

### Editors' Note

...Murmurs and whispers surrounding the mystery of birth...

Rising over the haunted melodies of past,

The foreshadowing of the triumphant resolution that is to come...

 $Deep\ rumblings\ that\ come\ from\ deep\ within\ our\ wombs-$ 

An intimate birthing place in each one of us.

She hosts, shapes, and delivers our creative inspiration into divine reality.

motif: //oice

**SKETCHBOOK** 

An Evergreen Creatives Initiative

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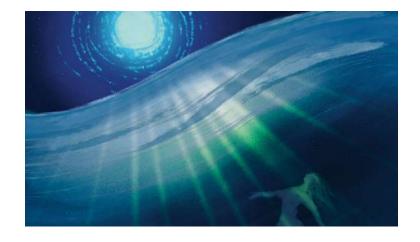
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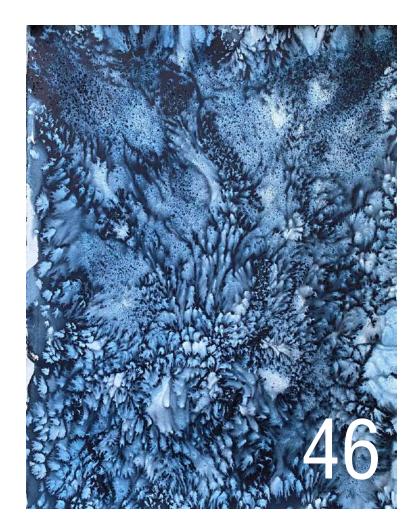
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### PASTORAL COLUMN

# Poetry



is to sense the heart of God and breathe and sigh and speak what is not easily known or understoodto marvel at mysteries of the deep, groanings of the soul, moved by the Spirit to cry to plead to seek to bridge the gap to lift up the afflicted and soothe them with the balm of Heaven's Mercy.

To intercede

Sometimes, one feels righteous Indignation, —a fiery utterance, a declaration, thunder clap of rage a roar of a lion, power against evil.

And sometimes, one hurts and breaks and tears fall flowing from the depths, Unanticipated.
One wonders if these be God's.

### **Untitled**

By Lovelyn Chang Artwork By Marian Sunabe

### Baker

A fresh look at Genesis 1: 26

By Virgil Lew

God's hand took dirt and
Shaped it like a baker.
God blew into the form, life.



### No One Knows

A response to Nicodemus in John 3: 8

By Virgil Lew

Hear its sound?

Feels its touch?

The Spirit comes and goes.

And no one knows.







### **Title:** God Might Say

**Description:** How can we wrap ourselves in the nearness of God, here in the dark with us? As my Mother's caregiver, bearing witness to the growing darkness of memory loss, this is what I imagine God's voice might say to her there and what it might look like.

**Medium:** Cotton textiles, lights, poetry, hand-lettering, photography

**Size:** 30"x60"

Model: My Mother

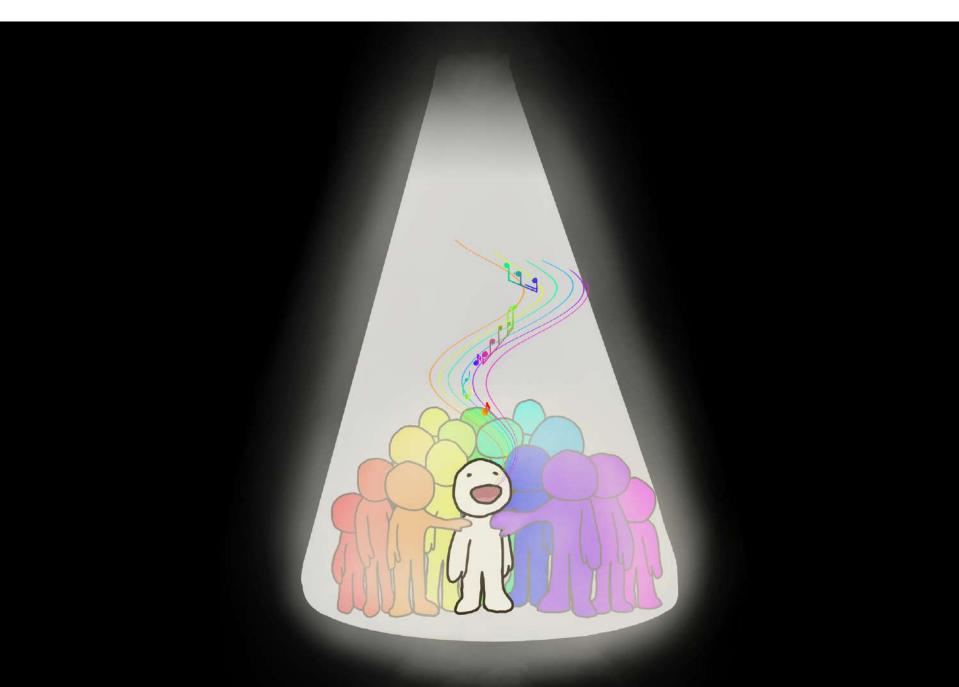
GOD MIGHT JAY YOU UP WITH GIE EING (ANDE ROMTHE WIND

## Reflections

### A Performance Built By Many

By Alexander Eng

Digital Art 8.1" x 8.4" 2022



### Voices from Imagination

By Lovelyn Chang Artwork By Marian Sunabe

I love to read stories. In particular, I search for fiction written by women or people of color or authors with names that sound foreign to me. Through reading narrative voices, I want to enter into the minds of characters who live on the outskirts—they represent those who strive to belong, to live and thrive in the midst of pain. Perhaps this is my way of searching for hope. Perhaps I marvel at the craft of storytelling—works of the imagination, where words come alive and I can hear voices filled with revelation and insight. Instinctively, I hunger for knowledge about cultures, histories, generations, and the human condition. I also want to understand people from different communities, and travel to places I'll never actually visit, because they are creatively captured moments from the past or simply works of the imagination. Some of these authors possess keen and prophetic eyes, while some yearn to speak for the voiceless. In reading these works, a little voice inside me may also yearn to be understood, because through fiction, I come to know myself and understand who I am.

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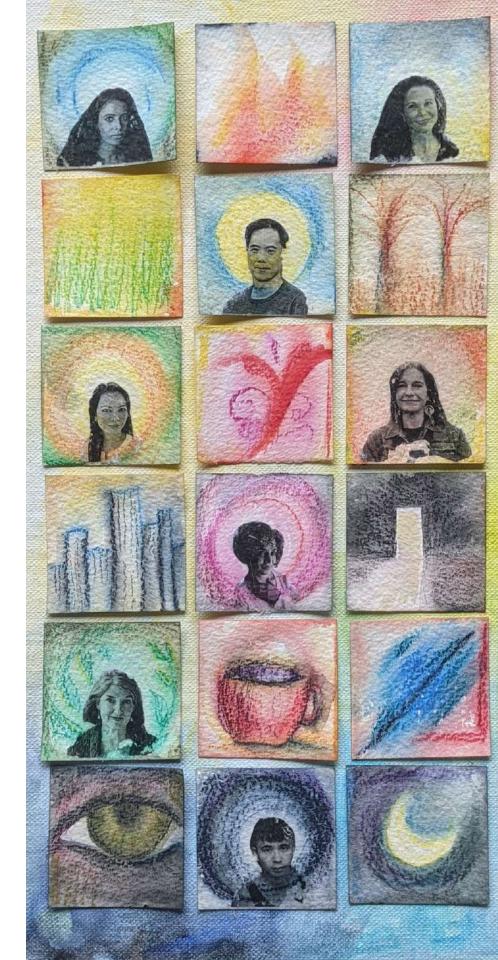
any books have touched me and brought to life voices of minorities. Here is a list of standouts in the last few years:

### 1. *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy

Written with fresh and lush imagery, this expansive story delves into the tragic consequences of characters breaking through India's caste system. We see the story through different perspectives, but the poignant way Roy portrays children's points of view is what makes this book so heartbreaking.

### 2. *Homegoing* by Yaa Gyasi

This complex and nuanced exploration of the slave trade and its impact down generations weaves between two sides—the group that stayed in Africa and the group that came to America. Both historically rich and emotionally-packed, Gyasi's imagination traveled from previous centuries to the present day.





### 3. Salt Houses by Hala Alyan

A Palestinian family deals with displacement and its effects. Through this novel, I thought about the effects of history on migration–from cultural assimilation to generational divides.

### 4. *Afterlife* by Julia Alvarez

A recently widowed English professor navigates grief, her personal boundaries and her ability to help the undocumented. In the midst of such turmoil, she finds sisterly support but also a whirlwind trip filled with life's surprises.

5. On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous by Ocean Vuong Readers clearly see Vuong's lyrical prose and poetic sense as he describes memories from his mother, the war, and his efforts to carve out the immigrant protagonist's own space and queer identity in America.

### 6. *In the Country* by Mia Alvar

This collection of short stories deftly touches on the lives of Filipinos in different parts of the world—at home, in the Middle East, and in America. Some of these stories become deeply personal for me, having grown up "in the country" myself. I particularly enjoy seeing Alvar's creation of a fictional voice for the first female president of the Philippines, capturing her life in Boston before she felt compelled to enter the political realm in her home country.

### 7. *Please Look After Mom* by Kung-sook Shin (*Translated from Korean*)

A mother gets accidentally left behind at a train station, and in her family's heart-wrenching search, they reveal their own desires and disappointments. This novel brings to light the generational divides and how families navigate through them.

### 8. *The Round House* by Louise Erdrich

Erdrich depicts the harrowing experience of a 13-year old who sees his mother plunge into depression after sexual assault. This story gives voice to the anguish and anger of Native Americans who see their women suffer brutality and find no justice. Until President Obama sig-

ned into law The Tribal Law and Order Act, non-Native men who commit heinous crimes against native women often went unpunished.

### 9. How to Live Safely in a Science Fiction Universe by Charles Yu

The average person may not share the same musings about quantum space-time as the author, but this fascinating and original prose delves into the Asian American father-son relationship, its hold on one's memories, and how work life affects and defines a person.

### 10. *The Bean Trees* by Barbara Kingsolver

A young woman goes on a road trip and unwittingly picks up an abandoned Native American child. This book touches on topics of identity, adulthood, immigration, friendship and family. At once funny, witty and sometimes heartbreaking, this book made me smile and cry.

Every few weeks, I excitedly drive to the library. This drive begins my journey of discovery. I walk-stop-walk down the aisles of my local library, scouring the shelves for more stories. I have come to realize that God speaks to me through these narrative voices. These authors offer up their heart cries, whether through characters like the Filipino activist parents whose son gets kidnapped, or the Syrian Christians who try but cannot breach the boundaries of the caste system due to their own hypocrisy. In reading, I understand my father more-including his decision to uproot his entire family after a nightmarish dream of his kids getting kidnapped. Through Louise Erdrich, I entered Native American spaces, and came to know their joy, pain, and their demand for justice. In reading Yaa Gyasi's work, I saw how history affected generations of African Americans, and I came to understand how oppression and racism traveled through the ages. These writers all inspire me to think beyond myself and see the world-in all its brokenness and beauty.

### You Can Fly

By Melanie Mar Chow Artwork By January Lim



voice of the past came to me as Peter Pan. The children in his care asked Peter how to fly. He told them to "think of a wonderful thought, any happy little thought." He invited them with, "you can fly!"

That is a common childhood dream. My mom daily encouraged her children outside so she could direct her focus toward daily tasks. Our childhood home was in the local airport flight pattern, allowing views of airplanes preparing to land. Dad's "we'll go for a ride" was mom-code for "take the children out of the house." We knew Dad's strong arms fueled the love for flight when he thrust us high in the air on park swings. He quickly taught us to pump our legs to go higher.

The dream to physically fly in a plane took a long time to be fulfilled. As a family with five children, the price to fly must have been prohibitive. Dad's creativity stepped in as his rides took us to the end of the runway to park by the fence and watch planes take off and land. As we grew older, he would drive us an hour away to the military base to see air shows. My maternal grandmother loved traveling, which required trips to the airport to bring her home.

Finally, the dream came true when I was in high school. My mother had not seen her sister since she moved to Hawaii as a young adult. Dad encouraged us to be observant of our trip. I remember not sleeping and watching five hours of clouds in anticipation of what we'd see. My first sight as we descended over the blue ocean was the endless sand. I knew that would not be my last flight. Moving to SoCal after college, I flew often. Home was the destination on major holidays. My parents became empty nesters and would send postcards from places they traveled. When I got married, I took another Hawaii flight for our honeymoon. My longest flight ever brought many happy thoughts as we adopted our daughter from China. She later accompanied me on many trips.

But a time came when no happy thoughts could help me fly. After 9/11, I was to fly with my daughter back to L.A. as year after year, I returned home to celebrate my birthday with my parents. The events of 9/11 stranded my daughter and me in Seattle. Though it took four days to safely return home, it took 21 years before I



flew again in September. Each birthday thereafter focused on honoring the lost lives, postponing my birthday celebrations a day later.

But something even Peter forgot to enable the children to fly with was faith and trust. The trusted voice of a thrifty mom reminded me not to waste money. Her reminder led to revisiting our canceled vacation travel funds that were about to expire. I also remembered to check my points and had enough for a free hotel. So off we went to Florida. We were able to hear the stories of the freedoms we Americans have from the voices of Ben Franklin and Mark Twain revisiting history. We flew between galaxies. My heart flew as our family celebrated 50 years of creative minds who enable others to "fly" to many places in one place. "Happy little thoughts" restored my heart to fly in September. Though JM Barrie was quoted as saying that doubt will cease one's ability to fly, God's joy helped me go on. I can fly though I will still honor the many voices silenced that ONE day. What happy thoughts make you fly?





### DRawing Airplanes

Melody & Lyrics | January Lim

I GOT CAUGHT UP DRAWING AIRPLANES
TWO WINGS, AND A BODY, A TAIL
EXIT DOORS AND WINDOWS, LIGHT BULBS TO SPARE
AN AEROPLANE
A BIRD
A WAY OUT OF HERE

DON'T KNOW WHERE I'M GOING
I DON'T REALLY CARE
I DON'T NEED FIRST CLASS, I WON'T EAT THE MEALS
DUST A GIRL ON A PLANE
BREATHING IN THE THIN AIR
GETTING LOST FOR A MOMENT
IN NEED OF REPAIR
CARRIED AWAY BY THE REVERIES
OF HER MEMORIES

I GOT CAUGHT UP DRAWING AIRPLANES
IT'S ME WAY UP HERE
I'M HEADED
NOWHERE
BUT JUST FOR A MINUTE, I'M FREE TO PREPARE
MYSELF FOR A SEASON
NO WEAR AND NO TEAR
A PLACE OF SWEET PLEASURE
WITHOUT MEASURE OF ANY PRESSURE
ANYWHERE



### Voice Calling

### **DEFINITION**

Lectio is divine or spiritual reading of a text of Scripture (to begin with). There are basic movements to this process, like a dance which is fluid, flowing and expressive. Lectio is like a spiral or a round-about. It can be entered whenever and wherever you are. This process can be applied to any text where you believe God is speaking to you. There is no mastery or experts in lectio, but only a desire for a deeper union with God. From a broader perspective, life can be a lectio, or a family or personal relationships can be lectio, etc. There are no confining boundaries. God is everywhere to be noticed and received.

### **HOW TO BEGIN**

Find a quiet place.

Breathe in and out several times to center yourself.

Begin with a Scriptural text as a good way to start.

Read the text slowly.

Then, *read the text again slowly and meditate* on what is read. Find a word or phrase that speaks to you.

Next, *read the text one more time and respond* as you feel moved, perhaps using the words or phrase as anchors to your responsive prayer.

Finally, spend time *resting* and *listening* to God as the Spirit moves in you.

There are times when nothing really occurs in this process, but the word or phrase may speak to you later. When that happens, hold the word or phrase close to your heart and express thanksgiving to God.

Now hear the Word of the Lord in 1 Samuel 3.

### THE LORD CALLS SAMUEL

1 Samuel 3: 1 - 10

3 The boy Samuel ministered before the Lord under Eli. In those days the word of the Lord was rare; there were not many visions. 2 One night, Eli, whose eyes were becoming so weak that he could barely see, was lying down in his usual place. 3 The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the house of the Lord, where the ark of God was. 4 Then the Lord called Samuel. Samuel answered, "Here I am." 5 And he ran to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." But Eli said, "I did not call; go back and lie down." So he went and lay down. 6 Again the Lord called, "Samuel!" And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." "My son," Eli said, "I did not call; go back and lie down." 7 Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord: The word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him. 8 A third time the Lord called, "Samuel!" And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." Then Eli realized that the Lord was calling the boy. 9 So Eli told Samuel, "Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening." So Samuel went and lay down in his place. 10 The Lord came and stood there, calling as at the other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" Then Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

### PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

- 1. In what ways do you identify with Samuel? Remember and explain your personal examples.
- Sometimes hearing the voice of God can be confusing.
   How do you discern whether the voice you hear is God speaking to you?
- 3. What are you compelled to do when you hear God voices

### Title: The Voiceless

**Description:** How are we listening to the voices of the voiceless? I find that through the beauty of bringing life into the world, there are spaces in which women are expected to take a tremendous responsibility of child rearing. How might we redirect the light on all voices in search of the hope of a brighter future? How might we bring those in shadow into the spotlight?

Medium: Digital Painting

**Size:** 1668 x 2388px

## Time Moiceless

By Robert Jona







Nicola Patton is a South African born writer, poet, and ThM graduate from Fuller Theological Seminary. She has been married to her husband, Alex, for 11 years. She is currently in a PhD program with a research focus on ethics in the book of Ezekiel.

### Here is Holy

By Nicola Patton Artwork by Gavin Otteson

### WILD NEWNESS

I didn't know I wanted a child.

Almost 11 years we've been married, and we've run the full gamut of wanting children right away to not wanting them at all – along with all the pressure from family and society to hurry up already.

This year something different happened.

I found out I was pregnant.

Out of nowhere, our lives were suddenly spinning a different direction and the \$5 test sat there as a wild assurance of a new kind of future.

When this time of year comes around, we look at a promise made to a young girl.<sup>1</sup>

She didn't have the convenience of a \$5 pregnancy test, much less the proven assurance of a decade-long marriage.

She did have the promise of a marriage. Her society was one in which she needed marriage and then children to find a place of belonging, in that order. We're not sure how old she was – or how old her betrothed, Joseph, was! – but we have a good guess that she was quite young and, on the face of it, things were looking up for her with this engagement: The promise of a settled future.

Out of nowhere, Mary meets a divine messenger who twice calls her favored, lucky, blessed. What kind of a greeting is that? But ok.

Also, Mary, you will conceive and bear a child. A very special child: the son of God, the son of the Most High..

"For nothing will be impossible with God," the angel says. Mary accepts and, just like that, the angel is gone again.

Let's pause in those moments – the ones right after the angel, when Mary lets the message sink in, when she pauses in the light of new promises.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup>Luke 1:26-38, NRSV.

### TRACK RECORDS AND EXPECTATIONS

Mary is not the first with this kind of encounter in either Testament. She stood in a line of women locked into patriarchy but seen by the Almighty.

Her own relative, Elizabeth, quietly lives her life in disgrace as a childless woman, wife of a priest. Out of nowhere, an angel appears to her husband in his service, promising him a son in his old age. Elizabeth will conceive and bear a child, a special child, full of spirit and power.<sup>2</sup>

Samson's mother, unnamed and barely acknowledged, has a sudden and unexpected encounter about her future. An angel appears to tell her she will have a child though she has been barren. In the same manner as Mary, she is told, "you shall conceive and bear a son" – a special son who will lead the people.<sup>3</sup>

Sarah, who laughed at a stranger's suggestion, was also told she would bear a child in her old age. This would be a child of God's embodied promises.<sup>4</sup>

Hagar encounters an angel of YHWH confirming her future even as she runs for her life. She was also told, "Now you have conceived and shall bear a son," just like the others.<sup>5</sup>

They all had confirmation of their promises, some sign of future promises.

Some of them laughed. Some of them doubted. Some of them accepted in fear, out of duty. Out of delight?

Did they not all accept with some sense of foreboding?

"This is too good to be true. How can I hope for this?"

### COURAGE TO HOPE

How many have sat with that complexity? How many have conceived but did not bear the child they longed for?

How many promises have we thought would come to pass only to find them to be wind, contractions without fulfillment?

The draw of future promises is that we are innately given to hope. Hope is in our DNA, in our bones, in our cells. We cannot help but hope, even when we would rather not.

Yet it is harder to give in to hope because we can always be disappointed. It is daring to hope. Courageous to let ourselves wonder.

But some things are too deep to utter. Some things take a lifetime to be said out loud. Some things lay dormant, bubbling up only later.

Some things are dreams we didn't know we had.

When do we dare believe that our hopes could be promises? Where are the voices of future promises?

### TOO DEEP

Deep calls to deep beneath the roar of waterfalls, in the deepest parts of our longings and the hardest parts of our dreams and hopes.

Maybe there is a tension here, a tension that sits between future hope and promises left unfulfilled.

How many times did Mary hope and wonder and wait for the impossible? Is that why the angel said simply, "Nothing will be impossible with God"? Did Gabriel know something?

Did Mary's womb cry out, "This is impossible, you don't know what you're asking"?

Wombs speak louder than words.

Elizabeth's womb leapt when she heard Mary's voice. There are some things we cannot control, some things too deep for words to utter.

The wordless groans of the Spirit match our own. The deep calls to deep.

Hannah wanted a child. She begged and pleaded, and then surrendered her dream to God.

Hannah's husband asked her if he was not enough, if she could not be satisfied with their lives as they were.

"Why do you weep? Why do you not eat? Why is your heart sad? Am I not worth more to you than ten sons?"

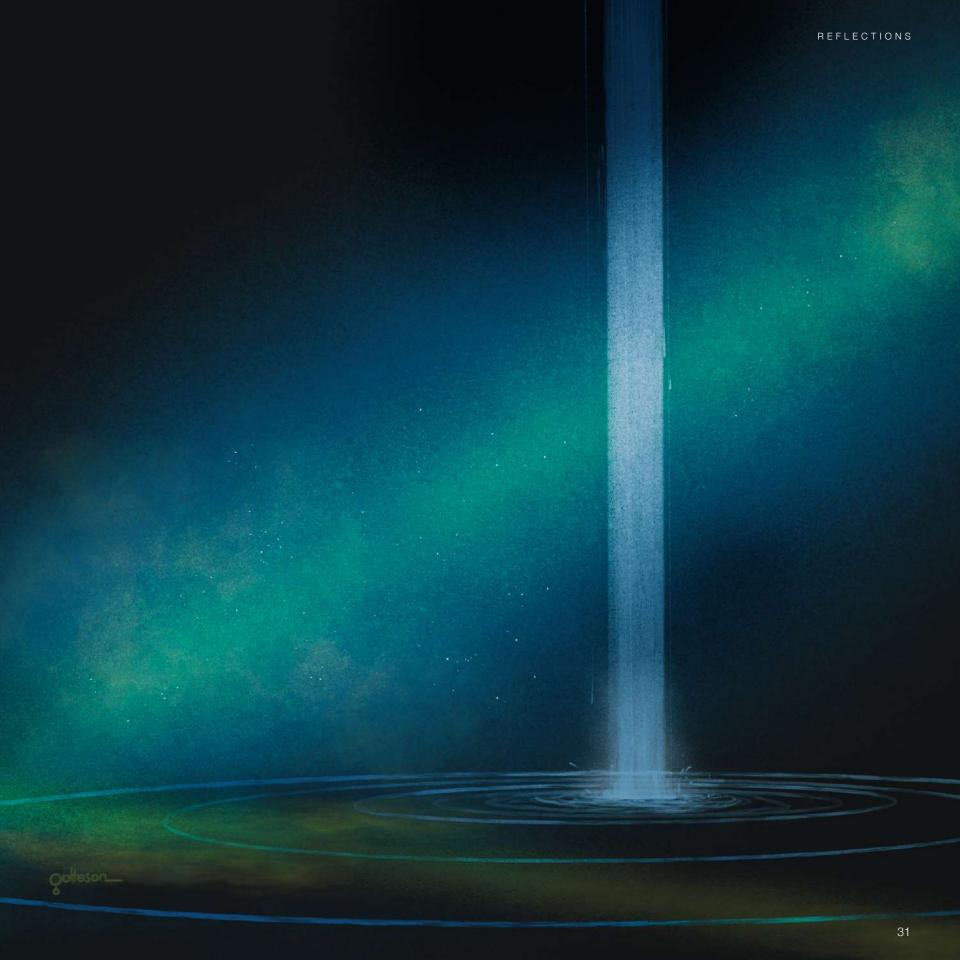
We never hear her answer. Some things are too deep to say out loud.<sup>6</sup>

Maybe it's within the tension of doubt and daring to hope that we find ourselves. Maybe it's those future promises that seem so far off, so unattainable that God enjoys showing up.

It's sometimes as if God sits back and says, "Watch. Watch what I'll do. I can't wait to show you."

And maybe those are words and phrases we can't hear articulated. We only hear them deep inside.

Maybe surrender is where we find ourselves most secure.



### HERE AND NOT YET

Future promises must come with gentle presence.

A breath for the here and now.

There must be room to say, "Here. Here is holy."

This moment – marked by solitude, quiet, even loneliness.

The stillness of deep knowing.

The deep under the roar of all waterfalls.

Maybe that's why I've always liked being underwater. The first few meters in a lap, right after the dive or the push from the wall – before resurfacing, noticing the need for air and the sudden rush to actually swim. It's the quiet before activity, the lingering peace and stillness as the waves crash and rage above me.

The crash will always come.

The draw of future ever nearer and nearer.

There's a pull, always ahead, always forward.

But here, too, is holy.

This moment.

Right after the angel Gabriel leaves, maybe Mary sits quietly, alone – stillness. Maybe in awe. Maybe in shock. Maybe in terror at what comes next. But here is holy.

Not just the moment she conceived nor the moment she gave birth. Not only at the first cry of her newborn nor the last breath of the Messiah: *Here is holy.* 

Here future promises mix with dashed hopes.

Here is where You are.

It's easy to rush forward – especially when we've heard the promise and glimpsed the possibilities.

The future can be exciting. Promises can be good and elusive, fickle and

They can be hopeful and terrifying, inconvenient and incomprehensible.

They are their own trouble and treasure.

But here is holy, too.

Do not rush through Lent to Easter, Advent to Christmas.

If the journey matters as much as or more than the end, then here is holy, here is worth seeing,

here is worth knowing.

Here is where the future is realized.

If it's a promise, we need not hurry it along. We need only be still. No amount of rush or worry will bring it closer. It will come in its own time.

Here we can sit and find holiness in the tension of waiting and hoping, in the here and not yet.

Watch and wait, see what YHWH will do – not only in some future, but in each moment as it comes.

Holy. Tender. Hopeful. Even mundane.

The angel came to each of them. But time passed slower for them than on the pages we read.

Days and years sit between those lines.

Waiting.

But that, too, was holy.

My wild newness was short-lived. I miscarried before the end of the first trimester.

But it turns out I do want a child. There are some things too deep to know consciously, much less to say out loud.

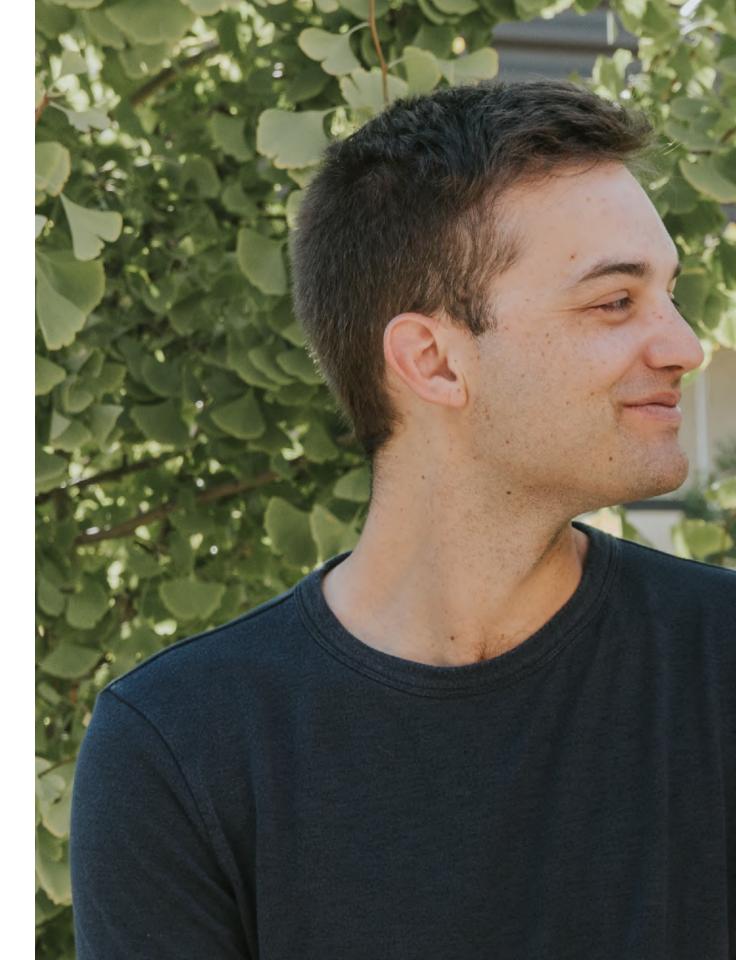
And in this in-between, the here and not yet, in this waiting, grieving, remembering, healing...

Here, too, is holy.

### Chanacters

## Blake & Megan Thomsen

Profiled by Eric Lui





egan and Blake Thomsen's journey to Southern California two years ago has definitely been an interesting one. They met during their undergrad years at Princeton and then went to seminary together at Duke Divinity School. They got married four and a half years ago and settled down on the East Coast. At the start of the pandemic, they started watching Evergreen's virtual services. And finally in mid-2020, they made the long trek from Durham, North Carolina to sunny Southern California so Megan could start the Social Work program at UCLA. They settled down in the Sawtelle district of West Los Angeles and fell in love with the neighborhood. In August 2020, they joined the Central Los Angeles home group where they were able to get plugged into the church and be a part of a community.

Now that they are currently in a new chapter of their lives, their inner voices are definitely leading them and speaking to them in huge ways. Megan describes her voice in three words as "growing, kind, and affirming." For Blake, he would say "rediscovering, shifting, welcoming."

For Megan, she has always been appreciative of the voices that have spoken into her life. She shares, "During a time of mental health struggles, the voices of others birthed new life out of a dark season. Helping lift the heavy weight of anxiety and depression, the voices of others showed me that my life is not bad because of these struggles, nor am I." She adds, "These voices reminded me of what is true in spite of my distorted thinking. These voices held out hope of what was to come when all I could see was darkness up ahead. These voices showed me that I was seen and loved. Bringing me back to life, these voices sang to me the notes of God's resurrection power."

She is now using her voice to help others with mental health struggles through her work as a therapist for the Yellow Chair Collective, a local practice that has primarily Asian and Asian-American therapists on staff. "I think my voice is unique in that I use my voice to make space for the voices of others," she explains.

"Whether as a therapist or friend, I use my voice to ask questions that encourage others to take up space; I offer reflections and insights that make people feel heard; and I seek to affirm others so that they too might see their voice as unique and precious."

When asked what voices in our world she feels need to be amplified, Megan says "I want to advocate for the voices that have traditionally gone unheard or unregarded. We live in a world marked by a thousand arbitrary hierarchies. We are told that it's better to be loud than quiet, white than Asian, skinny than fat." She adds "I want to be a voice that reminds people that these hierarchies are false and destructive. I want to use my voice to echo the voice of God, declaring all of creation to be 'very good.'





## Megan's voice "growing kind affirming..."

Blake's voice

"rediscovering
shifting
welcoming..."

This need to advocate for the unheard voices is a big part of what drew the Thomsens to Evergreen. They both share that,

"We were drawn to Evergreen's mix of faithfulness and creativity, particularly with regards to the LGBTQ community."

For Blake, he is always aware of the voices in his life that have shaped him in this current season. "Kate Bowler is a professor from Duke Divinity School who received a stage IV colon cancer diagnosis in her late 30's. In a flash, her life turned upside down. She has shared her journey into this new world via books and podcasts, which discuss the fragility of life and the painful reality that God does not always deliver the life we hoped for and/or the life we thought God would provide." He shares, "I've been particularly grateful for her voice in parsing out the difference between the Before and the After in her life (the "before cancer" and "after cancer" stages), and the faith, strength, and grieving required to live well in the After. This resonates with my own Before and After, with the Before defined by carefree joy and the After muddied by the pain of a traumatic medical ordeal in my early 20's that still bears scars almost ten years later."

He currently works for an education access non-profit that helps African high school students get into colleges across Africa and around the world. Previously, he got his MDiv and planned to do ministry of some kind, but he found it difficult to find the right ministry space to work in. His job helps him provide opportunities for those who are often unheard, something he has experience with. He explains, "In the midst of my medical struggles, I

often felt voiceless and unheard within the healthcare system and also within the athletic world of which I was a part. I had never needed my voice to be heard more, and yet I felt more voiceless than I ever did when I was healthy and strong." He adds, "Overcoming the effects of my past voicelessness is still an ongoing struggle. But I have made substantial progress through trauma therapy, where I have learned to claim agency and assert my value, especially in situations where I am being devalued or I feel powerless."

As important for Blake is to also listen to others' voices and to learn from them. He says, "I want to make sure I am always listening to others and willing to learn from their experiences. This will help strengthen my voice and allow me to speak more effectively. I think a voice is most powerful and helpful when it speaks on behalf of many."

As the Thomsens reflect on their past few years at Evergreen, they are always considering how they feel their voices contribute to our community. Blake shares, "I am proud to be a voice of affirmation and validation for those struggling with medical issues of any kind. The healthcare system is often a tragically dehumanizing space. I try to speak against the worthlessness that people can feel when they are dismissed or ignored in the midst of their pain."

And lastly Megan adds, "One of the things I treasure most about Evergreen is the posture of openness that this church holds towards faith. I seek to contribute to this attitude through emphasizing the significance of humility in our faith. None of us have all the answers, and there is so much unknown. But together, we can seek to explore the mysteries of our faith. I love encouraging different interpretations of Scripture, making space for doubt and wondering, and building relationships with those who hold different ideas about God."







Hank was introduced to Grace by an air force buddy he served with in Japan. Grace's parents were concerned about him. After all, Hank entered the picture as a total stranger who had hitchhiked his way from Ohio to Los Angeles and was living at the YMCA downtown. The only positive was that he claimed to have graduated from Ohio State University. A college degree was a must for Grace's parents.

One day while sitting around the kitchen table, Grace's mother asked Hank if he knew of a Kinuko Oga.

"Yes, she was my sister," Hank replied.

Before the war, Grace's parents operated a grocery store on 10th Street in L.A. They had often shared with Grace about a young high school girl who they were very fond of and who worked at the store. Every evening the mother of the young girl would come and pick her up with a little boy clinging to her. That little boy was Hank.

Hank's family and Grace's family were sent to different internment camps. Relocation did not allow for them to develop any connections. But now, Hank was no longer a stranger.

## **HANK**

As a child growing up in Ohio, Hank often felt unseen and ignored due to his small stature and Japanese ancestry. Hank's father was disabled — his leg amputated while working on the railroad in the 1920's. His mother passed away shortly before Hank and his family were relocated to Rohwer Arkansas Internment camp, where his oldest sister also passed away from tuberculosis. After returning from Rohwer, his family of five —which consisted of father (62), oldest brother (25), older sister (16), younger brother (13) and Hank (8) — faced many hardships.

"The burden of keeping the family together and providing financial support fell upon my oldest brother who was only 25. Those early years were often filled with financial insecurity and an inferiority complex."

Still, Hank overcame these difficult moments through the strong ties to his family and the tight-knit Japanese community.



"After graduating high school I joined the air force, desiring a new direction for my future. During the 6 1/2 years I served, I developed my sense of independence, self-assurance, and adventure, and acquired technical skills that formed a foundation for a technical career."

Hank moved to Los Angeles in 1964, where he began his career as a technician at Xerox. He worked for 30 years before retiring early at the age of 57, taking the golden handshake. Hank started attending Evergreen in 1965 — "Dating Grace required going to church" —and even volunteered as a facilities coordinator at Evergreen for several years post-retirement. In 2004, he began his journey as a grandfather and babysitter until the pandemic hit.

"The burden of keeping the family together and providing financial support fell upon my oldest brother who was only 25. Those early years were often filled with financial insecurity and an inferiority complex."

## **GRACE**

In 1942, Grace and her family were interned at Poston War Relocation Center in Arizona.

"I was 2 years old."

In 1946 when Evergreen first opened its doors to returning internees, Grace was a part of the Sunday school class that met at the Spanish American Seminary Church on Indiana Street.

"My parents sent me to Evergreen because they wanted their children to be 'American.' Attending a Christian Church was one significant way." Under Dr. William Bill Shinto's loving pastoral guidance, Grace was able to grow and establish a relationship with Christ that continued to mold her into the Christian she is today.

During her junior year at UCLA, Grace felt called to be a public school educator. She worked for the Los Angeles Unified School District for 38 years before retiring in 2005.

"My career began as a primary grades teacher. When my daughters were born, I switched to part-time in adult education, teaching parenting

# Hank's voice "limitations, thanksgiving, acceptance.."

Grace's voice

"thanksgiving,

peace,

treasure..."

classes. In 1989, I returned full-time to the classroom teaching in the early education program. For five of those years I taught the physically disabled preschool children."

After retiring, Grace led the volunteer Wonder of Learning program at Robert Hill Lane School until 2020, when the pandemic no longer allowed volunteers in the classroom.

"My desire to be a teacher had its roots early on. My mother often told me that my favorite pastime was lining up my dolls and playing school. I clearly heard God's mission for me was to share God's presence and love each day with the students and their parents."

## **VOICE**

Three words Hank uses to describe his voice are: limitations, thanksgiving, and acceptance.

Hank admits to certain physical and mental limitations. "I am unable to continue to achieve the goals I set for myself in earlier years."

Yet, Hank has thanksgiving for God's blessings over his family and the unique bond he has developed with his daughters and their families. His last word describes the peace he feels in this current season.

"I have acceptance of who I am and where I am at in life."

These descriptors of Hank's voice seem harmonious with the ways that Grace describes her own. She identifies her voice as: thanksgiving, peace, and treasure. Grace also expresses her gratitude for God's grace and faithfulness in the

lives of her daughters and their families, over her career as an educator, and her life as a part of Evergreen.

Grace adds that she has always been a doer.

## "I need to seek peace, puttering in the garden, living one day at a time, enjoying the moment."

Ultimately, she expresses her deep pleasure in her life with Hank. "Now that we are in our 80's, I treasure the time we have together. Our relationship to one another can be summed up by a plaque Hank gave me which he found in a gift store on one of the our travels. The plaque reads 'To the world you may be one person but to one person you may be the world."

It is a poignant and deeply layered sentiment that Hank and Grace express when considering the individuality of their voices.

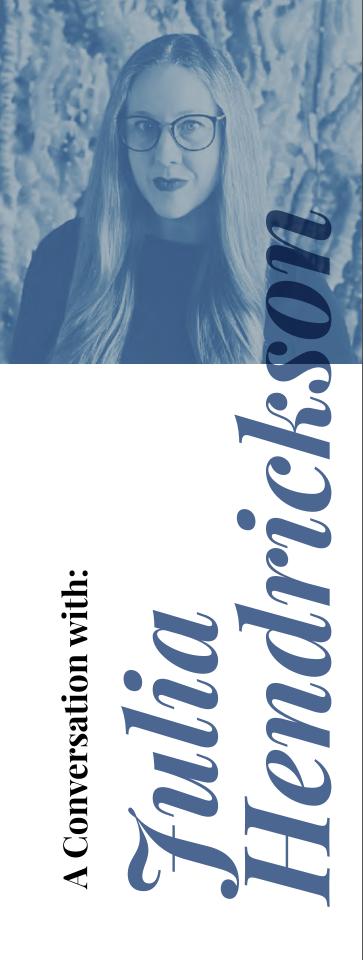
"We do not feel our voices are unique. Our voices reflect the voices of fellow seniors who experienced the Internment."

It seems only fitting that they hope to raise up voices that have experienced injustice and incarceration in the past—to advocate to prevent it from happening ever again.

"I want to amplify Christian voices for unification and respect for our differences," Grace adds. "We want to work towards that which makes us one in Christ."

## Conversations

Julia Hendrickson with January Lim



This interview was conducted via Zoom on September 21st, 2022 between two very good creatives and friends.

January: <getting settled> Fantastic. Okay. Cool. Hi, Julia.

Julia: Hi January. How are you?

January: I'm doing good. How are you?

Julia: Good. It's good to see you.

January: It's so good to see you friend. Julia, I know you, but will you introduce yourself for our motif readers?

**Julia:** Yes. My name is Julia Hendrickson. I'm originally from New York, but I've lived all over the United States and I've been living in Northeast LA for five years now. I work as a professional artist and a college professor. My artwork is primarily watercolor and salt, which is a technique that I picked up from an urban sketching book, but have really been working on and working with for the past eight years.

January: Past eight years...

**Julia:** My master's is actually in printmaking and sometimes when people see my work, they think that I've always been a painter, but the repetitive nature of how I work is very much rooted in a printmaking tradition. And I think when you're aware of that, you can have a different understanding of the work.

**January:** Got it. And Julia, you and I know each other from seminary so maybe you can describe briefly your process of arriving here. You're clearly an artist, but then you got this degree, your Master's of Divinity. Tell us about your journey of landing where you are today as a professional artist and professor, et cetera.

Julia: I think that seminary was really great in developing my voice even further. It gave a certain specificity to how I presented ideas. I think of homiletics classes as really foundational in that because they teach you how to communicate in ways that are accessible to a specific audience. And art can often be thought of as aloof or uninterpretable. So all of my seminary training, it was about, "How do I have conversations about faith in an interfaith context? How do I have conversations about the history of my faith and the current way that this faith plays out across a myriad of sociopolitical, global implications. And then if my primary mechanism for communication is visual art, what then is it communicating? How do I specifically hone my voice in that field so that it can be understood by a viewer?" I think that seminary really helped me to be able to articulate all of that and strengthened a lot of the foundational knowledge that I had regarding Christian faith and history and took it to that next level.

**January:** So that's amazing. First of all, that you decided to actively pursue a seminary degree so that you could saturate your voice that much more in order that it might translate to viewers of your artwork.

Julia: Let me be clear, I did not know that that was what was going to happen when I went to seminary! I thought that perhaps I would go and be a school chaplain. I was doing art, but I didn't know that—and I mean, I did have a master of fine arts, like, clearly I've been on this path with art for a long time—but I went to seminary thinking that I would go into a much more traditional role of ministry following seminary.

January: Got it, got it.

**Julia:** But I definitely see what I do now as a ministry and as a bridge in faith.

**January:** So let's talk about your voice a little bit and I know this is gonna be an impossible question, but in hindsight, especially as you've had such a concentrated time during the pandemic to work on your art—how would you describe your voice as an artist?

Julia: Yeah. So the pandemic started and my outside studio space closed and I was at home living in a studio sized apartment, finishing out my seminary classes, going to class from my kitchen table, doing my paintings from a kitchen table, eating my meals at my kitchen table, right? Everything was all happening at one table. And I say that I was painting at my kitchen table, but I wasn't painting a whole lot. I was mostly just looking out the window! But then I had a friend who was going in for a truly life changing surgery. And I was anxious about it for them. And I knew that I had to pray, but sitting and praying was not going to be the thing that was going to work in that moment.

January: Mm.

**Julia:** And so I cleared my table and I put out a big sheet of paper and I painted my prayer. And I shared it on Instagram and got more likes than I had ever gotten before in my life and realized this resonates with others, but this also did something for me. It gave me a practice to provide a framework for navigating whatever was going to come next. And so for me to paint is to

pray. I was raised in a home that values prayer immensely—the verse, "pray without ceasing" was a core family value, right?

And so I'm always thinking, "How do I remain in that state of communion with God?" How do I have that conversation in all the things that I do in the manner of someone like Brother Lawrence saying, "I can pray as I wash the dishes?" I can paint as prayer and what does that look like? And how does the world change when our whole action becomes a prayer? How do we change as individuals when we're in that kind of constant conversation with the Divine?

Something else I think about a lot is the word, *abracadabra*. Which means, "as I speak, I create", and it's actually an ancient Aramaic word. If you think about it, God spoke the world into being, and prayers are words. Constructing realities. Like, you can go out there in prayer land, you know, like it's this whole other construction that can happen. Painting as praying is giving the visual to that construction. And so all of that together is part of how I work and how I pray and how I am. Does that kind of give an answer to the question?

January: Yes! Some of the things I received as you're sharing all that rich stuff was the fact that you are a healer—that's part of your voice! You imagine, and you build and construct worlds. And it's through the concept of prayer that you're able to envision this world. I think one thing that I've always received from your artwork, just as somebody who's been around your work, thankfully, is that it's always so expansive and it's always so deep. I wanna get to the kind of choices that you make, the materials that you use. There's one in particular that you always constantly feature in your artwork just like there's one particular color that you've used. My question is, how have those materials also been an expression of your voice? Why and how did you choose these materials?

Julia: Thank you for that. The depth that you see in the work—I'm always seeking to construct a reflective, expansive, safe space for my viewers. One of the ways that I can do that is by eliminating choices. The color that I use is called "Payne's Gray." Paynes was an 18th century watercolorist and it's a commercial mix of ultramarine lamp black and crimson. He offered it to his students as an alternative to black, and this deep blue, gray slate color allows for your mind to imagine what other colors could be there.

Something that also sticks with me is, the college that I went to at the time had a slogan: "Freedom within a framework of faith." "Freedom within a framework"— when you put a boundary up, when you limit your color choice, you suddenly have that much more freedom to explore it. Because you're not making all these other choices and trying to make all these other things work. You're just focused intently on one thing.

January: Right, you're so committed. Mm-hmm.

**Julia:** You're so committed. Like Simone Weil talking about attention as the highest form of love, right? It's that limiting our field of focus so that we can truly pay attention and then other things can happen. So I have the Payne's gray watercolor and I also—



## **Ascending 1**

Julia Hendrickson

Watercolor & Salt on Paper

22"x30"

2021



Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus (1944): IV - Regard de la Vierge/ Olivier Messiaen

Piano: Daniel Lee | Mix & Master: Colin Althaus

January: Just, just on that note, it's kind of crazy because as you're saying that, I'm reminded that, sometimes, for those of us, especially as artists who feel limited, because we feel like we're only asked to show one side of us, or we're only asked to portray one part of our voice when we feel like we're multifaceted... of course there are times for that too... Absolutely... but I feel like it's just encouraging because in an odd way, your statement just empowers me to be like, even if for a season, I'm only asked to use this part of my voice—if I commit to that, if I go deeper into that, I may discover facets and aspects of this part of my voice that I would've missed if I was so busy, engaging in like 300 other options or choices that were set before me. I'm really encouraged by what you said.

**Julia:** Yeah, it's that facet of, "the diamond of my life is getting polished precisely at that point to be that much more reflective".

January: Mm-hmm. Sorry, I interrupted you!

**Julia:** No, I love, I love what you're saying.

January: So Payne's gray...

Julia: That's the color I use...

January: Right.

**Julia:** ...and then I use salt. I use Morton's coarse kosher salt and that came about...I tested all those different salts that we had in the cabinet and then I went and tried some more... and salt often includes an anti-caking agent and those anti-caking agents have colors.

January: Hmm.

**Julia:** The one in Morton's works the best with the paint that I use, but it also is the right size—does the right things with that pigment. Also in the beginning, I used lots of different colors, but each paint pigment separates differently. And I came to realize that Payne's and the Mortons, that was a perfect pairing for me and what I wanted to express, because my work is biomimetic and it does have that idea of like, am I on an iceberg or am I on a biology slide under a microscope. So it's the macro and the micro and this color lends itself to that.

**January:** And why in particular would that expression or manifestation of the salt with Payne's gray, why does that speak specifically to you? Why is it perfect for you, you think?

**Julia:** Um, I think straight black, like Mars black and zinc white, are very stark and very harsh. And there's a softness that can come in when you add that blue shade. And there's a comfort in it that I like and that I think resonates with people in a way that if it was solely black and white would not have the same welcoming effect.

January: Mmm-hmm, mm-hmm. So it's interesting because I feel like in an

odd way, the salt, the way that salt kind of combusts, if you will, for lack of a better word with Payne's gray, actually comforts and soothes you.

Julia: Oh, for sure.

January: So it's like a personal receiving, a personal response and a satisfaction. It doesn't feel like you're doing it because for you, it's very personal. It's very particular.

**Julia:** Oh, definitely. I think that everybody makes a choice, right? Whether you're cooking something, whether you're writing something, we're always making choices all the time and, yes, it's how it's going to land with others, but do we like it? Like, there's a selfishness to what we do, I'm not going to deny that. I like it.

**January:** Yeah. Well, I think that's what it is, right? A part of utilizing our voices is maybe somewhere in the process, we need to actually embrace our own voices and say, "I like my voice though."

Julia: Yeah.

January: I like the way it lands on me.

**Julia:** There are people that would be critical of me using paint directly from the tube. They would say that that is, that's not what a professional artist should be doing. They should be mixing all their own colors.

January: Really?.

**Julia:** People really have opinions on that and sometimes I think about it, but then I'm like, but it's uniform and functional and it's a pretty color.

January: Yeah! For goodness sake, it's pretty to look at!

**Julia:** I think that in the contemporary context, we sometimes are derogatory towards things that are pretty or beautiful. And I just say, well, why not like things that are pretty and beautiful? We don't have to just accept cacophony and dissonance. There's a place for those things to be sure, but we can also be led by still waters.

January: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Oh, that is really interesting. Maybe it is because of the color of the Payne's gray with the salt and kinda the ripple effect. There's a lot of depth and expanse, but there's also a lot of movement in your artwork and there always seems to be some sort of inertia behind it, right? I've also had the privilege of seeing your art on a really big scale. I know that that was a first for you when the exhibit happened at Fuller Chapel a few years ago, but I've always actually known your art to be that big and that wide. And so maybe I can ask you, you know, as an artist, I'm sure there might be a particular group of people that you might particularly want to resonate with—whose voices that you wanna tap into, you wanna release. Who are some of these people groups, if any, that you feel like particularly leaning towards you?



## **Ascending 2**

Julia Hendrickson

Watercolor & Salt on Paper

22"x30"

2021



Suite bergamasque, L.75: III. Clair de lune | Claude Debussy

Piano: Daniel Lee | Mix & Master: Colin Althaus

**Julia:** Yeah. I just wanna go back to something that you said though. The movement in my work and the color choice and all of that, it's also impacted by the fact that I lived on islands for 25 years of my life and I think that that expansiveness and that closeness to the sea and to the ocean also shows up. And so it's inherent to my experience of like, we're moving through and we're in isolation and all of that I think is also relevant to say that there's 25 years of lived island experience.

January: Right. Right.

Julia: Regarding a particular audience—I would hope that it's whoever would want to live with the work. Whoever would want to spend time with it. There's another thing in the art world that says, oh, that's just armchair artwork. Uh, like something that you wanna have in your living room and whoever wants to have this kind of artwork in their living room, then this is the art for them. I don't have a specific person in mind when I'm creating it, it's more, "Is whoever's viewing it also willing to enter the conversation? Do they wanna come to the dinner party that I'm hosting with the pigment and the salt and the water? Do they wanna come sit at this table and join this conversation?" If they do great, I want their voice here. I want their presence here. It's an open invitation.

**January:** I love that. So it's not something that you just want it to be looking, hanging as you're sitting and gathering with others, but it's a painting that you wanna eat with. Man, I feel like your table must be so sacred and so soaked, literally—figuratively and literally—with a lot of prayer and a lot of flavor and just a lot of invitation.

Julia, I'm so grateful to have been able to host you and our friendship all these years. I think my final question to you is, if you could offer a prayer over yourself, right? Like if you could offer prayer over your own still developing voice, not just as an artist, but just as an embodied human being, living through some really crappy times—living through some really difficult times—what would that prayer for yourself be?

**Julia:** God give me right sight. God, give me right words. To me, that means like, help me to see things as God sees them, help me to speak, to paint, to pray as God would speak, paint, and pray.

January: That's really good.

Julia: Because that, yeah, that's it.

January: So simple, now just go on and do it!

Julia: Just let it be God, right?

January: So easy!

Julia: It's not, and so that's the prayer, right?

January: Totally, totally.

**Julia:** It's like, no, I could totally make this an ego trip, but God help me see it the way you see it, help me live it the way you would live it. Like how much more then does that expand the boundaries of the table? The audience of the practice?

**January:** Well, I love that and I think everyone's going to take that prayer and hopefully be able to implement that into wherever they're at with their voice and how they express it.

Julia, it's been a pleasure. I'm continuing to look forward to the ways that your art continues to kind of spread out and I know you have an Instagram that you're very, very good about. Your release of content is phenomenal. And so we'll have all that information available for people to be able to access your work, but ultimately we're just so grateful to have you here. So grateful to talk a little bit more deeply about who you are as an artist.

**Julia:** Thank you January. It is a privilege to be able to share this with the Evergreen community. Thank you for the invitation.

## Stories

## One of Many

By Quincy Sakai Artwork By Alex Eng

very night when I was sure everyone had fallen asleep and Mrs. and Mr. Dalton had locked their bedroom door, I carefully snuck out of my corner of the sleeping room past all the beds and other children, making sure not to move anything out of place. After I had gently shut the bedroom door, I would find my way down hallways just as endlessly tall as they were long until I stood right in front of a kindly furnished drawer, a doll tied in a kimono perfectly placed on top.

She was a happy doll—a "too happy" doll as the other kids called her. She had two black beads as eyes and a pink threaded mouth strung to her white cloth face. On the doll's back was a music crank that could be turned to play music, which was regarded as creepy to most others at the orphanage. I had no idea where she came from or what her name was, so I decided on Hibiki, or echo as it translated to in English. Hibiki—the name that meant echo. Just how I heard her echo words or phrases in the things I told her every night.





Yet even though Hibiki was a "too happy" doll, there was some sense of sadness I found in the gleams of her pitch black eyes. I couldn't help but feel like she might have been my long lost sister, considering that I looked more like her than any living person in the orphanage. We had the same black hair, straight cut bangs, and dark beady eyes that seemed to have no distinction between the iris and the pupil.

"I don't get it," I told her one night as I sat beside the drawer. "Everyone else seems to get along with each other just fine. How come I'm the only one who doesn't know how to talk to them? Y'know, I'm happy just as I am, it's because of all the other kids. If it were only us, I would be just fine." I rested my head on my knees.

"...only us," the doll repeated. Of course, her repeats were a bit creepy sometimes, but I didn't have much of an option when it came to company.

"Do you ever have anything you want to say? Like... something other than what I talk about?"

"Anything you... talk." I sighed, getting up to go back to my bed. Maybe Hibiki was the only person in the world who would be there for me. As I laid down in bed, ready to close my eyes, I heard a soft music box melody from down the hall—it was Hibiki's melody, which she played every night after I had gone to bed.

The next morning, I woke up to news we hadn't received in a while. One of the other orphans found a family. We all congratulated her and hugged goodbye regardless of whether we knew her well or not before she left the orphanage in a shiny black car. Off to a new home, a home the rest of us may never see.

As uncommon as that event was, the adoptions didn't stop there. Day after day, parents stopped by to adopt their own child, carrying them away down the street and around the corner, leaving one less child by night. Until one night, there was just me. Me and Hibiki.

Walking down the hall after bedtime felt different somehow. I no longer needed to be as cautious as before because there was no one to wake up, yet I still found myself playing into old habits. Paying careful attention to avoid certain floorboards and leave the door just slightly ajar, I continued making my travel across the empty rooms until I stood in front of my destination. At the drawer sat Hibiki, patiently waiting on the top. Sitting beside the drawer, I told her things that had weighed on my mind the whole day.

"No one's here," I said quietly, almost tearfully. "Do you think I'll be adopted tomorrow?" Hibiki took a few moments to respond, making a few buzzing sounds

"Are... you... happy now?" I stared at Hibiki, fear and excitement ran down my back in a jolt.



"You-! You talked!" I jumped, waiting for Hibiki to say something else. She only stared back at me, back with her black bead eyes waiting for a response. "I..."

I took some time to think about this. Being alone, abandoned by the others who barely knew my name. That's how it was back then, and that's how it is now. In each case it seemed as if I had never existed to begin with. Even so... there was a part of me that hoped their absence would somehow make me feel better. Somehow stop me from being jealous of things I couldn't have. Was this... was this what I wanted this whole time?

"Maybe...it's all so new, y'know?" I shrugged it out with a weak chuckle. I thought again. I could be honest with Hibiki. I could only be honest with Hibiki. "I don't know. I thought I would be happy but I just feel... alone."

"You're just like the others..."

"Who?" I furrowed my eyebrows at this, unsure of what she meant.

"Wh-o?" she repeated back in a broken voice.

"What others?" I pushed, my voice raising past an unsafe volume for being awake at this hour, echoing off the walls over and over again. My mouth hung open, body frozen for only a moment before I could manage three words before turning and running away in fear: "I'm leaving now."

Back in my bed, I heard Hibiki begin to play her music, notes chiming an eerie and sweet melody. I clung onto my bed sheet covers, unable to fall asleep that night while I listened to the music played over and over again, accompanied by Hibiki's words ringing throughout the orphanage.

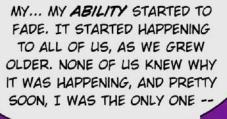
"You're just like the others."

The next morning, Mrs. Dalton woke up at 8:45, extremely late for someone like her. It didn't matter too much though, there weren't the same thirty-something children waiting for her like there was a few weeks ago. After getting dressed and making all her preparations for the day, Mrs. Dalton walked past the hall into the children's sleeping room. All beds stood empty, sheets made perfectly without a wrinkle. All except for one—a bed in the corner where a cute doll wearing a kimono sat.

"Looks like we've got another one," Mrs. Dalton mumbled to herself, picking up the doll and walking down the hall back to the drawer. With the turn of a key, Mrs. Dalton opened one of the many drawer shelves to put her newly found doll along with the rest of the many kimono-dressed girls, all waiting together for their next friend. Before leaving, Mrs. Dalton looked up at the kimono doll which sat on top of the drawers, happily smiling back at her.

"When will you ever have enough?"





11



THE WAYS OF HUMANS AND MAGIC CANNOT BE PREDICTED, FOR YOUR KIND HAVE STOLEN MAGIC THAT WAS NEVER MEANT TO BE YOURS.





JUNA FELT A PANG OF PAIN, NOT ONLY FROM THE MENTION OF HER LOST COMRADES, BUT ALSO THE REMINDER OF THE **ABILITY**SHE HAD BORNE SINCE SHE WAS A CHILD, NOW REPLACED BY A SENSE OF LOSS THAT LINGERED LIKE A PHANTOM LIMB.

HER SENTENCE THUS DECLARED, JUNA WAS LED OUT OF THE COURTROOM BY THE ENORMOUS SQUID KAMI.



WE MET IN COMBAT ONCE, ALMOST THIRTY MORTAL YEARS AGO.

EIGHT HUMAN SOULS WHICH WERE PROMISED TO ME WERE WRENCHED FROM MY GRASP BY YOU AND YOUR MEDDLING FRIENDS.

I WAS FURIOUS. BUT VENGEANCE WAS MINE SOON ENOUGH. THE SOULS OF YOUR FRIENDS WERE THE PRIZE FOR MY PATIENCE.

YOU'VE NO IDEA HOW LONG I'VE CRAVED THE TASTE OF YOUR SOUL TO COMPLETE THE SET.

THE DOUBLE DOORS AT THE END OF THE HALLWAY OPENED, AND JUNA AND THE SQUID KAMI STEPPED OUT INTO A DESERT THAT EXPANDED INFINITELY IN EVERY DIRECTION, CLOAKED IN A MOONLESS, STARLESS SKY.

UP AHEAD WAS A DILAPIDATED MANSION SURROUNDED BY A WROUGHT-IRON FENCE, HUNDREDS OF FEET TALL. THE HUGE IRON GATES SWUNG OPEN SLOWLY AS THEY APPROACHED.



BUT JUNA STILL HAD ONE TRICK UP HER SLEEVE...









JUNA COULD FEEL
HER SOUL WITHIN
HER BODY. IT WAS
LIKE HOLDING A
VERY DELICATE
THING MADE OF
GLASS,

HOLDING IT VERY CAREFULLY SO AS NOT TO DROP IT, ONLY NOW SOMEONE WAS SAYING,

"AREN'T YOU SO VERY TIRED OF HOLDING THAT?" THEN SHE
HEARD ANOTHER
VOICE, THIS TIME
A FAMILIAR ONE,
SAYING ONE
WORD:

RUN.

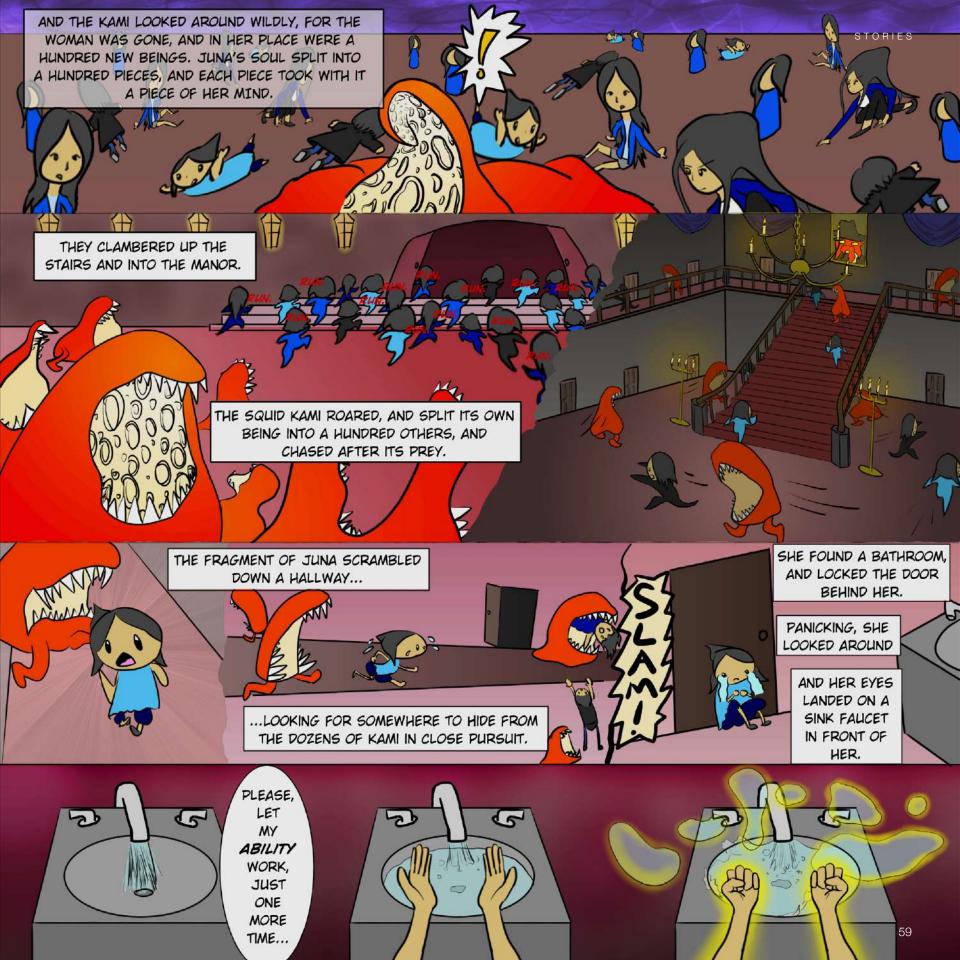
AND IN ONE LAST DESPERATE
MOMENT, JUNA TOOK HER SOUL AND

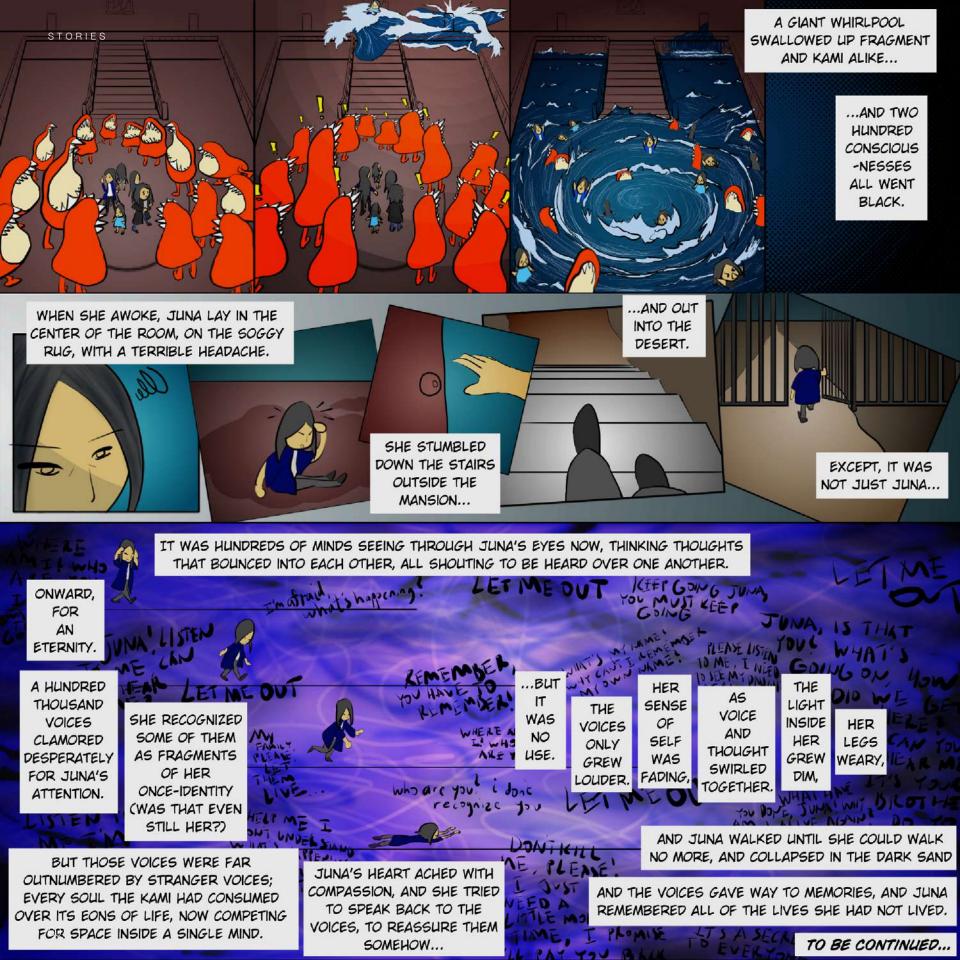
THREW IT

TO THE GROUND

WHERE IT SHATTERED

INTO A HUNDRED PIECES ...





Study

Written By Mide Kolawole Artwork By Robert Jong

This paper was written in my Fall 2021 quarter at Fuller Theological Seminary for completion of a course on global Christianity. It has been edited for brevity.

# African Women in Antiquity and the Theological Imagination

One of the most important means of progress in the Church today is the development and exposure of contextual theologies that challenge what has been considered normative for most of the Western world since Christendom's beginnings. While once viewed as niche or fringe takes on the Christian faith, many contextual theologies are becoming more prominent in public spheres, reflecting the ever-increasing awareness of injustice and the ways that Christian theology has so often perpetuated discrimination and abuse. In her work on decolonizing Christian spaces and practice, Dr. Christine Hong recognizes the shift to foster diversity and inclusion, but rightly highlights how the process has been lacking and just how far we have to go to actually see popular Christian thinking genuinely reflect the diversity of the world. Hong states, "When dominant culture people hear the truth from the mouths of minoritized people, it is often doubted, devalued, and erased, or it is stolen and operationalized for the benefit of those in power, and ultimately disembodied from whence it originated" (Hong, 2021, pg. 55).

The world today desperately needs the voices of people from unique and diverse backgrounds to be amplified. If the Church desires to continue to be a beacon of hope for the world, then its theology must be able to speak into an abundance of personal experiences. This can also be done by looking into the past and searching for the rich history and wisdom found in Christian communities that have existed for centuries in other parts of the world. I suggest that one well from which we might draw is the example of women leaders within the ancient African church.



## EARLY AFRICAN CHRISTIANITY

o orient ourselves in this task, it is crucial to understand the location from which these women were leading and serving. The church in the West has a complicated relationship to the African continent and an often misguided view of the spiritual history of its people. Nearly half of the population of Africa identifies as Christian today, but most of this demographic is inaccurately attributed to missionary efforts amongst Protestants and Catholics within the past few centuries. Christianity was thriving in various forms throughout the continent long before Africa was introduced to Christian missionaries in the 18th century. One example is the Coptic Church in Egypt that credits its beginnings to the apostle Mark. This community of Christians was the home of many of the patristics and fostered some of the most influential theological conversations within the Church in the first few centuries C.E.

In his work on ancient African Christian traditions, Vince Bantu surveys the introduction and development of Christianity in Nubia, suggesting the community might have been started by John of Ephesus or a century earlier during the time of King Silko.<sup>2</sup> Bantu also makes an argument for the inclusion of African believers in the New Testament.<sup>3</sup> The church in Ethiopia is one of the oldest Christian communities in Africa and the world. Its origins might date back to the first century, but the first historically reliable records of Christianity date back to the 4th century during the reign of King Ezana.<sup>4</sup> The spiritual works that I will be referencing are products of this time.

## WHAT IS A HAGIOGRAPHY: AFRICAN WOMEN'S STORIES

Much of the significant literature to come out of Africa during antiquity falls into the category of hagiography. Lynda Coon describes hagiography as "an exalted discourse that has formulated the literary representation of saints in popular and elite imagination during the two millennia of Christian history" (Coon, 1997, pg. 1). These stories are not meant to be purely biographical—their power lies in the faith and belief they evoke in the reader. Just as the entirety of scripture provides a source of spiritual authority and precedence outside of just its historicity, hagiographies are biographical narratives that blend the teachings, miracles, sometimes first-person accounts, of saints. The works that I will be introducing are hagiographies of African women within the Church. In a world where many Christians are overly concerned with the Bible being

historically accurate and absolutely factual, this genre of writing is perhaps a way to introduce a new way of reading scripture and thinking about faith.

## KRISTOS SAMRA

The first example I will be referring to, the biography of Kristos Samra, comes from the Ethiopian Orthodox tradition, which is the source of many of these kinds of writings. Kristos Samra was a respected noblewoman, born into a wealthy family and married to the son of the king's personal priest. She was much loved by the king and lived a full life, giving birth to eight sons and two daughters before deciding to become a nun at the age of forty.

Only two sections of this *gädl* have been translated into English, one being an account of a vision where Kristos Samra pleads with Christ to pardon the entire world, including Satan, and travels to hell with the archangel, Michael:

At that point I replied to him as follows, "My lord, I would like you to pardon the devil, and for all humanity to be saved from being condemned to [eternal] suffering. Truly, you don't desire the sinner's death, but rather his turning back [from sin]! This is why I say to you: 'Pardon the devil!' Don't think that I like to say all these things to you. Rather, [I do it] for the sake of Adam and his offspring, because their flesh is my flesh."...After saying this, Christ summoned Saint Michael, the head of the angels. He said to him, "Go and take her to Sheol, because she has asked me to liberate the devil from the [realm of] punishment with [eternal] suffering." (Belcher, 2018, pg. 100)

This story would no doubt make most Western Christians uncomfortable because it falls outside of the neat categories we have created in terms of good and evil and the idea of a cosmic battle occurring between the two. This section of the story is not necessarily powerful because Satan is given the opportunity for redemption. Its importance lies in the depth of compassion that moves Kristos Samra to make the request in the first place. Kristos Samra's embodied theological belief and philosophy points to an emphasis on reconciliation rather than judgment and punishment. It is reminiscent of the concept of tikkun olam that Sacks talks about in To Heal a Fractured World 6, a Jewish idea referring to the mending or perfecting of the world and the possibility that humanity must partner with God to bring wholeness. The Christian conception of good and evil is fragile in the sense that we are discouraged from questioning whether God's creation might ever be considered deficient in any way. Often times, we are discouraged from questioning God at all. In another account from this gädl, Kristos Samra confronts and corrects Christ, chastising him for not forgiving a man for practicing magic with plants when God made all plants.<sup>7</sup> The stories highlighting her character and convictions present Kristos Samra as an example

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Allo Isichei, A History of Christianity in Africa: From Antiquity to the Present (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1995), 2.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Vince L. Bantu, A Multitude of All Peoples: Engaging Ancient Christianity's Global Identity (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2020), 88.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Bantu questions whether the eunuch mentioned in Acts 8 might be considered Nubian rather than Ethiopian, as the Greek term "Ethiopian" or *Aithiopos* was commonly used to describe dark skinned Africans during the time. Bantu suggests that it is more likely that the eunuch was a high-ranking official within the court of the Cushite queen of Meroë. If this is case, there is a possibility that Christianity was introduced to Western African even earlier. (Bantu, A Multitude of All Peoples, 88-97).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Bantu, A Multitude of All Peoples, 98.

<sup>5 &</sup>quot;While ordinary Christians were God's foster children, the saints were the Creator's special friends. Hagiographers recorded the manifestations of the Holy Spirit to these friends of God who acted as intermediaries between the divine and the temporary. The ability of the saints to exist simultaneously in both worlds empowered them to work miracles and to serve as arbitrators for Christian communities in imitation of their biblical predecessors. As the heroic protagonists of hagiographical narratives, saints performed the symbolic function of acting out the sublime ideals of the faith as set forth in the biblical presentation of Hebrew and Christian holy men and women". (Coon, Lynda L, and Lynda L Coon. 1997. Sacred Fictions: Holy Women and Hagiography in Late Antiquity. The Middle Ages Series. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Jonathan Sacks, To Heal a Fractured World (London: Continuum, 2005), 72.

of taking a co-mission from God incredibly seriously. In her biography, faith is complicated and requires one to wrestle with God more often than not. The believer has the power to debate and change God's mind and to expand the imagination of what was thought possible in regards to redemption.

Kristos Samra's story presents a woman who is not afraid to make bold requests of the Lord. She is burdened by the state of the world, especially those considered eternally damned. She is asking big questions in her faith; she does not see how Christ in all his mercy will allow people he has died for to perish. So she takes matters into her own hands, all while still holding true to her belief in God's goodness.

### WALATTA PETROS

Walatta Petros is another Ethiopian saint known for her miracles, the monastic communities she founded, and her unwavering defiance towards the imposition of European Christians' beliefs onto the Ethiopian Christian community. Before her birth into a distinguished Christian family, a monk prophesied to Walatta Petros' parents that they would conceive an "extraordinary daughter". Walatta Petros married the chief advisor of King Susinyos whom she tried to leave in order to live an ascetic life. Her first attempt failed, but when Catholicism reached Ethiopia and the king and her husband supported the Europeans, Walatta Petros successfully left to become a nun.

One of the most interesting aspects of Walatta Petros's story is the account of her meeting her lifelong companion, Eheta Kristos. As she begun her monastic life, Walatta Petros's mentor advised her that it was not good that she was alone. The language used in the gädl is quite provocative<sup>9</sup> and Wendy Laura Belcher, the main translator of *The Life and Struggles of Our Mother Waltta Petros*, suggests that the text presents the relationship between the two women as "the love story of a holy and celibate couple" (Belcher, 2016, pg. 24). This inclusion is not necessarily a complete affirmation of same-sex relationships, as the text presents another more explicit instance of sexual activity between young nuns that Walatta Petros clearly abhors. One might think it irresponsible to read queerness into a text written into a time where it was not normalized, but it is significant that same-sex intimacies are referred to multiple times in this work and that an intimate relationship between two women is seen as holy and uniquely benefical to not only each woman's journey of faith, but also the servie they wish to do for the church.

Same-sex relationships amongst those practicing celibacy within a monastic lifestyle have been discussed before, but this gädl was the first time I had encountered anything of the sort in an ancient African context. The inclusion of queer people in religious spaces and opinions about queer identity in general are extremely pressing issues for the Church today. Stories like this show that

there is a precedent to look to; they reveal that this is an aspect of life that Christian traditions around the world have been navigating from the earliest days of the Church. Something that is almost unprecedented and desperately needed is the focus on two women of color who are revered spiritual leaders of their time and might also be considered queer in our time. I believe that stories like these can ground modern conversations attempting to reconcile theological traditions and queer identity.

## APPLICATION AND CONCLUSION

The stories of Kristos Samra and Walatta Petros are much deserving of analysis and reflection throughout the Christian world. It is important to note that these examples from African traditions make up some of the most extensive literature written by and about women of color. I believe that the theology and epistemological particularities that can be drawn from these examples are crucial to understanding the global development of Christianity. In highlighting the contributions of a select few influential women within the African church of antiquity, the goal is not to place prominence on the context of one group over another, but to decenter the current focus on European theology for a time in order to emphasize some of the ways other works might enrich the aforementioned theological imagination of the Western world that is so desperately in need.

These stories and the witness of these women do more than chronicle the lives of Christian leaders in a particular context—they give insight into the rich history of a long standing faith tradition that is completely overlooked in the Western world. These gädlat highlight powerful tales of faith and resistance while also offering opportunities to think creatively and daringly about our own traditions. Expanding the theological imagination is necessary to access the full picture of what God is doing in the world and in history and it must be done by expanding the theological categories that we are restricted by-by pushing back against the ways of thinking rigidly defined by traditions and voices we are familiar with. Diving into stories such as these show that the bold questions and uncomfortable theological conversations of today are not just the product of a world deconstructing what has been considered normative and authoritative in Christianity for so long; these questions and attitudes reflect the scandalous and miraculous nature of the stories that make up so many communities of faith around the world. They have the ability to ground us as we pursue diversity, inclusion, and justice today.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Belcher, The Life and Visions of Kr stos Śämra, a Fifteenth-Century Ethiopian Woman Saint, 2018, 90.

<sup>8</sup> Gälawdewos & Wendy Laura Belcher, The Life and Struggles of Our Mother Walatta Petros: A Seventeenth-Century African Biography of an Ethiopian Woman (Princeton:Princeton University Press, 2015), 86.

<sup>9 &</sup>quot;As soon as our holy mother Walatta Petros and Eheta Kristos saw each other from afar, love was infused into both their hearts, love for one another, and [approaching,] they exchanged the kiss of greeting. Then they sat down and told each other stories [about the workings] of God. There was no fear or mistrust between them. They were like people who had known each other beforehand because the Holy Spirit united them. They then deliberated together and decided that they would live together." Gälawdewos & Wendy Laura Belcher, The Life and Struggles of Our Mother Walatta Petros, 115.

<sup>10</sup> Gälawdewos & Wendy Laura Belcher, The Life and Struggles of Our Mother Walatta Petros, 254-257.

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## Pastoral Column

## Living World

By Shirley Lew



Reflections of Serving in Family Ministry

n 2001, three years after "The Hive," Evergreen-LA was looking for a Children's Ministry director. A soft voice whispered in my ear, "Shirley, you can do it! Have confidence! Go for it!" With that whisper, my journey on staff at EBCLA began--first as director and later as pastor of Family Ministry.

The first of many voices invaded my thoughts that kept me for submitting my application. "But what about my kids? I have a child still in middle school. Will she feel left out because I won't be participating in her activities like I did with the older two?"

Another terrifying thought crept up.

## Being a PK (Preacher's Kid), I knew what life would be like if I started working at church: I would be under a microscope, criticized for what I did or didn't do.

"Would this job really be part-time? What expectations would the congregation place on my family? They would be under a microscope, too."

Another voice chimed in, "You know, if you join the staff, you'll be working with some really smart people..." Rolling my eyes, my retort to him was, "Yeah, I know I'm not as smart as them." But his words did make me stop and got me thinking twice about submitting the application. I didn't go to seminary like everyone else, but did that really matter? Does that degree make them smarter than me? Does that degree measure my heart to teach children that God loves them? Does that degree help me plan the different ways to tell the children about God, to help them see and know God? I don't think so! "Go for it, Shirley!"

But the soft voice kept prompting me to pursue this job, to work at my home church, "Trust me, Shirley. Go for it. At the time of the Hive, you told me you wanted to be part of a church that would challenge you to stretch your faith. This is the time." I finally submitted my application, joined our amazing staff, and God began to use other voices to speak into my life.

Two voices early on taught me to see potential in those with passion to serve. I learned that it was important to provide an opportunity and a place for them to serve. One such person who needed a place and opportunity to serve was Elza. I saw in her a passion for teaching the gospel to children.

Through Elza, I was reminded that God's Word isn't just written in the Bible. In reponse to a parent's concern that the children weren't paying attention during Children's Worship, Elza

There go those vois again who are not happy with
not I'm doing. 'Is she lisning to God?' She doesn't
ow what she's doing."

said, "You know, God's Word is a Living Word. Whether the children are listening or not, I believe the [sic] God's Word is living in their hearts." I remember thinking, "Oh! Good answer, Elza! Good answer! I'll have to remember that truth." With this simple statement, Elza reminded me that God's word is not limited to written form. When we tell a Bible story or sing a song of praise, God's word comes alive in the hearts of those who hear it.

"Oh no. There go those voices again who are not happy with what I'm doing. 'Is she listening to God?' 'She doesn't know what she's doing.'"

"Did I hear God right? Am I not the right person for this job? Why did I think I could do this job? I can't do it. The words hurt too much. She told me that I took this job for my ego and I was selfish. Should I quit? Oh, I really want to quit......" Serious doubt crept in and my confidence in my abilities to lead was quickly eroding.

It was a very painful time. I remember crying in my colleagues' offices, asking whether I was really the right person for the job, and seeking to know if what God had placed in my heart was true. Their voices of assurance sustained me and helped me weather those dark days. I really examined myself--what I knew about myself—to decide what was true or not and to find my worth.

"No, God said to trust Him. Did I really ask God to put me in a church that would challenge me and stretch my faith? Well, I guess this is one of those times that God is asking me to trust Him. This is that stretch that I asked for. Sigh... Okay, God. I can't do this alone. I will need your strength so give me perseverance, grace and wisdom."

With the help of counseling and spiritual direction, God used those challenging words and my self-examination to grow and deepen my faith. My dear friend, Wendy Wong, a spiritual director, was instrumental in helping me see how God saw me.



"Trust me, Shirley. Go for it. At the time of the Hive, you told me you wanted to be part of a church that would challenge you to stretch your faith. This is the time."

> Trust me, Shirley. Go for it. At the time of the Hive, you told me you wanted to be part of





Through our impromptu spiritual direction sessions in her office, she guided me through those tumultuous times. Despite the pain, I am grateful for that time and for those individuals because through their voices I grew in my faith, in my self-worth and confidence, finding my own voice and assurance that I was the right person for the job. Going through this time, though painful, showed me that I could endure, that I could persevere. This particular time showed me that I was a lot stronger than I gave myself credit for.

The voice of each person I met with, had a conversation with--whether the conversation was encouraging or was to criticize me--have contributed to the person I am now and validates the soft voice I heard all those years ago, "Shirley, you can do it!"



to be continued...