Kingdom and the United States. It is one of the best selling graphic novels of all time in the UK and has been openly praised by Archbishop Rowan Williams.¹¹

The last of our artists is by far the most critically acclaimed. R. Crumb’s 2009 release of Genesis was met with significant media attention; interviews, reviews and even a multi-page reproduction in the *New Yorker*¹² made it one of the biggest stories in the world of comics as well as biblical studies that year. A well-known comic artist who works outside of mainstream cartoons, Crumb has spent his career criticizing and satirizing American values and taboos through comics such as *Fritz the Cat*, *Devilgirl*, *Mr. Natural*, and *Keep on Truckin’*. His status as the most prominent figure of the 1960s Underground Comix movement accounts for the considerable publicity this book has received. His cartoons can be visually disturbing, and have been criticized for being misogynist and racist. An AP headline announces that Crumb ‘mocks’ the Bible, and various conservative Christian groups have opposed the book, claiming that it is exploiting the text for titillation.¹³ Unlike other comic presentations of the Bible, which use occasional images or omit or streamline dialogue, *Genesis* is unabridged.

Unsurprisingly, such diverse artists are going to have diverse styles. As a simple example of how different these styles are, we can examine the artists’ treatment of Genesis 3 where God blocks access to the Tree of Life with cherubim and “a flaming sword which turned every way.” The stylistic differences are apparent.

Hoth, the oldest text, presents us quite straightforwardly with a sword that is on fire; however, its size implies a mighty force. The two angelic beings flanking the sword, emphasizing its height and perhaps presenting the sword as a substitute for the deity Hoth never portrays. Siku’s sword, intense and frightening, brings a shadowy figure with it. The robed figure in the distance is not God since his voice is coming from a different direction. This heightened drama is characteristic of Siku’s style. In Crumb’s depiction, we see that his imagination was captured more by the fact that the sword “turned every

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¹⁸ McCloud, 153-155.
¹⁰ From interviews with David C. Cook representatives
¹¹ Publisher’s biography of Siku at http://www.hodderfaith.com/authors.aspx
which way” than the fact that it was a sword. The result is a whirling vortex, with mythical menacing creatures conjured by this Gandolf-like Deity.

Taking from just a single frame in each of these narratives, it is clear that the diverse style and imagination of our three authors is going to provide for plenty of opportunity for comparison. It is important to remember, however, that the visual depiction is only one aspect of interpreting sequential art.

Analysis of Three Scenes

Having briefly covered the introductory critical issues, we are now going to examine a few passages common to all three texts to provide a few examples of the interpretive process and issues surrounding the presentation of biblical material in sequential art. Due to the limited scope of this article, certain issues, such as the categorization of frames, scenes, and sequences, and the material inferred between frames (so-called ‘closure’) as well as other issues of larger interest to readers of graphic novels are not fully discussed. But we are going to examine selected passages common to

Hoth, Picture Bible

Siku, Manga Bible

R. Crumb, Genesis
all three texts to provide examples of the interpretive process and issues surround the presentation of biblical material in sequential art. Specifically, we are going to focus on the characters of Eve, Cain and Noah.

Hoth presents Eve as timid and naive in both text and image. As she continually gestures to herself with her hands, protecting herself, she seems vulnerable and uncertain. Her wariness however does not stop her from reaching for the fruit, because “just one bite won’t hurt.” When she eats it, Hoth clouds her in a shadow.

We cannot see her expressions, but her words show no remorse until after she calls for Adam and he finishes eating. Only then does she claim to be afraid, but her body posture is almost identical to what it was prior to eating the fruit. Adam weeps bitterly as God tells them to leave the garden but, again, Eve is wringing her hands. She looks confused at being tossed out of the garden, for she seems to have no idea of what she did that was wrong. That Eve should desire wisdom should not come as a surprise. She does not meaningfully consider her actions or understand their consequences.

This scene provides a good example of how the artist uses both image and words to create a character. There are very few words spoken or narrated which bear a close resemblance to the biblical text. It goes beyond paraphrase to really being an abridged version of the garden story, where theological assumptions or assertions are told through non-biblical scenes.
Siku’s Eve is much more in keeping with the common image of Eve as sexy, or a temptress. Yet, quite surprisingly, and non-biblically, Adam responds first to the serpent. As the serpent speaks, Eve’s coy smile turns to a fierce hunger at the idea that God is keeping something from her. She looks expectantly at the fruit as if it held a treasure inside while Adam is silhouetted behind her. While Eve seems to be adventurous, excited by the tree that brings knowledge, the knowledge she receives causes her to be afraid. The explicit announcement of emotion tells us that Eve is scared by the realization of their nakedness. When God confronts her, her eyes are wide and seemingly innocent to what she had done and she is astounded that he is punishing her for her actions. The reader is not given God’s full verdict. Eve’s role is metaphorically and, at times, literally shadowed by the man throughout the sequence.
Crumb’s Eve is wild, unabashed and intense. Her full figure is characteristic of Crumb’s work and her strong posture emphasizes her power. With her hand on her hip she interrupts the serpent and seems to be chastising his ridiculous idea. She emphatically notes that God has stated that death will follow if they touch the tree in the middle of the garden. But she is intrigued, and turns back, when the serpent tells her she will become like God. But what is perhaps most interesting is that, in the moment of decision, Crumb has chosen to have Eve with her powerful backside to us, dominating the tree. From our snake-like vantage point we do not know if she confidently headed toward the tree or if she is standing there frozen, nervous or scared. We must read our own impulses into her thoughts.

Chapter 3

Confronted by God, her shoulders are slumped, but she does not fear eye contact, like a child trying to show her remorse in hopes of stilling her father’s anger; this is in contrast to the sweaty, nervous grimace of Adam. Eve and Adam do not deny that they have eaten from the tree, but they both offer reasons to justify the action. Eve claims that she was beguiled by the serpent, though there is no indication that the serpent was doing anything other than telling her the truth.

We can see something of the authors’ interpretations of the biblical material through this examination. In Hoth, for example, we see that Eve is simple or even vapid. She is alone, and acts alone, and perhaps without understanding. Siku’s sexy Eve is rarely alone. Adam is beside her, participating with her. Crumb’s Eve dominates almost every scene; She dominates both the serpent and her husband, who eats as he is told.
And the Lord God said to the woman... 

The woman whom you have to eat with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate...

Who told you that you were naked?

The tree that I commanded you not to eat of, have you eaten?

The serpent beguiled me, and I ate.

What is this you have done?

And the woman said...

And to the woman he said...

But to the serpent he said...

And he said...

And he said...

The Lord God said...

And he said...

And the Lord God said...

In sorrow you shall eat from it all the days of your life. Thorns and thistles shall it sprout for you, and you shall eat the grasses of the field. By the sweat of your brow shall you eat bread, till you return to the ground, for from there you were taken!

For dust you are, and to dust you shall return!

And Adam called his wife's name Eve, for she was the mother of all living...

And the Lord God made clothes for Adam and his woman, and he clothed them...

And Adam said...

And Adam called his wife's name Eve, for she was the mother of all living...

And the Lord God said...

And he said...

And he said...

And the Lord God sent him forth from the Garden of Eden to till the ground from which he had been taken.

And he drove the man out, and set up east of the Garden of Eden the cherubim and the flaming sword to guard the way to the tree of life.
Next, we consider the account of Cain and Abel, which Hoth entitles, 'Jealous Brothers.' In The Picture Bible, Cain seems resentful and selfish from the start. Though the brothers look practically like twins, Cain’s sideways glances and remote stares as he hangs in the background betray his jealous nature even before God shows favor to his younger brother. Like Cain, Abel’s character is developed far beyond what the biblical text warrants; Abel asks questions, speaks of God, and is excited by the idea of giving gifts to God. Cain, however, is annoyed that he may have to give up some of his produce.

When it becomes clear that God favors Abel’s sacrifice, and does not accept what Cain has reluctantly offered, his posture becomes extremely hostile. After murdering his brother, the hateful wrinkles in Cain’s face transition into a fearful furrow. His pleas to God demonstrate fear of the punishment, not remorse. Though there is an expression of regret in his countenance, it is that of man thinking only of himself, an utter coward.
Siku moves immediately from the exile of the first humans to the fact that God favors Abel to his brother and he wastes no time in drawing sharp contrasts between them. Abel sits bathed in light with an open posture and reverent expression; his floppy hair makes him seem harmless. Cain, however, even from the shadows looks menacing. His outrage at God’s favoritism shows in his expressions, and becomes a visible entity praying upon his mind. His colloquial speech and profanity is easily seen by the reader as threatening, although Abel trusts his brother.

The brutal murder is done, and he stands over his brother with blood-drenched bone that was used as a club. When God questions Cain, he stoically answers with the famous, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” Not betraying a hint of sorrow or remorse, his firm expression is a challenge to God. The account moves so quickly that there is no opportunity for Cain to express fear at the thought of his impending exile, making him a tough guy from beginning to end.
Crumb vividly distinguishes between the peaceful life of a shepherd and the harsh labor of the farmer. Though both characters are sturdy in build, it is Cain's hairy and larger frame that carries a heavy burden as he brings forth his offering. Sweat flies from his face while farming and delivering his offering to the anthropomorphic god. Abel puts in no effort, shows no emotion, but is favored. God speaks to Cain, seemingly in an attempt to reassure and encourage him, but the words cause his disappointment to morph into hostility, driving him to premeditated murder. The scene in the field is filled with the violence of repeated blows as Cain bludgeons his brother. Just as God's earlier words drove Cain to rage, God's words now drive him to despair. Distraught by God's intervention and punishment, this is the only account in which we see him shed tears, and it is not over the death of his brother but of the fear of the dangers of exile.

The Cain narrative is actually quite confusing, for the biblical text gives extremely little information as to why God accepts one offering and not the other. Hoth feels the need to characterize the two brothers, almost as Goofus and Gallant, with one never wrong and the other never right. The Manga Bible also does this, but the characterization is simply shown, not explained. Crumb does depict a significant physical difference between the two, but it does not seem, from the looks of them, that either is good or bad. The reasons for the difference between the two is inexplicable, except, perhaps, that the life of a farmer is simply more frustrating that the life of a shepherd.
And now, we turn to our last character for analysis, Noah. Hoth presents Noah as overtly pious. His elevated position above the idolaters with their grand alters demonstrates his moral superiority, emphasized by his reverence in prayer as he burns his simple offering with his head covered.

Noah’s character then recedes in importance, deferring to the character of the ark. The ark is always imposing or the focal point of the frame in its temple-like position throughout the sequence. Still massive among the many waters, the ark demonstrates the tension between God’s power to destroy and preserve. Streaming into the immense vessel are pairs of clean and pairs of unclean animals. Though the floods are great, the ark is impenetrable. Noah emerges from the ark with his bald head bare, revealing his years, adding gravity to the effect the ordeal has had on him as well making him seem meek in reverence to the power of the flood.
When the Ark is completed, God directs Noah and his family to enter... and to take with them seven pairs of each kind of animal and bird that is good to eat, and one pair of each kind not used for food.

Look! The doors of Noah's Ark are closing! Yes... it's being shut by a great invisible hand!

The rains pour down steadily for forty days and forty nights.

So, a little over a year after the flood began, Noah steps on dry land once more. He, his family and the animals in the Ark are the only creatures on earth.

Water flows over the land, and rises above the mountains. All the earth is covered; only Noah's great Ark survives. The flood destroys all that is evil.

At last the water level drops and the Ark rests on the top of the mountains of Ararat.

I will send out a dove; if it does not come back we will know it has found land.

An olive branch that means some land must be dry again.

Noah sends out a dove again, and it returns.

But the dove returns.

Seven days later, Noah sends out a dove a third time. It does not return because it has found a place to nest.

How good it is to walk on the ground again! Yes— to feel grass under your feet. And warm sunshine on your face.

All that was evil has been destroyed through us. God is giving mankind a new start: we must obey God—and teach all who follow us to do so.

As soon as Noah leaves the Ark, he builds an altar. Here he thanks God for his care and asks God's guidance in helping Noah and his family to make a new start. Then God makes a promise to Noah and to all his children, forever...
As seems common for Siku, he begins in the middle of the story, with the animals being loaded into the ark. Noah first appears only as a voice, distant, at the entrance of the cavernous ark. Noah’s task is comical, and Siku notes this with a joke about counting the animals. When the storm is in full force, the ark does not dominate the flood, yet, the ark is not moved either; frame after frame, waves may lash at it, but the ark is a symbol of stability. Noah appears for a frame, a vague face among others, inside the ark. Positioned between two identical panels of the ark in the storm, Noah speaks for his family in expressing their anxiety as the flood waters surround them. Never presented in isolation, Noah is but a mere part of the grander narrative of the ark. In the last frame, it is not Noah’s face that we see, but the ark, radiating from the mountaintop. It is the story’s real hero.

Crumb’s Noah is wide-eyed and earnest. Sitting directly before God he is bewildered, and probably frightened by God’s plans. Not once does he speak; the direct speech comes only from God. One might think by the way he looks that he is going to run off in fear, yet the frame after God leaves shows Noah with his family diligently at work. God does not disappear from the scene, but continues to direct Noah’s activity. His family is thoroughly involved in the construction of the ark and the gathering and care for the animals. Crumb does not hide the harshness of the life on the ark. We see the family worry as they toss in the waves and their eagerness as they wait for the bird to return. Noah even sits on the floor as the dove flies in, looking as though his head is just rising after it had been hanging in despair. Just as God was present to close the door of the ark, when the family emerges through a hole cut in the side, God is there to meet them.
So who exactly is the star of this show? In *The Picture Bible*, the stage is shared by Noah and the ark, which is a stand-in for the power of God to protect amidst his judgment. Siku highlights the ark as a stable presence in the world so large that even the righteous Noah is only a minor presence. Finally, throughout the first eleven chapters of Genesis, Crumb has maintained an anthropomorphic Deity. Here, God is the primary focus. As he braves the rain he himself began to close the door of the ark and stands there waiting for the only living family to disembark.

**Conclusion**

As a way of conclusion, we would like to note the overarching tension that is created by the complication of the author-text-reader construction, as these readers *cum* authors/artists are simultaneously interpreters and open to interpretation. Their artistic and editorial decisions create meaning and interpretive layers which allow different theologies to emerge and place these novels meaningfully among other critical readings.

Many questions are raised regarding the extent to which the pictorial depictions limited, changed, or expanded the original biblical text. Often, we found, the visualizations created ambiguities in the narrative that were not present in the source text while at other times the ambiguities or difficulties of the source text were eliminated according to the theological proclivities of the artist.

It is clear that Hoth makes the more extensive use of non-biblical material, using dialogue to fill in gaps and speculate about motivations. Her narration is almost midrashic, expanding on the story and eliminating ambiguity. For example, the biblical text does not describe the character of Cain and his brother, nor does it explain why God accepted one offering but not the other. Hoth removes these questions by simply presenting Cain as a selfish and unloving boy. This renders it impossible to view God’s decision as capricious.

Siku’s editorial and artistic choices deliver a palatable text, often with little connection to the biblical narrative. If Hoth is explaining the story, Siku is almost telling a different story altogether. For example, the account of Eve is more the account of Adam, but with a significant change: Adam first addresses the serpent and is equally culpable. While this diminishes the possibility of sexist interpretations, it also denies the patriarchy present in the original text, far removing it from its historical context.

Crumb’s editorial decision to leave the text unabridged is unusual in graphic novel presentations of biblical material. This decision means that the place to look for his contribution is in the design of the words and the images. With Eve, Crumb chose to emphasize certain words and it gives the impression that she is yelling at the serpent. All the while he is raising her voice, he is sometimes hiding her face, obscuring clues to her emotional state as she approaches the forbidden tree. This raises questions of her character that would likely not be asked of the biblical text.

These novels can be understood as critical readings in their own, but they are also able to be read critically with methods common to biblical scholarship, such as postcolonial, queer, feminist and womanist criticisms. For example, it is not hard to imagine what a feminist critic might make of Hoth’s presentation of Eve, who seems to have revived the term, the ‘weaker sex.’ Crumb, on the other hand uses his oversized visualizations to enlarge the presence of the woman, a presentation which a feminist critic might find ambiguous; Eve is overpowering, but therefore all the more culpable. Siku seems to have already applied a feminist criticism and has attempted to eliminate the possibility of a sexist reading.

In these ways, the artists as reader *cum* author intermittently clarify and obscure our access to the original text, all the while providing new material for fresh interpretation.
This essay explores how a jazz aesthetic might contribute to and enhance the way we think about and write theology. One theologian, Sharon Welch, has examined jazz for its theological relevance in a larger work where she is concerned with how aesthetic models teach theology an ethos of vision. She poses an engaging question for theologians. “To think about jazz and to learn from it is to enter a compelling engagement with a complex, changing, intricate form of art.... [As art,] it is meaningful and valuable in its own terms. And yet, if we immerse ourselves in this complex play of insight and form, what will we discover?”¹ I wish to respond to Welch’s question by examining descriptions of jazz from, particularly, musicians and cultural critics, as well as other commentators, and, in so doing, suggest something of what theologians might discover in this aesthetic regarding their approach to sources, forms, and processes of theological discourse.

The Jazz Aesthetic in Sources and Forms of Theological Discourse

In its origins and development as a genre, jazz is known for synthesizing African, American and European musical traditions. The jazz aesthetic uses the self as a source, illustrating that subjective experience acts as an interpreter of texts. In describing Billie Holiday’s jazz musicality, Angela Davis writes that the artist would subvert the composer’s lyrical intent and literal signification, “She was able to set in profound motion deeply disturbing disjunctions between overt statements and their aesthetic meanings” through her vocal’s relation to the instrumental accompaniment.² Holiday’s subjective experience not only interpreted the text of the music, but interpreted the lives of her listeners, particularly African American women, through her experience. “Lady Day’s genius was to give her life experiences an aesthetic form that recast them as windows through which other women could peer critically at their own lives.”³ Davis continues:

It is a woman’s vision she presents, and as women’s realities filter through the prism of her music, we are educated and enlightened about our interior emotional lives. Her message is able to escape the ideological constraints of the lyrics. In the music, in her phrasing, her timing, the timbre of her voice, the social roots of pain and despair in women’s emotional lives are given a lyrical legibility.⁴

Miles Davis uses intelligence and feelings to create haunting sounds, Charlie Parker relies on quickness in tempo and organization to communicate, and Louis Armstrong combines blues realism with the bright sound of the trumpet. The common factor in these musicians’ technique is their willingness to use personal expression to communicate through the song.

Although the delivery of lyrics was Holiday’s technique of using subjective experience to interpret texts, instrumental jazz musicians, too, use timing and phrasing techniques to “read” texts according to their experiences. The form the music takes depends on its interpretation. Different musicians will use different approaches: Miles Davis uses intelligence and feelings to create haunting sounds, Charlie Parker relies on quickness in tempo and organization to communicate, and Louis Armstrong combines blues realism with the bright sound of the trumpet.⁵ The common factor in these musicians’ technique is their willingness to use personal expression to communicate through the song. The sound of an accomplished musician is as distinct and personalized as the sounds of someone’s voice,⁶ and the jazz musician’s interpretation of the music is what makes it theirs. The musician “reads” the text aloud to an audience in his or her own voice, which colors and shades it with meaning.

NOTES

3. Ibid., 179.
4. Ibid., 177.
6. Ibid., 7.
This communication generates audience response. attended a theatrical master class led by Sharon Bridgforth, whose performance novels are based in the jazz aesthetic, in which several sessions were dedicated to teaching participants to “witness” to others. Witnessing as a part of the jazz aesthetic operates in much the same way as some church contexts. Within an emotionally safe environment, space is created for individuals to present their work openly. The audience’s primary function is to listen empathetically to what is being said, and if they offer commentary or critique, it is presented with respect and affirmation. This positive attitude is not uncritical, but it requires criticism to follow empathetic listening.

Witnessing as a part of the jazz aesthetic operates in much the same way as some church contexts. Within an emotionally safe environment, space is created for individuals to present their work openly.

The metaphor of jazz as language is a prevalent one in writings about the jazz aesthetic. When musicians and critics such as Wynton Marsalis and Jonny King employ this metaphor, they are not speaking of a language of words, but one of feelings. They recognize that what is conveyed through the music can often not be captured in words, but the sentiments are nonetheless real and felt by the musicians and audience. Jazz, as do other forms of music, provokes individuals to shape a language out of their feeling and use that personal expression to communicate how the world feels to them. This expression is not, however, univocal. In jazz, communicated experience is open to the many interpretations of its audience. Even works that are articulated literally can be subverted through the tone of their reading. Therefore, performance has a place in interpreting the text, not only presenting it, which is already done in the context of worship. There is a tension, however, between the aims of academic or didactic theological writing to be clear and unambiguous and the jazz aesthetic’s willingness to subvert a plain meaning. In essay form, the ironic move of saying one thing but meaning another is more difficult to accomplish than it is in poetry or narrative. Yet, instead of casting this as a limitation of the jazz aesthetic’s applicability to theology, I believe that it suggests a need for openness in the genres through which theological discourse is expressed.

The form of jazz – the music – is not only oral or textual, as academic theology tends to be. The music communicates through rhythm, texture, and tone. In fact, when jazz is performed without vocalists or introductions and explanations, it may not be oral or textual at all. But it is always aural and physical. It is aural because the music paints a picture that is received by listening. It is physical because it is created through the exercise of the musician’s bodies, the movement of their fingers and hands over the instruments. The intensity of the music and its resonance within the band and its audience are also communicated physically through clapping hands, tapping feet, swaying bodies, closed or rapt eyes, nodding heads, and other bodily motions. The non-textual nature of music, and of jazz in particular, requires an attention to imagistic expression. Jazz artists’ skill in expression is the criteria by which they are judged. Sound communicates the performer’s depth and understanding of life. Marsalis compares the way a great musician delivers insight to life the soul with the poetic expressions of spiritual wisdom delivered by a great preacher. Theologians must also see the capabilities of poetic expression. The jazz aesthetic prompts us to assess our own communicative skills as Marsalis does: Do we, as theologians, possess such a broad understanding of life? (And do our audiences? They will not be able to hear it if they do not.) Does our theological discourse express that understanding? Do its sound, tone, and imagery communicate information? The jazz aesthetic’s attention to image in expression prompts us to seek ways that our work can be aural, physical, textured, and visual.

In the jazz aesthetic, experience is communicated through a blues sensibility. Although it is a distinct style of music, the blues remains a part of jazz. The blues represents jazz’s origins and its expressive quality. It is not always sad, but it deals with melancholy topics. Blues recognizes the pain of lost love and injustice, but also expresses

9. Ibid., 15.
10. Ibid., 68.
11. Ibid., 69.
12. Ibid., 61.
the victory of outlasting a broken heart and facing down adversity. Blues introduced a
“personalization of feeling into popular songs”, which became a feature of American
music, including jazz. However, jazz and blues maintained a fearless, unadorned realism
that most other forms of American popular music abandoned. Modern jazz forms evoke
loss and suffering, but do so without despair or self-pity. A blues sensibility reassures its
audience through the inevitability of the unpredictable nature of life, not through a
magical happy ending. Instead of contrived happiness, it presents our sad states as
something that will get better or could have been worse. It begins with pain, but does
not let pain have the last word.

By holding sorrow and promise in tension within the same song, the blues
element in jazz becomes a model for incorporating the pain of human experience into
theology. It allows painful experiences to be told--individual suffering like abuse and
neglect or corporate suffering like oppression, marginalization, and genocide—without
being subsumed into another’s master narrative of hope. Instead, the telling itself becomes the source of
hope. The blues element in the jazz metaphor is a challenge to easy sentimentality and asks theologians
to refrain from explaining suffering away, inviting us instead to address and confront suffering, and by
doing so, express hope. Our theological challenge is to develop “intellectually challenging”, “aesthetically
pleasing”, and “profoundly healing” work to respond to the sources of life experience.

This aesthetic approach could inform theological discourse not only as an attitude of interpreting one’s own experiences, but as
a hermeneutic of the gospel. The blues element of the jazz aesthetic provokes hopeful, yet
unsentimental readings of the stories of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. Proclaiming
the lived reality of joy in the face of suffering and the yearning for happiness despite its
“attendant ambiguities and contradictions” demands an interpretive approach that does
not seek a simplistic “moral of the story” or a happily-ever-after ending. A blues
hermeneutic would look for the concurrent presence of joy and suffering in Jesus’ acts
and teachings. It would affirm hope prevailing against sorrow, but would not site such
hope in the eradication of pain and suffering. In the blues aesthetic, the cause of the
blues is never overcome, but worked through. Whether the performer expresses resilience
or regret, the past is never undone. His or her suffering is told and it is delivered with
irony, satire, or an impulse to dance. From this perspective, a creative retelling of the
sorrow and joy of Jesus’ death and resurrection would result in a “Good Friday theology.”
It would emphasize the pain and suffering of sin and death. Jesus’ suffering would not be
cast as something to emulate or model in our own lives—the blues does not provoke you
to go and make a sad situation of your own—but cast as something with which we
empathize and we recognize in our own lives. His resurrection and his followers’ response
to it would be interpreted as an ironic and unpredictable element to the story, something
that models the ambiguous and unknown results of our sufferings. The blues
hermeneutic encourages us to hear, understand, empathize with and learn from Jesus as
the protagonist in a blues song. It encourages us to face our own lives with realist
recognition of the sorrows we bear, but to keep on living in spite of them.

The Jazz Aesthetic in the Process of Constructing Theological Discourse

In jazz, process as well as final product is important. Because the process in
which jazz is articulated is commonly identified as the unique element of this art form, it
merits distinct consideration. In light of the jazz process, which we will explore, I offer the
following proposal: that the process of constructing theology could be enhanced if
modeled on at least these two characteristics of jazz: the interaction between the
individual and the collective, and an ephemeral yet real definition of success.

Although jazz music can be played by a single performer, most jazz is played by
groups of musicians. A defining characteristic of the jazz aesthetic process is the interaction between the individual and the collective. Jazz music is a “social situation,” as pianist Bill Evans remarked, in which a number of musicians speak a shared language with individual sensibilities. Tom Piazza describes this social situation as a relationship between the voice of the individual and the voice(s) of the community in which the individual operates. That relationship can take many forms in jazz: a clearly defined lead voice against clearly defined accompanists; an entwined, symbiotic form; a solo against a written-out ensemble accompaniment; or other permutations of these. The characteristics of the relationship between and individual and the group is explored through improvisation, respect, and reliance on others in the jazz aesthetic.

One of the most reflected-upon expressions of the interaction of individual selves and collective groups in jazz is improvisation. To improvise is to compose and perform at the same time. Improvisation is one of the most noted features of jazz and when scholars use the jazz aesthetic as a model for work in non-musical disciplines; this is frequently the element by which they draw parallels-as a model of the doctrine of creation, as a model for dialogue, and as a model for response to beauty. It has also been articulated by Alfonso Montuori as a metaphor for the learning community, which Ann Pederson applies as a model for academic theology. Improvisation has often been described with the metaphor of conversation, in which individual expressive skills are brought to bear on a central topic. The notes that each musician contributes speak to the other musicians and the audience about the “subject” of the underlying song. The conversation metaphor emphasizes the collaboratively creative and communicative qualities of improvisation.

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The jazz aesthetic teaches us that the power of composition and creation comes from a shared power that builds on the strengths of the present artists. Jazz icons Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn were acclaimed for their ability to compose works around the strengths of individual performers. In a jazz band, one individual does not have the ability to create a great work by themselves. This principle is developed in the theatrical jazz aesthetic also, but as it is explained by Joni L. Jones, the mentor relationship is prominently featured,

[The process] is about the humility involved in apprenticeship as one painstakingly acquires one’s own aesthetic character at the feet of the master. It is about the performers finding their way, bringing their distinctive gifts to the work and letting those gifts ring forth through the characters, through the breath of the company.

The interaction between the individual and the collective in the jazz aesthetic is ultimately based on respect and the goal of enjoying oneself and relationship to others, while working toward a common goal. The assertion of one’s self is balanced by dependence on others. This attitude of respect and desire for balance would become a key feature of a theological jazz aesthetic. A theologian who writes or teaches with this principle will locate his or her work among contributions of others. It is not a denigration of one’s own work, but humility in discourse; it is a recognition that the individual’s work is limited and emerges through interactions with others, and insight acquired from mentors, instructors, and great thinkers. As a cooperative project, the voice of a single theologian does not dominate over others in that theologian’s community of composers.

Finally, we must consider the reception of a work of jazz as part of its process.
The fulfilled expectations of something coming to be, a piece being activated by the skills of its musicians is what makes a jazz show exhilarating for its performers and audiences. The goal in jazz, as Welch describes it, is to engage in action that demonstrates accountability and creativity, not to seek a final or universal resolution. As the jazz aesthetic models for us, our creations are dependent on the creations of those who formed our theological tradition, yet they simultaneously evoke further creativity. The products of our process are ephemeral, but because they exist for our time and place, they are also real, and to the degree that they address the issues of which we are concerned and engage our audiences, they are successful.

An attentive and critical audience is therefore crucial to success. It is interesting that the implication Marsalis draws from the performers' need to have an audience who listens and receives its message is to require humble communication from the musician; he challenges performers to commit more musicianship, feeling, sophistication and professionalism to reach out audiences. "In jazz, the most sophisticated musicians should consider it a challenge to try to communicate with the most inexperienced listener…. When you lose the desire to communicate with an audience that hasn’t been exposed to your music, you begin to step away from the humility required to develop your artistry." When theologians adopt this desire for their audience they are inviting themselves to create work that is accessible to a broad audience. This is not asking less of professional theologians, but more. It requires the effort to explain sophisticated work and develop approaches that communicate that work. If theologians capture the spirit of the jazz aesthetic, our theological work will be done in a spirit of humility that supports the construction of theology intended to be broadly accessible. If theology is important enough to construct, it should be important enough to communicate to any audience that will listen.

Conclusion

Theological discourse modeled on the jazz aesthetic would be expressed through a language of feelings, ideas, and concepts that rely on imagery and metaphor. This discourse allows subjective experiences to interpret texts, stories, and Scripture. It addresses life experiences with a blues sensibility, creatively expressing joy and sorrow with fearless and unadorned realism. In a jazz-informed process of theological engagement, we would improvise, composing while performing, listening to others and respectfully allowing and encouraging participants to contribute their skills and artistry to a collective goal. This model of theological engagement would seek success for our present time and project, not permanent resolution. Ultimately, the jazz aesthetic model for theology provides a vision and ethos for doing our work in the context of shared power in a free society.

Works Cited


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