

Article

“I Am the Nail”: A Multimodal Analysis of a Contemporary Reception of Isaiah 53

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Abstract: The *Arma Christi*, the instruments of the Passion of Christ, are a fascinating collection of symbols evident throughout the history of Christian art. This article considers the striking re-emergence of visual depictions of the *Arma Christi* in the contemporary spiritual practice of Bible Journaling. How have these symbols of the Passion made their way back into the popular Christian imaginary and creative expression of Bible readers today? The creative, devotional practice of Bible Journaling is gaining popularity in many countries, notably the US. Almost exclusively practiced by women, Bible Journaling involves making artistic interventions directly in the material artefact of the printed Bible, with different creative media. In considering the value of this practice for women’s spirituality, this article employs a social semiotic approach, multimodal analysis, to survey their visual representations and to analyse in detail one specific creative intervention, “I AM THE NAIL”, as a reception of a contemporary understanding of salvation through the suffering of Jesus Christ on the cross. Also considered are intertextual readings of the Hebrew Bible (Isaiah 53: 3–5) and the NT. The semiotic influence of popular cultural products such as *The Passion of the Christ* movie on the visual idiom embraced by the journalers forms part of this analysis.

Keywords: Bible Journaling; multimodal analysis; Isaiah 53; biblical reception; Passion of Christ; salvation; suffering servant; atonement; multimodality; *Arma Christi*; Bible and art



Citation: Dillon, Amanda. 2023. “I Am the Nail”: A Multimodal Analysis of a Contemporary Reception of Isaiah 53. *Religions* 14: 370. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14030370>

Academic Editor: Salvador Ryan

Received: 7 August 2022

Revised: 27 February 2023

Accepted: 3 March 2023

Published: 10 March 2023



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1. Introduction

Bible Journaling is an emerging trend amongst mostly female readers of the Bible.¹ This practice has grown exponentially since 2014, when the first wide-margin journaling Bibles were published, with hundreds of thousands of women now engaged in this activity internationally.² In this devotional practice readers of the Bible, having reflected on a particular passage of scripture, then write and draw directly in their Bibles. They make use of a vast array of art materials and stationery—coloured pens and pencils, watercolour paints, washi tapes, stickers and templates—to embellish the page with their creative response to their understanding and personal appropriation of that text. Photographic images of these journaled pages of the Bible with their colourful interventions to the printed page are shared publicly and may be found on social media sites such as Instagram, Pinterest, Facebook and Flickr thereby migrating beyond the material page into the digital realm. Here online communities share their pages, comment on and support each other and may choose particular themes or passages to work on, occasionally with exegetical input from a leader or members of the group.

As the *Arma Christi* are the explicit subject of this Special Issue, this article briefly surveys a small number of Bible-journaled representations of the crucifixion of Jesus featuring one or more of these implements. One particular journaling, here referred to as “I AM THE NAIL”, shall be subject to an in-depth multimodal analysis examining its visual reception of intertextual readings of the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, as well as the theology of atonement referenced in this illumination of the biblical text. I then consider this journaled intervention as a reception of the Gospel Passion narratives. The

impact of popular culture, such as the influential *The Passion of the Christ* movie on the visual idiom embraced by the journalers, is discussed in terms of its role as an influential social semiotic resource.

In the first instance, it may be noted that the conventional biblical page onto which these interventions are made is described as monomodal. It is a white page featuring printed black text. The only mode of communication present is that of the printed verbal text: the mode of language in its formal written form. Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen, theorists of multimodality, describe this mode of language as the hegemonic mode that held sway since the invention of the printing press until the very recent past when the “visual turn” came into force, aided by the democratising technologies of image production (digital photography, mobile technology, computer graphics software, etc.). Once an intervention is made on this densely-printed page, be it the addition of texture in the form of a ribbon or washi tape, or a hand-drawn doodle, that page becomes a multimodal text. The mode of graphics and illustrated visual content is the predominant mode used by the journalers. Other fabric and material content such as patterned tapes and papers, napkins, ribbons and stickers are also pasted onto the pages adding visual content and texture.

In commencing this research project and preparing to make a detailed multimodal analysis of the semiotic workings of *one particular page* (Figure 5), I surveyed 30 journaled Bible pages that featured the *Arma Christi*. I sourced these photographed and shared journaled pages on Pinterest and in Facebook Bible Journaling groups. The purpose of this small survey was to achieve the following:

1. Obtain an overview of the visual *Arma Christi* and/or Passion references most used by contemporary Bible journalers.
2. Understand which biblical texts are most commonly featured as the focus for these journaled reflections on Christ’s Passion.
3. Highlight the biblical and theological reception evident in this creative work.
4. Reflect on the social influences that may be apparent in the context of contemporary Christian churches.
5. Contextualise the featured page “I AM THE NAIL” (Figure 5) within a larger body of work.

In terms of criteria for selection, the priorities for this study were the following:

1. Visual content that explicitly featured the *Arma Christi* or Passion of Christ.
2. Original artistic material: Visual content that looked like it was drawn from the imagination of the artist or copied from resource material that the artist had sourced themselves, rather than using “printables”. Printables are designed consumables, ready-made, cut-and-paste templates available to download from popular Bible Journaling websites.³ My interest is in the journaler’s own authentic personal engagement with the text—the direct unmediated work of the journaler engaging with the biblical text in their own original way.
3. Journaled Bible pages shared online during the fortnight of Holy Week and Easter week.

Traditionally, as many as up to 30 different implements including Veronica’s veil, the lance, the hyssop stick, and the sponge may all be included amongst those items that are associated with the *Arma Christi*. As Daniela Wagner notes, “‘Arma Christi’ does not mean all the objects involved in the Passion, nor does it refer to a fixed group of instruments of the Passion. ‘Arma Christi’ is a collective term allowing no conclusions to be drawn about which objects are actually included in the list. The possibilities of what a set of the *Arma Christi* could contain are defined roughly by the context of the Passion narrative.” (Wagner 2022).

A brief overview of the findings of this survey suggests that the symbolic repertoire made use of in Bible Journaling is currently considerably limited when compared with the rich and complex historical iconographic tradition in Christian art. I suggest that this is in no small part due to the elaborate visual iconography of the Passion in art, as seen in the Middle Ages, is not widely known among contemporary Christians (especially those

outside of Europe). Across the selection of pages surveyed, the breakdown of the visual symbols of the Passion deployed featured: Blood spatters: 23; Crown of Thorns: 23; Cross: 13; Nails: 8; Wounds: 4; Lamb: 1. Of these, only 3 are drawn from the traditional *Arma Christi*: the cross, the crown and the nails. The Crown of Thorns is a particularly graphic symbol that lends itself to reasonably easy rendition even for those with rudimentary drawing skills. The Crown of Thorns is also a symbol that does reappear frequently in contemporary Christian imagery, Holy Week liturgical events and materials, iconic film posters (Jesus of Nazareth 1977), and so forth. A small selection of the images (Figures 1–6 and Figure 9), offering a sample of the Bible-journaling work being produced, is shown here alongside the main featured work: “I AM THE NAIL” (Figure 5).

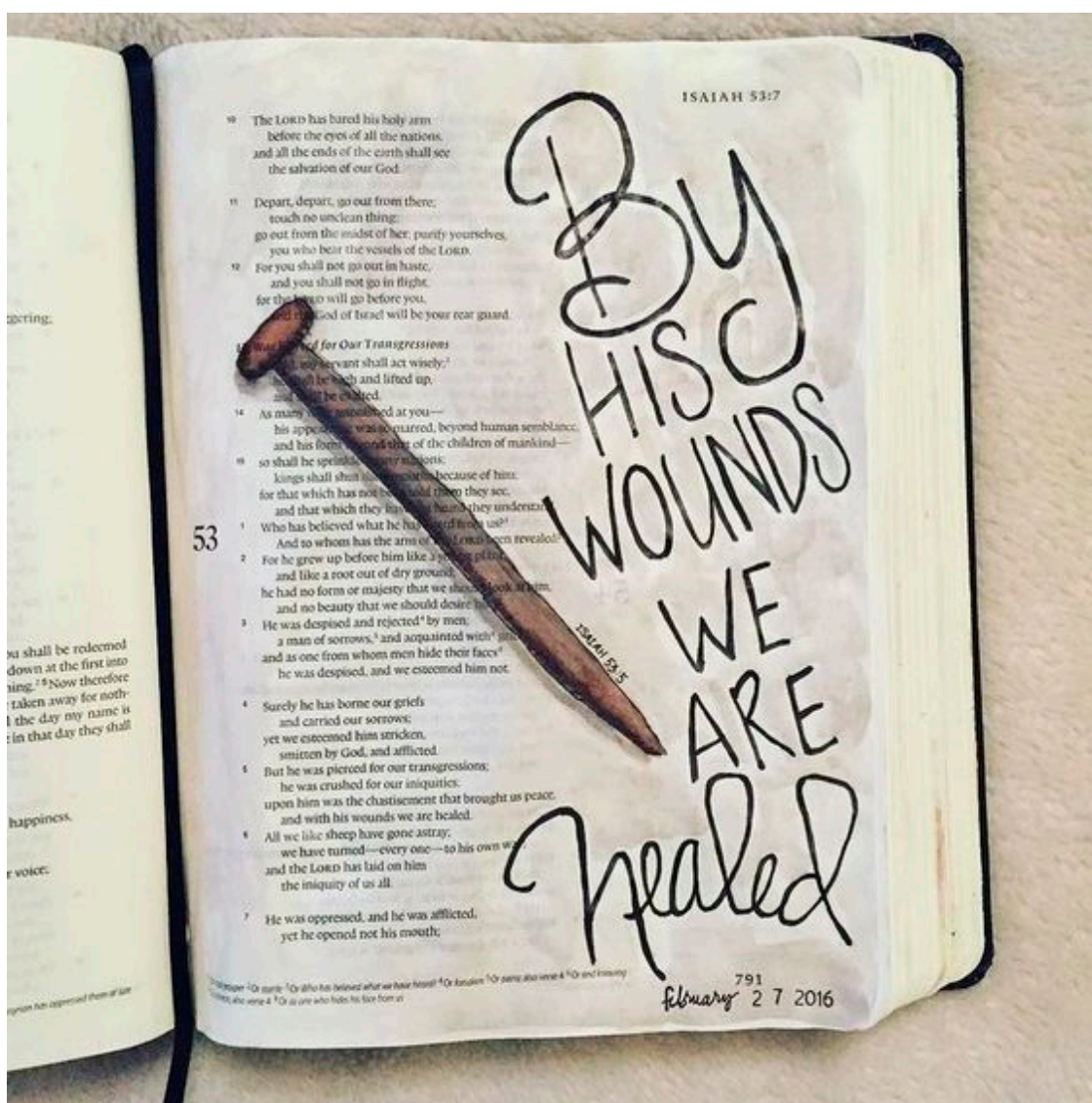


Figure 1. “Isaiah 53.5, By His Wounds We Are Healed” (2016) by Brittany Cowley (with kind permission of the journaler).

The results showed that the most commonly featured New Testament text was John 19 (6). The fourth Song of the Suffering Servant taken from Isaiah 52–53 was the most frequently engaged Old Testament text (5), with Leviticus 1 and 16 also receiving attention. The synoptic Passion narratives account for 13 further pages, divided almost equally: Matt (4); Mark (5); Luke (4), of these Luke 23 was the most popular.

I then looked for explicit reference to the Self, the artist mentioning or drawing themselves somehow in their journaling, as we see with the “I AM THE NAIL” piece. Just over a third (11) either used or drew their own hand, or somehow brought themselves into the page (See Figure 2). Direct reference to the subject of sin is evident in 11 instances, again just over a third.

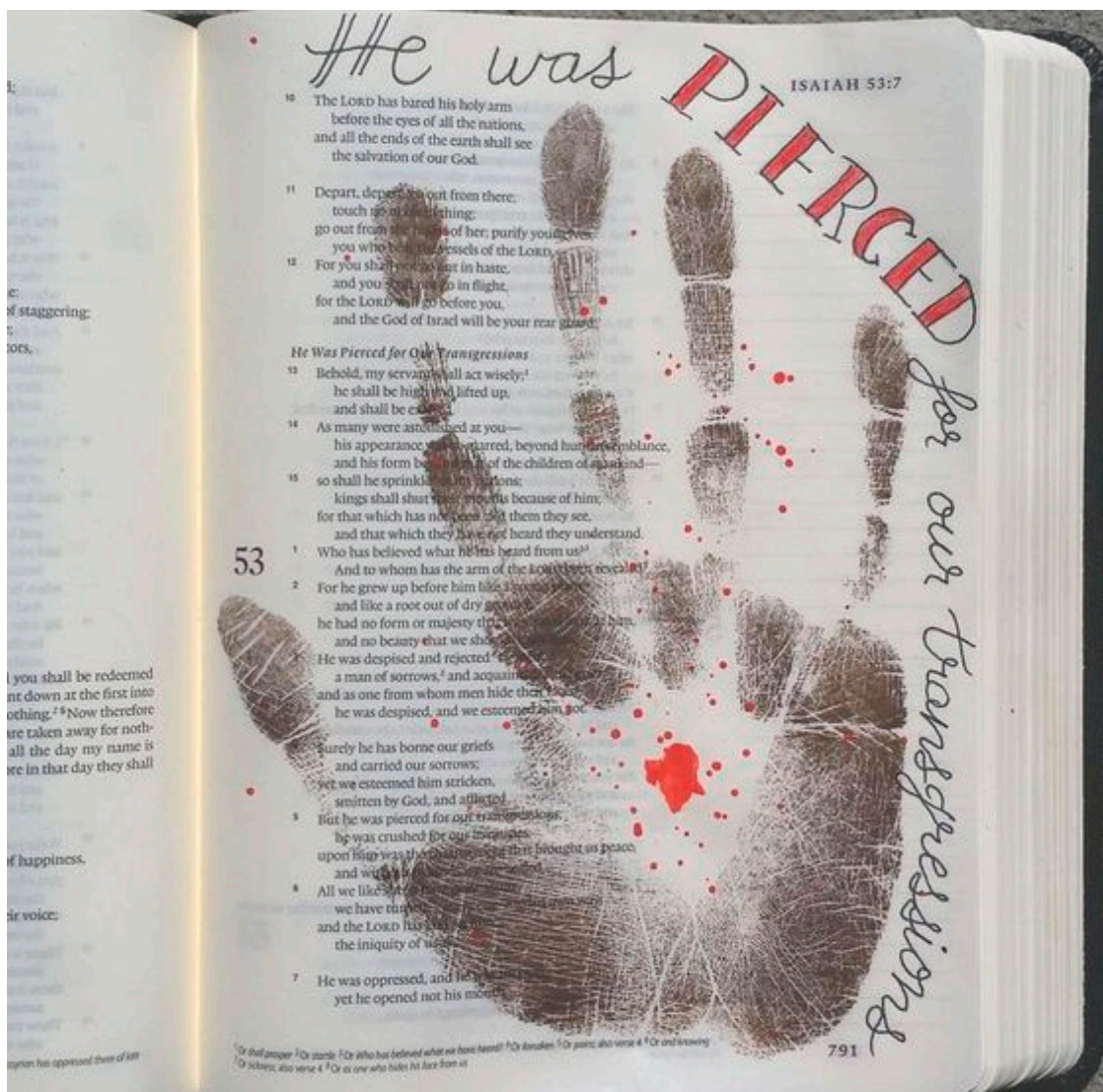


Figure 2. “He was Pierced for Our Transgressions” (2018) by Peggy Buckley Thibodeau (with kind permission of the journaler).

2. Literature Review

There is no small irony in the fact that some of the bestselling books in bookshops are in fact blank. Testament to the widespread appeal of journaling is evidenced in the ubiquity of attractive journals widely available. These journals or notebooks are often beautifully designed (FlameTree, Hartley and Marks, teNeues, Bushel and Peck), sometimes carrying the prized artworks of past masters or contemporary illustrators, sometimes plain and pragmatic (Moleskin, Leuchtturm), produced to a high standard with embossed, fold-over magnetic clips and covers, ribbon placeholders, fine quality paper, ruled or plain, rounded corners, with or without inspirational quotations or motivational prompts. Some of these journal brands—originally the offshoots of paper manufacturers—are over a century in existence and particular designs have been available for decades attesting to their enduring

popularity in the fast-moving book-selling and art-merchandising marketplace. Within the Mind Body Spirit category, many journals are now more directive and structured around themes of wellness, gratitude, mindfulness and personal goal-setting. Young Instagram influencers (some of whom have over 250 K followers) are actively promoting daily journaling, alongside meditation and mindfulness, as a spiritual or personal growth practice. Moody, filtered photographs capture the enduring nostalgic romance of having time to oneself in the window seat of an ambient coffee shop, or cross-country train journey, wistfully daydreaming over a coffee, whilst handwriting one's reflections, hopes and plans in a journal.

Over the past six or seven decades a great deal of scholarly attention has been given to self-reflective practices that enable people to come in contact with their innermost selves. During the 1960s, American psychologist Dr. Ira Progoff began using a "psychological notebook" with his therapy clients. He subsequently began to offer workshops in the use of what he called his Intensive Journal method (Progoff 1975, 1983). A network of "journal consultants" trained by Progoff and his staff taught his method of journal keeping to over a quarter of a million people. The value of written emotional expression continues to be shown to have therapeutic benefits for improved mental health (Ruini and Mortara 2022; Pennebaker 2004; Ulrich and Lutgendorf 2002), healing from eating disorders (Rabinor 1991), and the healing of addictions (Plante 2018; Maisel and Raeburn 2008; Lukinsky 1990). Moreover, the reflective practice of journaling has been shown to be beneficial to those working in clinical healthcare environments (Wedgeworth et al. 2017; Murray 2002).

The rise of attention to spirituality over more recent decades has also placed renewed value on the practice of journaling for personal and spiritual growth as seen in the work of Helen Cepero (2008), Alison Leonard (1995), Marion Milner (1986), Kathleen Adams (1990, 2004, 2006), and Luann Budd (2002), among many others. A focus on creative journaling, using art techniques and images, has been promoted by Marianne Hieb (2005) and best-selling, contemporary authors such as Julia Cameron (2002), SARK (1997), and Anne Lamott (2005), all of whom promote creative personal expression and reflective autobiographical journaling and writing.

The journalings of religious leaders have also become primary texts for considering their spiritual growth. Within the Catholic tradition, there is a flourishing of spiritual writing during the medieval period detailing the experiences of the mystics. The writings of Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179), Hadewijch (1200–1248), Mechthild of Magdeburg (1208–1282/1294), Angela of Foligno (1248–1309), Marguerite Porete (d. 1310), Julian of Norwich (1342–c.1416), and Margery Kempe (c1373–1440) have become celebrated evocations of the interior life of women of faith.

Distinguished diaries have also come from literary figures (James Boswell, Gustave Flaubert, Edmund Wilson, Virginia Woolf), religious leaders (John Wesley, Cotton Mather, Pope John XXIII), statesmen (George Washington, John Quincy Adams, Richard Crossman) and a host of nonpublic figures whose personal dramas have become historical classics. However, diaries should not be seen solely as literature; most fail when viewed that way because, as Henry David Thoreau once said, "the journal is a record of experience and growth, not a preserve of things well done or said." In the last century, diaries documenting the personal reflections of young laywomen such as Etty Hillesum and Anne Frank, caught up in the horrors of the Holocaust, became famous best-sellers after the war. As indeed have those of Jewish spiritual leaders such as "To Heal the Soul: The Spiritual Journal of a Chasidic Rebbe (Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Shapira 1995).".

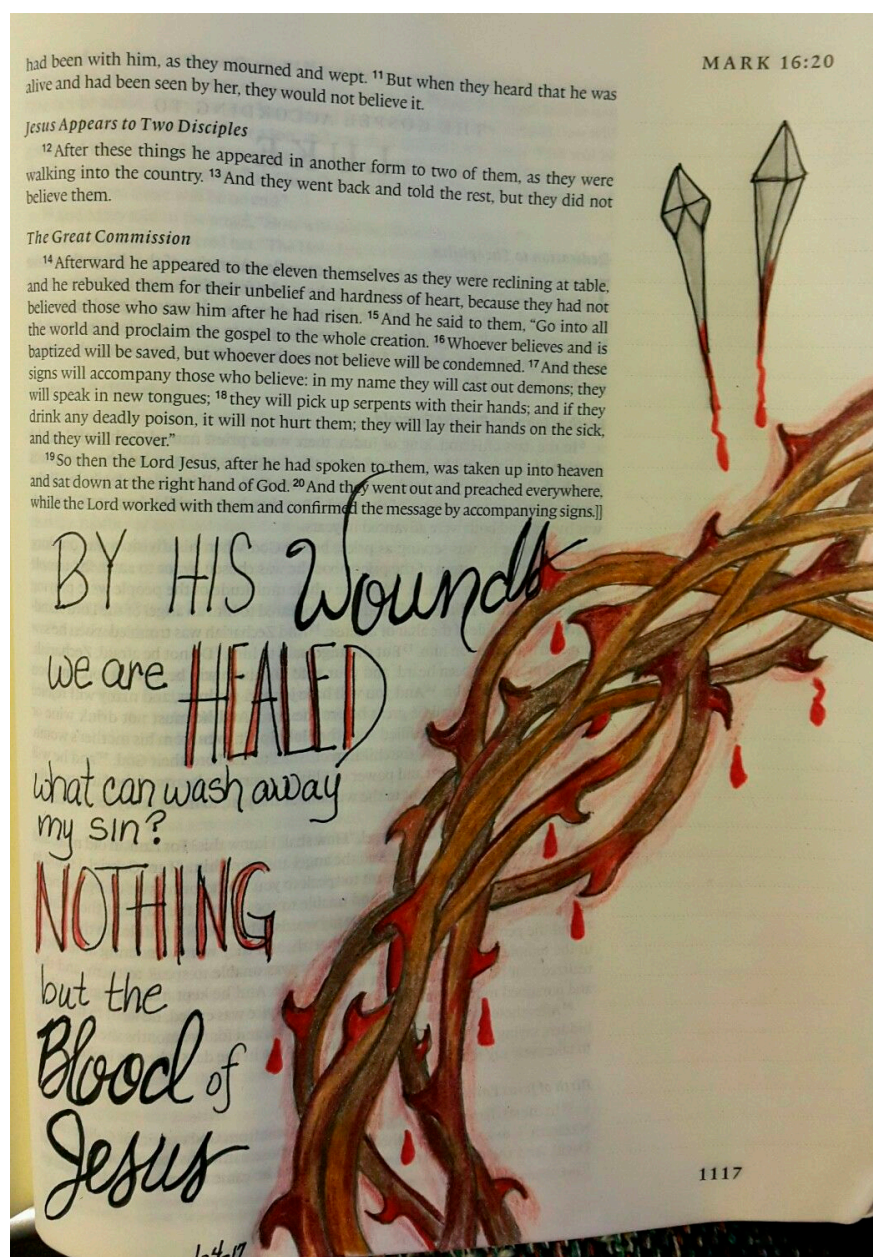


Figure 3. "By His Wounds We Are Healed" by Charlotte Parrack (with kind permission of the journaler).

Within the evangelical Christian churches, Journaling has been praised as an essential spiritual discipline by Kenneth Boa: "Many people have found that keeping a spiritual diary heightens their understanding of the unique process of spiritual formation through which God has been taking them. By recording our insights, feelings, and the stream of our experiences, we clarify the progress of our spiritual journey. This discipline relates closely to those of prayer, meditation, and study; journaling enhances personal reflection, encourages us to record perspectives we have received from scripture, and serves as another form of prayer" (Boa [2001] 2020).

Scant attention has been paid thus far to this phenomenon of Bible Journaling. Previously, I have offered an overview of the emergence of this practice, including the publishing dimension that has produced a wide diversity of Bibles and associated materials supporting this devotional practice (Dillon 2020). A further article considered the value of Bible Journaling as a spiritual practice in aiding those in recovery from an addiction (Dillon 2021).

3. Multimodal Methodology

This study is innovative in that illuminations of biblical texts in Bibles have been conventionally treated in an art historical fashion. That is, a descriptive account is provided of marginalia and illuminations and how they are an accompanying adjunct to the dominant verbal narrative. Something may be said about the artistic style of illustration and how it reveals the social mores and fashions in clothing and architecture of the time. An account of the use of perspective, for example, as a development in art at the time may be discussed—but seldom are these marginal artworks treated as anything more significant than simply decorative illustration. The page as a multimodal artefact including both verbal and visual modes in a dialectical interplay that conspires to construct a new meaning, beyond the biblical text, is not considered, nor analysed systematically.

Cheryl Exum (2019) in her latest volume *Art as Biblical Commentary* deals with how there has been an undervaluing of art that treats biblical texts, considering it as simply illustrative rather than as exegetical commentary in and of itself. Whilst her work focuses on large canvas oil paintings—the same can be said of the treatment of illuminations in manuscripts.

A topic of discussion in the emergent field of biblical reception history studies as it currently stands is the topic of methodology (Gillingham 2015; England and Lyons 2015). What is abundantly clear is that no one methodological approach will be able to deal with the enormous breadth of biblical reception implicated across the spectrum, temporally from the first century Christian communities to the modern day, and in terms of content across liturgical praxis to visual art, music, theatre, film, politics, advertising, graphic novels, digital media, and so many more iterations and expressions. Different methodological approaches must be sought, developed and applied appropriately to the material being examined.

I propose that multimodal analysis is one such methodological approach that has the capacity to offer a rich semiotic framework for analysing biblical receptions that are multimodal and that occur in modes of expression other than the verbal alone.

Multimodality understands that most of our communication takes place simultaneously across more than one mode. There are multiple communicative modes other than language, including image, gesture, posture, gaze, touch, sound, and more, that function independently as semiotic resources in meaning-making and do not function simply to reinforce language. Within the multimodal framework, language is treated as just one semiotic resource among others (Kress 2010; Jewitt 2009).

Eminent linguist Michael Halliday (1978), Gunther Kress, and Theo Van Leeuwen, amongst others, have advanced what they refer to as a Social Semiotics of the Visual (Kress and van Leeuwen [2006] 2021; Kress 2010; Van Leeuwen 2005). Two fundamental aspects of Social Semiotics are the cultural context from whence the communication emerges and the agency of the “sign-maker”. Turning to the examples of Bible Journaling being considered here, the social context within which these multimodal artefacts have been created is north-American Christianity around 2017. In the broad brushstroke of this macro backdrop are found phenomenal technological and scientific advancements, as well as extreme political and social polarisation, culture wars, xenophobia, global instability and the pervasive anxiety created by late-stage neoliberal capitalism and climate change, in other words, the “permacrises” (Turnbull 2022) of our time. The micro-social environment is more stable and generally characterised by strong ties of belonging to close family and friend circles with similar beliefs and lifestyles, a local church and associated groups, and Bible study groups. The journalers share their artworks in social media groups where there is a high degree of social cohesion, mutual support, understanding, and acceptance of shared theological presuppositions and approaches to biblical exegesis.

Michael Halliday, in his linguistic theory, defines three metafunctions that appear in all effective communication; firstly, the *ideational*, the function that “construes human experience,” is representative. Further to this, beyond construing experience, “language is also always enacting: enacting our personal and social relationships with other people

around us” (Halliday and Matthiessen 2014). This active dimension is referred to as the *interpersonal* metafunction. These two metafunctions contain the idea that “every message is both about something and addressing someone,” and these two motifs may be freely combined and do not restrain one another. There is a third component, “an enabling or facilitating function since both the others, construing experience and enacting interpersonal relations depend on being able to build up sequences of discourse, organising the discursive flow, and creating cohesion and continuity as it moves along. This we call the *textual* metafunction” (Halliday and Matthiessen 2014).

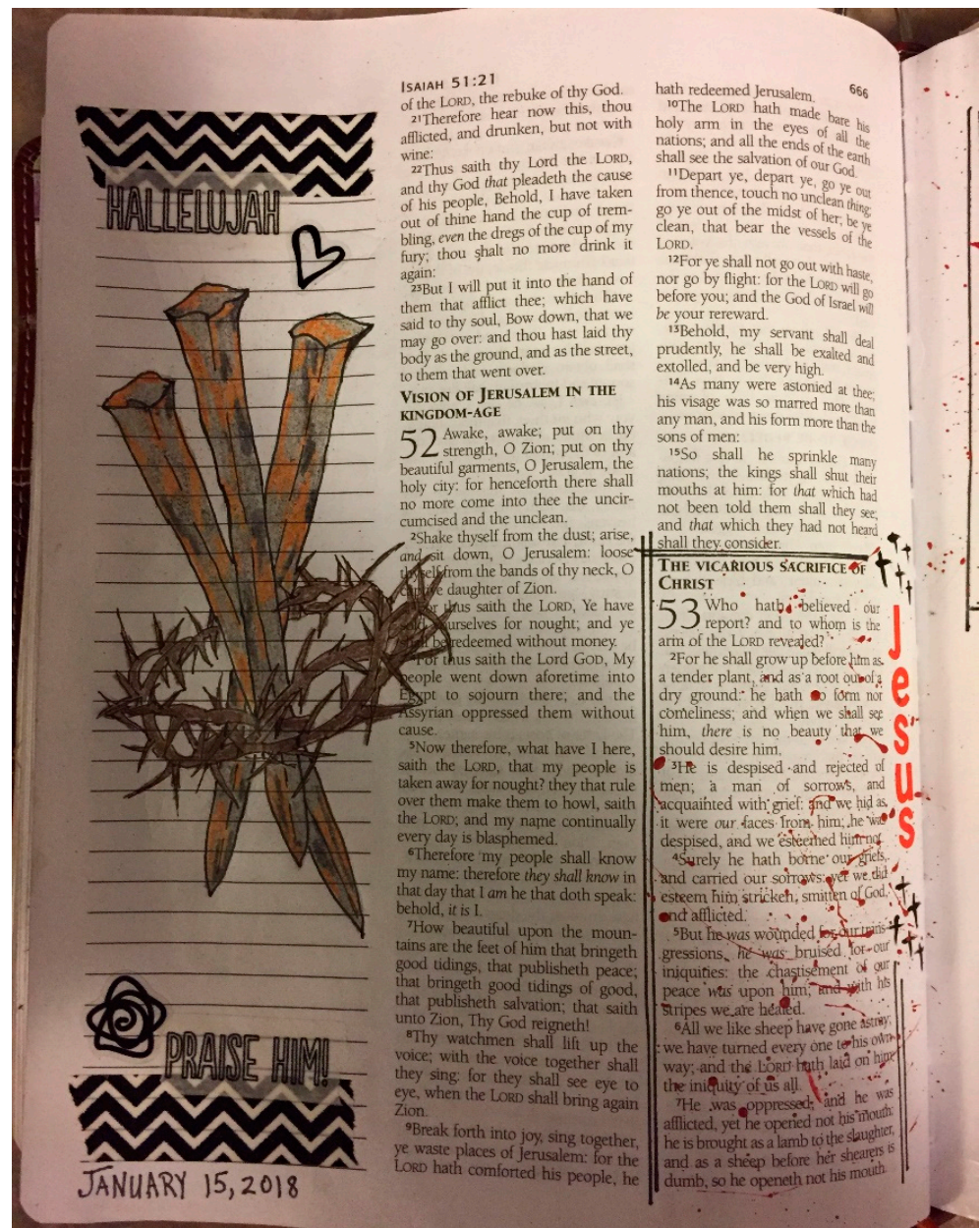


Figure 4. “Isaiah 53” (2018), Anonymous (Pinterest). It is pertinent to note here the erroneous, anachronistic addition of a title, obviously not present in the Hebrew Bible or any extant manuscripts, given to this chapter 53 of Isaiah in this particular Bible translation: “The Vicarious Sacrifice of Christ”.

These three dimensions of meaning, *ideational*, *interpersonal* and *textual*, maintain a one-to-one correspondence with the metafunctional domains distinguished by Kress and van Leeuwen in their grammar of visual design to study the meaning potential of images

in multimodal products. This article takes the most relevant systemic functional and visual semiotic theories a step further by applying them to this context and ‘genre’ of Bible Journaling through an applied in-depth multimodal analysis of this image (Figure 5): a photograph, shared on the social media platform of Pinterest, of a page of Bible Journaling. Within the framework of Halliday’s Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) and Kress and van Leeuwen’s Social Semiotics of the Visual, I identify the visual and verbal strategies available to the journaler: (i) to convey representational meanings; (ii) to set up interpersonal relationships within the response to the biblical text and with the reader/viewer of the journaled page; and finally (iii) to create a coherent journaling of this scripture passage within a particular theological exegesis of this passage. This is achieved by identifying and analysing the *ideational*, *interpersonal* and *textual* or *compositional* choices made by the journaler to create meaning in this Bible Journaling as a multimodal response to a verbal biblical text (Isaiah 53: 3–6).

Before turning to the multimodal “text” or journaled page it is important to briefly consider some of the critical issues surrounding this biblical text, Isaiah 53, and its contested reception within the field of biblical studies and Christian theology.

4. The Fourth Servant Song and Christian Exegesis

The Bible page (Figure 5)—of the multimodal work “I AM THE NAIL” being analysed here—forms the material substrate upon which the artist-journaler has made their creative intervention. The page features a column of printed text to which the journaler has directly responded and this galley of text, the printed word, is a significant *interpersonal participant* in this multimodal design. It is not a plain neutral background. It is an *active* element in the final multimodal artefact we are examining, an interlocutor in the work.

This printed text—Isaiah 53: 3–11—to be precise, falls within that which is conventionally referred to as the fourth Servant Poem or Servant Song in Second Isaiah. The full song includes verses 52: 13–53: 12 and is a poem of exquisite artistry and beauty, beloved of many, and one of the most frequently quoted passages of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament.⁴

The entire poem contains three sections and is often demonstrated as having a chiasmic structure (Goldingay 2005). In the first section, verses 52: 13–15, God speaks in the first person to proclaim the exaltation and vindication of his Servant. In the second section, the heart of the poem, verses 53: 1–9, we have “the confession of the nations,” the people acknowledge that they could not recognise the work of God active in the suffering of this divinely smitten, humiliated and utterly rejected figure, nor that God was at work to effect their atonement in his suffering. They have now come to recognise that it was for their sins that he suffered, that he had voluntarily accepted the suffering for the sins of the world, and that this was for the healing of the nations. The language of Psalms 22 and 88 is echoed in this section. The final section, verses 53: 10–12, is the divine declaration: the Servant has been loyal and obedient and the divine purpose is accomplished and therefore the Servant will be vindicated and victorious. The apparent rejection of the Servant by God, voluntarily accepted, is the means by which a rebellious world will be restored to fellowship with God. “This is both the tragic experience and the supreme triumph of the loyal, faithful and obedient Servant in a world which ignores God, but which God is resolved to save and reconcile to himself” (Herbert 1975). A Jewish reading of Isa 52: 13–53: 12, Marc Brettler and Amy-Jill Levine write, perceives it as “an oracle of comfort to the exilic (or early post-exilic) Judean community. We believe that Isaiah’s ‘servant’ initially referred to an individual living in Babylon, whose vicarious suffering explains why Israel deserves forgiveness for the grievous sins that caused its exile. Placed in the broader narrative of Isaiah 40–55, where the prophet speaks of ‘Israel my servant’ (41: 8; cf. 49: 3) and ‘Jacob my servant’ (44: 1, 2), the figure can be seen as a symbol for the nation exiled and then restored. This servant, who remains otherwise unidentified, will gain central importance in the history of interpretation for both Jews and Christians.” (Brettler and Levine 2019).

The interpretation of this passage within Christianity has a long and contested trajectory stretching back to the earliest Christian communities and their writings. The disciples of Christ saw in the passage many similarities with the ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (“prolong his life;” 53: 10), seeing it as a prophecy fulfilled in their time (Matt 8: 17; Luke 22: 37; John 12: 38; Acts 3: 26; Rom 15: 21; 1 Pet 2: 22–25). The intertextual exegesis of the Servant Song, as a prophetic foretelling of Jesus as the suffering redeemer, finds its precedent in Luke’s Acts of the Apostles, 8: 30–35. Here the author narrates Philip’s encounter with the Ethiopian eunuch who was reading the scriptures, quoting Isaiah 53: 7–8, and desired to understand them better. Philip responds, “and starting with this scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus.” (Acts 8: 35b).

Christians readily see a reference to Jesus in Isaiah’s description of the “man of suffering” who “was wounded for our transgressions, and crushed for our iniquities,” who, “like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent,” was “stricken for the transgression of my people . . . although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth” (53: 3–9). In the NT, 1 Peter 2: 21–25 alludes to Isaiah’s words: “He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth . . . he himself bore our sins in his body on the tree.” The NT contains eleven quotations from and at least thirty-two allusions to the fourth Servant Song, the subject matter of innumerable commentaries and too vast to deal with in detail here. By the end of the first century, when the last books of the NT were being composed, Isaiah 53 had become established as a key text for interpreting the redemptive value of the crucifixion. “St Clement of Rome simply quoted the whole of this text when expounding the meaning of Jesus’ death (1 Clement 16)” (O’Collins 2007). Polycarp the Lysian described it as the “golden Passional of the Old Testament evangelist.”

Early attempts to make theological sense of the violent death of Jesus led to further parallels being heard within Mark’s gospel especially. John A. Dennis (2013) writes the following:

That the Son of Man must “suffer many things” and “be treated with contempt” (MK 9: 12) has directed interpreters to the similar treatment of the suffering Servant in Isaiah 52: 13–53: 12 (France 2002; Cranfield). It is telling that Mark’s verb *exoudeneō* (“to treat with contempt”) in Mark 9: 12 (only here in the NT) is used of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53: 3 (he will “be treated with contempt”) in the LXX versions of Aquila, Symmachus and Theodotion. However, the noun form *exoudenema*, (“object of contempt”) of Mark’s verb is also used of the righteous sufferer in LXX Psalm 21: 7 (MT Ps 22: 7; ET 22: 6) (Pesch), and this psalm as well as other lament psalms will be important in Mark 15. (Hooker 1991)

Ultimately, it is best to conclude that in regard to Mark’s Passion predictions in general and Mark 10: 45 in particular, Mark (and perhaps traditions before him and Jesus himself) has drawn together various streams of scriptural expectation (lament; Psalms; Is 53; Dan 7) to interpret Jesus’ sufferings and vindication (Davies and Allison 1997; Marcus 1993). As to whether or not the Suffering Servant prophecy was part of Jesus’ own self-understanding, scholars differ widely (Bellinger and Farmer 2009). Others note that “this passage presents many difficulties for various reasons. The use of the passage in the NT to describe the mission of Jesus is such a notable departure from the pattern of thought of the Old Testament in general and of Second Isaiah and includes obscurities in the text itself. The central problem is the identity of the Servant (McKenzie 1968). Discussing this “venerable belief in the Christian church that the Servant poems, in particular, are predictions of Jesus Christ,” John McKenzie writes, “In this form the opinion is defended by no one today except in a few fundamentalist circles. This type of predictive prophecy does not appear in the OT. It is another question whether the person and mission of Jesus Christ are interpreted in the NT in terms of the Servant poems: that is, whether Jesus or his disciples, or both, identified him with the Servant of Yahweh.”

Contemporary mainstream historical-biblical scholarship cautions strongly against reading a prophecy about Jesus back into the fourth Servant Song, especially those whose

hermeneutic teaches them to read the Old Testament exclusively in the light of Christ's revelation. Unfortunately, these verses are still read Christologically, without any consideration for the historical context in which Deutero-Isaiah functioned. Calls for exegetical restraint have not deterred some Christians from going even further and claiming this passage as a primary biblical "proof-text" in an unfortunate proselytizing mission to convert Jews to Christianity. "Isaiah 53 is one of the clearest prophecies of Jesus the Messiah in the Hebrew scriptures," claims Mitch Glaser. He continues, "Isaiah 53 is unquestionably our most powerful tool for Jewish evangelism, as it answers many of the fundamental issues Jewish people might have regarding the possibility that Jesus might be the promised Messiah" (Glaser 2012). Glaser and his organisation have over the years won some Jewish support for their work (See: Baron 2001; Fruchtenbaum 1974; Mills 1971). However, this evangelical programme is deeply offensive to many Jews and there is strong opposition to it. Gerard Sigal penned an anti-missionary polemic demonstrating why Jesus is not the fulfilment of Isaiah 53 (Sigal 2007). Further exemplifying the resistance to this hermeneutical appropriation of Isaiah 53 by Christians, especially in the context of proselytising Jews, the "Jews for Judaism" counter-missionary website lists no fewer than 27 objections to the application of this passage to Jesus (Jews for Judaism n.d.). Levine explains, "Jews traditionally see Isaiah 53: 3–9 as referring not to a single, future figure but to God's servant, the people Israel, redeemed from exile" (Levine 2006).

Writing in *L'Osservatore Romano* (the Vatican's official paper) in December 2000, Joseph Ratzinger (at that time prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith—later Pope Benedict XVI), stated the following: "The faith witnessed to by the Jewish Bible (the Old Testament for Christians) is not merely another religion to us, but is the foundation of our own faith. Therefore, Christians—and today increasingly in collaboration with their Jewish sisters and brothers—read and attentively study these books of Sacred Scripture, as a part of their common heritage." (Levine 2006).

A year later, the Pontifical Biblical Commission (2001) published *The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible*. Described by Levine as "this remarkable text" it recognises that Christological interpretations of the "OT" are made retrospectively; that is, readers should not be expected to find references to Jesus in the pages of the Old Testament unless they presuppose that those references are there (Levine 2006). Most significantly, the document insists that supersessionist readings are illegitimate.

5. A Multimodal Analysis of "I AM THE NAIL"

"I AM THE NAIL" is the title given to a page of Bible Journaling examined here using multimodal analysis as proposed by Kress and van Leeuwen ([2006] 2021).⁵ "I AM THE NAIL" (Figure 5) features the left-hand page of a double-page-spread of the Bible. The biblical text takes up three-fifths of the page forming a column of text on the right of the page. The page number followed by the book title and chapter and verse identifier are given at the top left-hand corner: 1154 | Isaiah 53: 3. The text on this page then opens with Isaiah 53: 3, "He was despised and rejected by mankind . . ." The biblical text of this column, on this page, ends with Isaiah 53: 11, " . . . and he will bear their iniquities."⁶ Beneath this is a footnote relating to verses 8, 10, and 11.

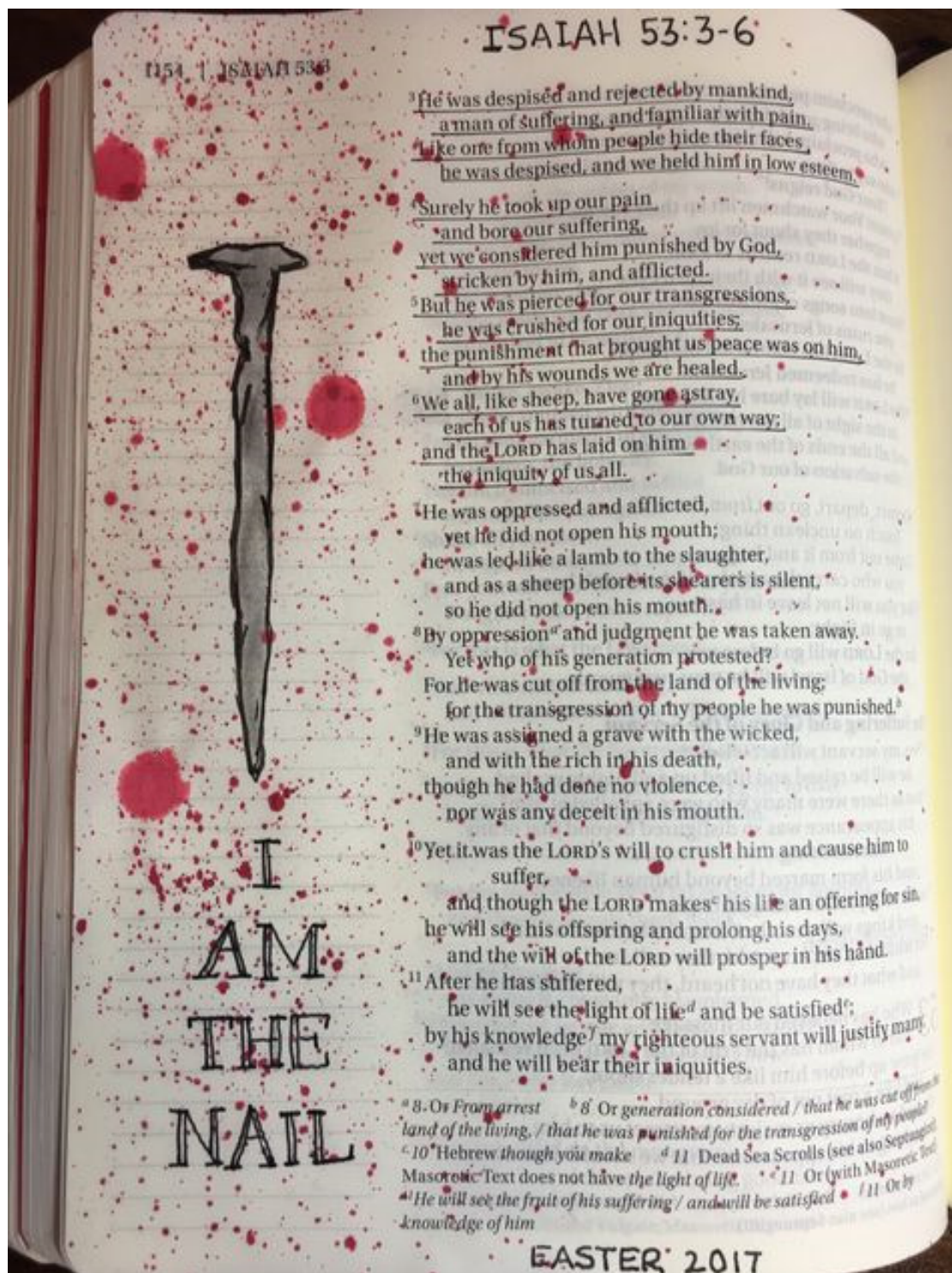


Figure 5. "I AM THE NAIL" (2017), Anonymous.

The journaler has added a headline, in the centre above the printed column of biblical text, in handwritten black capital letters: Isaiah 53: 3–6. The journaler has added emphasis by also underlining in black, with a ruler and pen, verses 11: 3–6, the first two paragraphs of text on the page. This correlates directly with the handwritten headline above it. At the bottom of the page, also centred, is the date: Easter 2017—in handwritten, black, capital letters. In the feint-ruled margin given over to the journaler's intervention, they have drawn a long nail. It has a solid black outline and is coloured grey, with what appears to

be either watercolour or felt-tip pen. Beneath this drawing of the nail are handwritten the words in black, capital letters:

I
AM
THE
NAIL

There is one word centred on each line and the typography mimics a headline serif font that has an outline on the thick vertical strokes. The vertical strokes are not filled in giving it what is referred to as an “Inline” font appearance. Importantly, visually, the strong vertical emphasis in the rendering of the letters echoes the verticality of the nail.

Across the page, but focussed in the left-hand margin around the nail, are splatters of red ink suggestive of blood. There are three large drops of blood close to the nail. The blood splatters decrease in size and density as they move towards the centre gutter of the page, away from the decorated left-hand margin. We shall now turn to an in-depth, three-part analysis of this multimodal page.

5.1. *The Ideational Metafunction at Work in “I AM THE NAIL”*

The *ideational* metafunction is about representation, a key requirement of any semiotic mode: it must be able to represent aspects of the world as it is experienced by humans. In so doing, semiotic modes offer an array of choices and of different ways in which objects and their relations to other objects and processes can be represented (Kress and van Leeuwen [2006] 2021).

5.1.1. The Nail

Let us consider in detail first the most immediate representational aspects of this page before spiralling down into its deeper potential meaning. Within the *ideational* metafunction, the representational function that “construes human experience,” this image is recognised as a conceptual structure. The focal representative visual element is the nail. It is the most salient participant in this multimodal composition. The nail is one of the primary *Arma Christi*, the symbols of Christ’s Passion in the traditional iconography of the Christian church; others being the cross itself, the crown, the lance, the hyssop stick and the mallet. The nail correlates directly with the reference to ‘piercing’ in the adjacent lines of printed biblical text: “But he was *pierced* for our transgressions, he was crushed by our inequities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed” (Is 53: 5). Although it is not explicitly stated in the Gospels that Jesus was nailed to the cross by his hands and feet, it is implied in Lk 24: 39, and Jn 20: 27, and this has been the historical understanding of the practice of Roman crucifixions in the first century.

The phrase “I AM THE NAIL” implies, in conjunction with the biblical text, that the journaler is identified as the actor animating, driving, the action of the nail. A nail is an object that does something, it moves through space into another thing. It acts on another material object, by piercing it, fixing it in space, and fixing it to another object. In this artwork we do not see an actor putting momentum behind this nail, initiating its movement through time and space; however, the verbal text written beneath the nail identifies the artist with the nail.

This nail is interesting for a number of reasons. Conforming to a typical conceptual classification, it appears static, as though suspended in space “shown in a more or less objective, decontextualised way. The background is plain and neutral. Depth is reduced or absent. The angle is frontal and objective. Frequently there are words in the picture space” (Kress and van Leeuwen [2006] 2021). There is no shadow behind the nail allowing for the effect that it is laid down on a ground, as a realistic rendering would demand (as in Figure 1). Rather the nail hangs before us, without even the dynamism of appearing to fall vertically through space. It is also essentially a clean nail—there are a few light drops of “blood” splattered over the nail but it has not yet pierced anything. This is not a nail that

has already pierced the flesh of Jesus and been pincered out, coated in congealed blood, by Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea as they depose the body of Jesus from the cross (Matt 27: 57–61; Mark 15: 42–47; Luke 23: 50–56a; John 19: 38–42).

At the heart of the ideational communication made here is the self-identifying of the Bible journaler with the use of the first person in the handwritten text, “I”. This illustration in the left-hand margin is a smaller multimodal unit within the larger design of the whole page. In a sense, the phrase “I AM THE NAIL” is the expression of a verbal idea, a theological concept belonging to the journaler personally. The relationship between the nail and the comment therefore is complementary, each adding to the contextual meaning of the other. The drawn nail and the phrase “I AM THE NAIL” augment one another.

The relationship between the drawn nail and the handwritten text (“I AM THE NAIL”)—and the printed biblical text on the page is profoundly different, however. There is a personal appropriation of the biblical text that extends far beyond either a theological reading of Isaiah 53: 3–5 within the Jewish tradition, or indeed a Christian exegesis of this text. The biblical text does not imply the journaler in any way. Reading themselves into the biblical text in this highly individual way the journaler sets up an intersemiotic *connection*, a relation of *projection*, between their creative visual intervention and the printed scripture passage (Moya Guijarro 2014).

5.1.2. The Blood of Christ

Splattered across the page is red ink signifying the blood of Christ spilled in his Passion and on the cross. This blood is concentrated in the left-side margin but evidently sprinkled across the full page. The splatter shows drops of many different sizes. In a forensic sense, this would be consistent with a dramatic blow which causes blood to splatter rather than a stream of blood or consistent drops dripping in the same place. The splatter then serves as a further reference to violence, to a body being brutalised and blood being caused to splatter. This is not a visual depiction of the result of blood running down the side of the body of Christ and dripping onto the ground in one place. It is a spray of blood coming off an assault, a lash of the whip, the moment of piercing. It is visceral and immediate. The splatter speaks to the immediacy of the action that precipitated the splatter, it has just happened and the action that caused it was one of great force.

The blood is all around the nail, in this way *the nail itself* pierces through the blood splattered around the page. A few little drops overlap with the grey of the iron nail. The journaler is identifying themselves, through this metaphor of the nail, as being involved in the torture and execution of Jesus.

5.1.3. The Colour of Blood

The connotation of blood holds within it, simultaneously, the possible positive meaning of vital lifeblood and the negative meaning of spilled blood and death. Artists of the Middle Ages recognised two types of blood, also perceived as opposite. *Sanguis* was “sweet,” referred to blood in the body, and was associated with fertility, whereas *cruur* was “corrupt,” blood that had been shed and was associated with violence. They were also interpreted as “good” female blood and “bad” male blood. “Yet, since there are two types of blood, what is the red that sanctifies?” asks art historian Spike Bucklow. “Perhaps surprisingly, since it turns gender stereotypes upside down, Christ’s saving blood was thought of by some devotional writers in the Middle Ages to be more like the ‘flow of birthing than the flow of wounding’” (Bynum 2007).

Medieval artists were sometimes more explicit in their representation of the Crucifixion as childbirth depicting *Ecclesia* (the church) being received emerging from the wounded side of Christ—much as Eve is pulled from the rib of Adam. The blood of Christ flows into golden chalices born by hovering angels. A clear connection is made with the eucharistic blood of Christ, on which believers feed and through which they become one with the Body of Christ. “While the iconography is familiar, what needs to be given weight is the overtly

female nature of the imagery that associated the crucified Christ with the human female body, both in giving birth and in feeding" (Soskice 2007).

Finally, in Revelation, the great multitudes gathered before the white throne are robed in white: "These are they who have come through the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (Rev 7: 14). There is a distinct transformation indicated in the progression to the colour white. There is a purifying that takes place in the washing that is signified then in the colour white. Interestingly, the colour of the impurities washed to white is not explicitly mentioned. However, in contrast with the Christian association of sin with the colour black (the darkness that is the opposite of the light of Christ), in the Hebrew Bible sin is often portrayed as red and is foremostly associated with the *red* violence of bloodshed. "There is bloodguilt on Saul and on his house" (2 Sam 21: 1), while Isaiah cries out, "Your sins are like scarlet . . . they are red like crimson" (Isa 1: 18). At the end of the New Testament the great whore of Babylon in Revelation is clothed in scarlet and sits on a scarlet beast drunk with the "blood of the saints" (Rev 17: 1–6). John Harvey writes, "The image of red stains runs through the Bible, now of sin, now of wine, of blood, in changing equations . . . Sin lives in a red triad of bloodshed, drunkenness, and crimson fornication." The concept of the stain of red sin that is washed white in the red "blood of the Lamb" (Rev 7: 14) adds another particularly interesting dimension to this design—the transition from red sin to white purity through *red* purity (blood of the Lamb). The red blood of the slain Lamb purifies and redeems. Red is thus redeemed as the colour of the full flourishing of humanity in Christ.

The description of the outcome of the washing, that the robes are made "white in the blood of the Lamb," is a poetic description that emphasises the value of white as a signifier for ultimate purity.

The image of being *sprinkled* with blood carries a distant echo of the blood ritual of the Jewish temple on the feast of Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. On that day, and on that day alone, the high priest entered into the most sacred zone of the temple in Jerusalem, the Holy of Holies, to make expiation for the sins of the people as prescribed in Leviticus 16. The high priest first filled the Holy of Holies with incense, presumably as a visual symbol of the invisible presence of YHWH, believed to be 'enthroned between the cherubim' carved on either side of the sacred Ark and the mercy seat. He took a bowl of the blood of a bull and a bowl of the blood of a goat into the Holy of Holies and this in turn was vigorously sprinkled and smeared around the sanctuary. According to the Mishnah, the remainder of the blood was then poured out before the great altar in the courtyard of the temple (Irvine 2013).

In the Letter to the Hebrews there is also an explicit linking of the blood of Christ shed on the cross, back to the blood covenant ritual performed by Moses and the yearly atonement ritual—Yom Kippur—of the high priest in the Holy of Holies (Heb 9: 18–22). The passage concludes with the assertion that "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins" (9: 22).

The anthropologist Mary Douglas picked up the ambiguous duality of the natural symbolism of blood, being at once both powerful and dangerous. When blood seeps from the body, it can both pollute what is deemed to be clean and, paradoxically, increase fertility, vitality and life (Douglas 1973). Something of this duality made be said to be at work in this illustration. Whilst this splattered blood may carry echoes of the atoning sacrifice made in the Holy of Holies, it more concretely alludes to the violence perpetrated against Jesus at his crucifixion. The journaler infers upon themselves bloodguilt for the role they perceive themselves, as a fallen human being, as having in this ultimate and necessary atoning sacrifice made by Jesus on the cross. This splattered blood is also simultaneously therefore the blood that secures their salvation. It is pure red salvific blood shed in violence, by the executioners, and in love by Christ. This blood sprinkled across the page is the blood that washes the journaler free of their sins. This theological understanding of the role of Christ's blood underscores the vigour of the spread across the page and the directness of the statement (see also Figure 6).



Figure 6. “The Crucifixion” (2018), Melissa Amyx (with kind permission of the journaler).

5.2. Examining the Interpersonal Metafunction at Work in “I AM THE NAIL”

Of the *interpersonal* metafunction, Kress and van Leeuwen maintain “any semiotic mode has to be able to project the relations between the producer of a (complex) sign and the receiver/reproducer of that sign. That is, any mode, has to be able to represent a particular social relation between the producer, the viewer and the object represented” (Kress and van Leeuwen [2006] 2021). Different “interpersonal” relations are able to be represented through the choices of different modes.

In outlining the interpersonal metafunction, Kress and van Leeuwen explain, “The visual mode also has resources for constituting and maintaining another kind of interaction: the interaction between the producers and the viewers of images. Another way of saying this is that images involve two kinds of participants, *represented participants* (the people, places and things they depict) and *interactive participants* (the people who communicate with each other through images, the producers and viewers of images)” (Kress and van Leeuwen [2006] 2021).

Bible journalers and those who belong (sometimes vicariously) to Bible Journaling groups as well as members of the broader Christian community are the primary *interactive participants* in this context. These are the people who produce and make sense of these Bible-journaled pages in the context of the social institutions, parishes, congregations, Bible study/Bible Journaling groups which, to varying degrees and in different ways, organise what may be communicated and with and how it should be interpreted and used. Within biblical studies, we are familiar with the concept of the “implied reader/viewer”. In this Bible Journaling context, the “implied” *interactive participants* are understood as other Bible-reading, Bible-loving Christians and members of the Christian community (with degrees of inclusion and exclusion according to the journaler and their situation).

There is another interesting dimension to this interpersonal aspect of Bible journaling to be considered. As with the more well-known *Lectio Divina*, this is a spiritual practice, whereby practitioners understand their journaling activity as a prayerful, worshipful, devotional engagement with the “alive and active” Word of God (Heb 4: 12). One might

ask is God perceived as an *interactive participant*, an “implied reader/viewer/receiver” of Bible journalings? I suggest the answer is in most cases is “yes”. In many instances, like this one, God is the primary interlocutor, the “implied receiver” of this journaling. The creative intervention on the page is understood as a personal response to God’s living Word, God’s direct communication with the reader and therefore part of a perceived dialogue with the Divine, taking place in quite an immediate way within the material Bible, right next to the printed word, like a reply to a personal letter.

The strong verbal statement “I AM”—in the present tense—is a declaration of fact. This is reiterated by the long, bold nail suspended right in front of the viewer. The nail is large and occupies almost half of the vertical space (about 10–12 cm on a 25 cm page—roughly the size of this journaling Bible). It is “life-size” and presented in the close-up range. As the choice of distance realises different relations, this is in the personal or intimate zone, indicative of the relationship that is projected with the implied viewer.

Perspective, positioning the viewer in 3D space and determining their point of view is another dimension that brings about social relations between *interactive participants* (the sign-maker and the reader/viewer). There is no perspective here in terms of depth, both the nail and the blood are in the same up-close plane. Both are presented frontally. “The frontal angle says, as it were, ‘What you see here is part of our world, something we are engaging with.’” (Kress and van Leeuwen [2006] 2021). Perspective here has been neutralised. We observe the nail, rendered in a realistic style, from a frontal, subjective angle, from the side directly (neither above nor below nor from an oblique angle), that infers involvement with this artefact of the nail, the splattered blood, the written phrase and multimodal message as a whole.

In the visual mode, the nail is also very much like a large capital “I” letter, with a serif at the top but not the bottom. Situated directly above the verbal capital “I” letter written beneath it, which may function in some way as the lower serif, it accentuates the letter “I” in its visual repetition of the straight vertical line. This further advances the impact of the journaler identifying themselves with the nail in this metaphorical way, as the nail and letter “I” almost merge. This is a theological proposition that draws directly from atonement theology. This is evident in all of the registers; contact, social distance, attitude (subjective and objective).

The verbal phrase “I AM THE NAIL” is an example within metonymy of what rhetoricians refer to as *synecdoche*, where the part stands for the whole (Lakoff and Johnson [1980] 2003). As Lakoff and Johnson explain metonymy goes beyond metaphor, as it “has primarily a referential function” and, moreover, “it also serves the function of providing understanding.” (Lakoff and Johnson [1980] 2003). The particular *part* that is selected from the whole determines which aspect of the *whole* is being emphasised and given attention. It is not simply a case of the part, the *nail* in this instance, being used to stand in for the whole, the *crucifixion of Jesus*, but this semiotic choice is saying something specific about the nature of crucifixion, drawing attention to a particular dimension of that act. For any person contemplating the physical torture that is crucifixion—the most visceral dimension of that abject violence is the forceful driving of hard sharp nails into soft human flesh against the hard surface of the wood. It is an affront to the senses alone even to imagine the pain of such piercing and rending of human hands and feet.

But it goes even further than that. Here, the nail is also more than a synecdochal metonym for the crucifixion of Jesus. In the journaler’s phrase “I AM THE NAIL”—the nail also becomes a metonym for a theology of atonement and the belief that human sin is responsible for Jesus being nailed to the cross as he willingly offered his life as a sacrifice to atone for this. The nail is a synecdoche for the atonement wrought, through all of that immense suffering, for sinful humanity in this theological framework.

There is a mediatory role taken on here in this graphic by the journaler. They have set themselves up as mediating in some way, through their transgressions, the torture inflicted on Jesus in the crucifixion. This is evidenced in the vertical design with the suspended nail in the middle of the margin—emphasised and underlined with the declarative statement

“I AM THE NAIL”. Whether intentionally ironic or not, it is a strong counterpoint to the mediatory role played by Jesus in expiating those sins on the cross. Moreover, the use of the two words “I AM” resonates for Christians as an explicit echo of Jesus’ own self-identifying statements in John’s Gospel: “I am the Bread of Life (John 6: 35), I am the Light of the World (John 8: 12), I am the Gate (John 10: 9), I am the Good Shepherd (John 10: 11, 14), I am the Resurrection and the Life (John 11: 25), I am the Way and the Truth and the Life (John 14: 6), I am the Vine (John 15: 1, 5)”.

There is a strong sense in which this layered multimodal message codifies belonging to the Christian community through the first-person admission of guilt and acceptance of personal responsibility for the suffering endured by Jesus to expiate humanity’s collective sin.

5.2.1. Atonement

Both the Old and New Testaments abound with salvific terms, themes, and images that have been galvanised to support different soteriologies over the course of Christian history. During the Middle Ages, these ideas were developed by Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109), and Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), and then later developed further by Luther and other Protestant Reformation theologians. Within contemporary American Protestantism and conservative Roman Catholicism, much of this theology still finds traction despite academic theology having moved towards love, mercy and reconciliation rather than expiatory sacrifice as an explanation for Jesus’ suffering and death.

Anselm, through his theory of ‘satisfaction’, established an enduringly standard expression for Christ’s redemptive work when understood as expiation. During his lifetime, European Christianity was moving away from the *Christus Victor* (Christ the Victor) model and towards the image of the *Christus Dolens* or “Man of Sorrows”. When reflecting on the human proclivity for sinfulness and the need to somehow make reparation for that, Anselm argued using the highly stratified medieval feudal model as the basis for his proposition: ‘Every sin must be followed either by satisfaction or by punishment’ (*Cur Deus Homo*, 1. 15). Only Christ can freely offer the gift of his life as a work of reparation for the whole human race.

Gerald O’Collins is critical of the developments of Anselm’s thought as this was expanded in Thomas Aquinas’ theology:

Unfortunately Aquinas went on to interpret the specific purpose of sacrifice to be that of ‘placating’ God: ‘In the proper meaning of the term one calls sacrifice that which is done to render God due honour with a view to placating him’ (48. 3 resp.; 49. 4 resp.). In general, Aquinas dealt with Christ’s Passion and sacrifice in the light of satisfaction which he saw as the act of a particular form of justice: namely penance that involves a penal or punitive element (47. 3), an element expressly excluded by Anselm. This helped to prepare the way, sadly, for the idea of Christ being punished and so propitiating an angry God by paying a redemptive ransom. Aquinas himself held that by offering his blood, Christ paid this price to God (48. 4 ad 3 um). (O’Collins 2007)

As Collins notes, the legacy of Aquinas’ adjustments to Anselm’s theory of satisfaction as it has come down to us, and dare I say, is now repeated in often simplistic forms by preachers to today’s congregations, “helped open the door to a sad version of redemption: Christ as a penal substitute who was personally burdened with the sins of humanity, judged, condemned, and deservedly punished in our place. Through his death, he satisfied the divine justice, paid the required price, and propitiated an angry God” (O’Collins 2007). While for many, “Atonement” in these terms increasingly appears as an outmoded theological proposition that no longer holds meaning for many Christians, and is incomprehensible to those outside formal Christianity, these ideas continue to abound in the Christian ether, tethered to selected biblical passages that have provided the proof-texting for this theology.

Over the past half-century, many feminist, *mujerista* and womanist theologians have also rejected this theological understanding of atonement and its presentation of violence as the ultimate and necessary means by which expiation for human sinfulness is achieved.

Whilst acknowledging that the metaphors of the scapegoat, justification, ransom and sacrifice may all be shown to have a biblical basis across the NT and as having some value in understanding the life and death of Jesus—the emphasis placed on this dimension of Jesus’ death and suffering has become imbalanced when set against the full scope of Jesus’ life, ministry and teaching. They have shown that the implications of this imbalance have been extremely detrimental for women and children and marginalised people of all sorts. Moreover, beyond providing an incomplete understanding of Jesus, the negative and dangerous image of an offended God desiring or requiring such suffering and sacrifice from Jesus, in order to be appeased or paid off on humanity’s behalf is profoundly disturbing. The legacy of this theology within patriarchal, ecclesial and social structures has seen much abuse of power and the projection of “sin” onto women who are then expected to acquiesce to violence and abuse in their atoning. As Barbara Reid had shown in her research among Latina women, “This has frightening consequences, especially for women for whom this image of God gives divine approbation to the ways in which they cower in submission before men who exercise this kind of power over them in their lives.” (Reid 2007).

“We had a miscarriage due to a flagrant sin of my wife at the time. It hurt all around, but it brought us closer to God. Our 4th is due in a few months.” This is the chilling text of a tweet (Figure 7) that garnered a huge response critiquing the profoundly misguided theology operative here: miscarriage is not a punishment from God. Many questioned how this person thought publicly shaming his wife (who’s not on Twitter apparently) in such a way was appropriate or just. In response, he consistently doubled down on his right to do so and his correct understanding of the situation. The wife in question remained silent and voiceless and potentially ignorant of the tweet and ensuing Twitter debate. The first sentence alone is sinister in its implication of psychological and spiritual abuse.

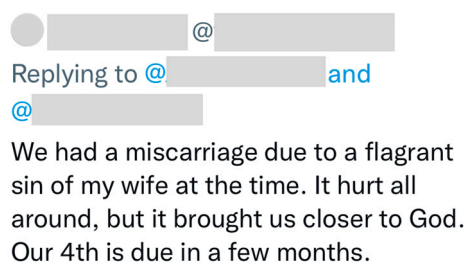


Figure 7. Tweet by a married man. 19 February 2023. Twitter.

Many scholars highlight how this abusive dynamic—of blaming and shaming the woman in a Christian marriage for any misfortune that she or the couple experience as somehow being a consequence of her moral failings—is prevalent in many churches that teach a complementarian theology and insist on a biblical basis for male authority and female submission.

In her powerful account of being married to an extremely violent pastor, *Black and White Bible, Black and Blue Wife*, Ruth Tucker demonstrates how the church-sanctioned “theological abuse of scripture can lead to the physical abuse of women” who in turn are admonished to silently endure the abuse when seeking assistance within church structures. She cites David M Scholer: “the idea that the Bible may justify and even encourage husbands to compel their wives to obey by force is, regrettably, deep within the tradition and life of the church and has shaped a painful reality for countless anonymous women throughout the last two millennia” (Tucker 2016).

The role of Christian churches in the subjugation of women is in the spotlight presently and increasingly the subject of overdue scholarship (Barr 2021; Du Mez 2020; Byrd 2020, 2022; Tucker 2016). An exposé of spousal abuse and the treatment of the wives—“revealing ‘awful patterns’ of siding with abusers and endangering victims”—by church elders is the focus of a recent article in *Christianity Today* (Shellnutt 2023). Research shows male church leaderships routinely not only counsel women to remain in marriages where they

are subject to physical violence and other forms of abuse, but furthermore often hold women responsible for the abusive behaviour of their husbands and require them to return and submit to their husband regardless of his behaviour or how endangered the wife and children may be. As highlighted by Julie Roys, women may be publicly shamed and excommunicated from their churches for refusing to “repent”—as in the case of Eileen Gray (publicly shamed and excommunicated from Grace Community Church by pastor John MacArthur). Her husband David Gray is now “serving 21 years to life in a California prison for his 2005 convictions for aggravated child molestation, corporal injury to a child, and child abuse” (Roys 2022, 2023).

These patterns, within Christian patriarchal church leadership structures, of the systemic abuse of power—purportedly endorsed by the Bible—are pervasive. They also distil widely-held and prevalent theological ideas of atonement and salvation. It may be the journaled Bible page here discussed communicates absolutely nothing more than a metonym in an emotional devotional reflection. However, where women manifestly self-identify as carrying some personal responsibility for the suffering of Jesus on the cross, in the context of this religious milieu that almost relishes the extreme violence that Jesus was subjected to whilst simultaneously requiring women to submit to violence in marriage (rather than divorce), a red flag is raised and the operative theology must be vigorously critiqued and addressed.

It is inconsistent with the image of a loving God presented by Jesus. Paul’s theology has also been distorted in this modern overemphasis on human sin as God’s dominant concern. The abundant unconditional love of God and God’s boundless mercy are displaced. Lost too is “Paul’s emphasis on God’s initiative and the utter gratuity of God’s gift to humanity in the Christ event” (Reid 2007). Taking their critique of the consequences of this theology further, Joanne Carlson Browne and Rebecca Parker write “Every theory of the atonement commends suffering to the disciple. The Christian is to ‘be like Jesus’—and imitation of Christ is first and foremost obedient willingness to suffer” (Carlson Brown and Parker 1989). A further consequence has seen an unhealthy obsession with sexuality in Christian churches. The linking of sex with sin and therefore positioning sex as a major obstacle to the spiritual life of a Christian, placing at risk their salvation, has had negative, long-term effects and, indeed, has caused psychological damage to many people (Marsh 2022). Again, this theological agenda disproportionately implicates and burdens women with a requirement for sexual purity and submission based on gender and is under serious critique today amongst women within Evangelical churches (Barr 2021; Du Mez 2020; Byrd 2020, 2022; Gaddini 2022; Tucker 2016).

“I AM THE NAIL” carries a powerful message about this journaler’s perceived self-identification with a personal role in the collective sin of humanity that required immense suffering of Jesus, within the theology of atonement outlined above. The statement is forcefully claimed—“I AM”—in the present tense, and in bold capital letters. It may be a response to a hard-hitting “fire and brimstone” sermon recently heard, especially in the days approaching Good Friday. Or it may be in response to a communal season of reflection during Lent, for example, contemplating one’s life, repentance, and change. It is not inconceivable that it may be the working out of an assault as a result of having been gaslit into accepting the blame for some misfortune. Other creative and cultural influences within the social context of Church may also be influencing this expression of personal culpability. The reception of the iconography of the Passion in the history of Christianity, and in its modern iterations, as a resource for personal spirituality further illustrates the *interpersonal* semiosis at work.

5.2.2. The Visual Reception of the Passion of Christ in the Christian Tradition

A strong personal identification with Christ’s suffering has a well-established precedence in the Church and has been actively promoted in earlier periods. In the history of Christian meditation on the Passion of Christ, it is only in the late medieval period that it becomes a dominant focus of theology, spirituality, and art. A review of Christian art

through the ages reveals that the Passion was not a major theme of painting or sculpture prior to the thirteenth century. Robin Jensen outlines the way in which a gradual shift in depictions of Christ's triumph over death towards a visual representation of the suffering man-God, or *Christus patiens* took place gradually from the ninth through the eleven centuries (Jensen 2017).

Evolving theological reflection on the significance of Christ's death, the growing emphasis on the purpose and value of Jesus' physical agony, and the development of guided meditation on Christ's Passion within certain early monastic communities all contributed to this transition. Viewers were prompted to meditate on the Saviour's affliction, to empathise with it, to be profoundly grateful for it, and even to imitate it. Despite this emphasis on the Saviour's bodily suffering, medieval devotees did not regard the crucifix as evidence of defeat or humiliation but rather as an affective depiction of Christ's redemptive and sacrificial love. Such divine love came to be understood as the source of human salvation as much as his heroic conquest of Satan and death. (Jensen 2017)

Travis Ables writes of the development of lay piety under the influence of Cranfield (1079–1142). Anselm, reportedly at the behest of Adelaide (daughter of William the Conqueror), desiring material for personal reflection, adapted from the Benedictine monastic meditations and psalter a collection of seven prayers. Recognising that a layperson wouldn't be able to follow the Benedictine Liturgy of the Hours, with the Gregorian practices of *lectio divina* and liturgical celebration that provided its structure, he devised a set of alternative meditations.

"Instead, in its place emerged what would become the practices of affective devotion: intimate, emotional, imaginative reading of prayers and meditation on devotional artefacts. Anselm's Passionate, tortured narrator was a literary device constructed to enact this spirituality—the reader is encouraged to put herself in his place, his 'I,' and cultivate the exemplar of the praying monk. This was a new form of piety. The vivid compunction of the religious was becoming available to the laity. And the way Anselm—and Abelard, who similarly adapted this motif—was able to give force and power to this development was to place the reader at the foot of the cross, the better to incur a deep resonance of piety and feeling in those whose affections could not undertake the Benedictine virtue of obedience but needed a more adaptable realisation, one both interiorised and ambulatory." (Ables 2022)

Anselm wrote devotional prose that lay Christians might use in their spiritual practice to reflect upon the suffering Christ endured. It included contemplative reflections for the reader as this:

So, as much as I can, though not as much as I ought, I am mindful of your Passion, your buffeting, your scourging, your cross, your wounds, how you were slain for me, how prepared for burial and buried . . . Why, O my soul, were you not there to be pierced by a sword of bitter sorrow when you could bear the piercing of the side of your Saviour with a lance? Why could you not see with horror the blood that poured out of the side of your Redeemer? Why were you not drunk with bitter tears when they gave him bitter gall to drink? (Anselm, Prayer to Christ, Oratio 2, Opera Omnia, 3.9-7, in The Prayers and Meditations of St. Anselm, trans. Benedicta Ward. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, Ward 1973)

This understanding of Christ's death as an atonement for human sin eclipsed the earlier concentration on Christ's death as a victory. Medieval theologians replaced a narrative of triumph with one of self-sacrificing love, and the *Crux Patiens* replaced the *Crux Invicta*. Devotional practices attended to Jesus's suffering, vividly imagining it, feeling sorrow and pity, and even physically experiencing pain. Visual artists began representing Christ's bodily torments, the cruel mockery of his persecutors, the crown of thorns, the

wounds on his body, and other evidence of his physical and mental anguish as he hung upon the cross.

Many Christians have undertaken both spiritual and intellectual pilgrimages to Oberammergau for the famous Passion Play. This religious spectacle has been performed at least once a decade since 1634 by the inhabitants of this Bavarian village in Germany. Mel Gibson's film *The Passion of the Christ* has been described as a "medieval Passion play rendered in celluloid" (Hilton 2006). In considering this controversial contemporary movie, we might mindfully keep glancing back over our shoulders at the entrenched iconographic tradition that precedes it in Christian spirituality and the creative multimodal expression of that over the centuries.

5.2.3. Mel Gibson's Film *The Passion of the Christ*

"As human beings we use the semiotic resources available to us to communicate and create codes which are known to all members of our community. A symbol, an object or a sign becomes a semiotic system only if the members of the community accept it and are able to decode it and interpret its meaning". (Moya Guijarro 2014)

Within evangelical Protestant and conservative Roman Catholic quarters, the Anselmian theology of Christ's suffering being the necessary sacrifice to atone for humanity's sinfulness still gains traction. This soteriology remains deeply embedded in the cultural Christian milieu that informs many contemporary Christians. One contemporary cultural production that may be understood as a modern iteration of some of these medieval concepts and one that is of enormous and enduring influence is Mel Gibson's film *The Passion of the Christ* (Figure 8).⁷ The film opens with the epigraph: "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed" (Isaiah 53: 3), alerting the viewer immediately to its animating theological position.



Figure 8. Movie still from *The Passion of the Christ* (2004) showing the crucifixion.

In my observations across many Bible Journaling Facebook groups, close to Good Friday and the Easter weekend every year there are numerous mentions of Mel Gibson's film *The Passion of the Christ*. This controversial movie was released to phenomenal box-office success in early 2004, but was far less enthusiastically received by theologians and biblical scholars for a number of reasons (Egan 2004; Beal and Linafelt 2006), not least, as Vincent Miller put it "because it shows little interest in engaging with the theological work

of the past four decades” and implies “that traditional atonement theologies provide all the meaning necessary to understand Jesus’s Passion” (Miller 2006). The film’s perceived anti-Semitism (Heschel 2006; Rubenstein 2006) and gratuitous violence were the main objections levelled against it. Writing in the aftermath of its release, Beal described the popular Christian response to the film:

But *The Passion of the Christ* is not simply a media phenomenon. More important, it is also a religious phenomenon, especially in the United States. Mel Gibson said that he didn’t want to create another film experience; he wanted to create a religious experience. Judging from audience responses, he has succeeded for many viewers, especially those identified with evangelical Christianity. *The Passion* has been embraced by millions as a revelation of biblical proportions. For these viewers it has been elevated to the status of cinematic scripture, simultaneously creating and representing a shared religious experience and communion. [. . .] Indeed, for many, *The Passion of the Christ* is Gospel, a cinematic presentation of holy scripture, a 21st century incarnation of the Word. (Beal 2006)

Beal correctly predicted that Gibson’s film “is likely to remain a prominent presence on the American religious landscape for decades to come” (Beal 2006). Likewise, although equally critical, Thomas Altizer described it as “a major if not primal event in American church history” (Altizer 2006). Indeed, over these eighteen years it has become a staple of Easter viewing for many Christians across the denominational spectrum. In a manner not dissimilar to Catholics making the Stations of the Cross in preparation for Good Friday, watching *The Passion of the Christ* has become an essential part of the annual repertoire of Easter events and liturgies observed by a great number of practising Christians internationally. In online Bible Journaling groups, members make mention of having watched *The Passion of the Christ* again, for the umpteenth time, with their family, Bible Study group, or at a church screening, during Holy Week. When discussing viewing this movie in their posts, many Bible journalers comment on their heightened emotional response, including weeping, citing being “moved to tears”, “heartbroken”, “humbled to the bone”, and “brought to my knees”. Most comment on the horrendous violence and suffering Jesus is depicted as having endured in his final trial and crucifixion.

Noting that Evangelical Christians are enormously influential in the success of the film to which they have brought their own devotional and imaginative resources, Miller, drawing parallels with the Anselmian tradition makes an interesting observation about biblical literalism:

Theologically Evangelicals by and large share in the Anselmian tradition, interpreting the Bible from the perspective of the history of its reception through Aquinas, Luther, and Calvin. Thus, their perspective on the Passion is similar to Gibson’s. They also share his suspicion of the revisionist claims of contemporary theologians (although, insofar as these arguments are biblically based, Evangelicals would be much more receptive to them than Catholic traditionalists). It is precisely the biblical literalism of Evangelical Christianity that is relevant to the film. The film’s hyperrealism can be understood as the visual equivalent of biblical literalism. [. . .] The film was widely lauded by Evangelicals for depicting God’s love for humanity. But this depiction was effected precisely by the graphic portrayal of Jesus’s torture and execution. What mattered was not the artfulness of the film, but its claim to literally represent what Christ underwent in his Passion. Such a spiritual imagination is perfectly suited for cinema in these days of near perfect special effects. Traditional Roman Catholic devotional materials did not rely on such literal visual depictions. Art served to focus and inspire the imagination, but it did not provide the full content of meditation, as does the all-encompassing spectacle of contemporary cinema. [. . .] The film, when understood in the context of devotional art and practice, represents a new moment in that history—a new moment that is curiously compatible with the emergent form of Christian belief in this age. (Miller 2006)

Furthermore, I suggest that *The Passion of the Christ* has been influential in raising the bar for the graphic depiction of visceral violence inflicted upon Jesus. Later cinematic portrayals of the life of Jesus, hugely popular among Christian viewers such as *The Bible* (2013) (Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, Lightworkers Media and Hearst Production), have also been characterised by extreme violence. Is there a difference between what these women Bible journalers are consuming in the aesthetic idiom of our contemporary visual culture—and the oil painted stimuli their medieval counterparts were spirituality ‘hysterical’ over 800 years ago? Is there a difference between spending hours before a wooden Spanish Baroque crucifix, or an oil painting like Grünewald’s *Isenheim Altarpiece*, contemplating the immense suffering of Jesus, as Anselm advises his directee, and making an annual ritual of watching the neo-Baroque Gibson movie? Or is it simply relative to the cultural and religious aesthetics of each period? Much is made of stained glass of the medieval cathedrals forming a *Biblia Pauperum* of sorts, a “Picture Bible” embedded in the architecture for illiterate lay people with no access to the Scriptures in their written form. In an age when digital stimuli and soundbites have radically shortened peoples’ concentration spans—and fewer and fewer people have the capacity for sustained reading—has the visual mode displaced the verbal as the primary means by which people gain information, including their knowledge and understanding of the Bible? Do films like *The Passion of the Christ* replace the ancient contemplative practice of *Lectio Divina* and the internal, imaginative work of visualisation, of entering deeply into the scriptures? Can the visually saturated modern imagination still produce its own images once it has been subjected to repeated viewings of *The Passion of the Christ*—or are these images now deeply embedded in the mind and almost impossible to bypass when approaching the Passion narratives? In other words, what does the movie do to one’s reception of the Gospel Passion narratives?

The *interpersonal* metafunction serves to represent meanings about the social relations of those engaged in communication. At the interpersonal level, the film has become a major interlocutor in the social space of contemporary Christian understandings of Christ’s Passion and in constructing a visual repertoire of semiotic resources now well-known and well-rehearsed amongst those engaged. There is widespread assent by a great many Christians to the film’s presentation of a theology of atonement and the depiction of extreme graphic violence in achieving the full weight of that assertion. The film endorses, visually explicates, and popularises this theology. The far-reaching embrace of the film (across the denominational spectrum) as orthodox and true to life and the permeating familiarity with its aesthetic has enabled it to become a powerful interpersonal semiotic resource within Christian communities and evidently amongst Bible journalers.

The *interpersonal* is concerned with social relations and hence roles, relationships and power. The classification of information, as in this declaration (“I AM THE NAIL”/I am responsible for the death of Jesus), as mediatory and self-implicating, to the audience has social and ontological consequences. A particular status in relation to this knowledge is (implicitly) ascribed to the audience, and further communication, further social interaction proceeds on that basis. This declaration of personal culpability ascribes, whether correctly or not, specific social characteristics to both the journaler and the audience. The ascription organizes the communicational relation between the maker and receiver of the message in a specific way and, in that, has effects on their social relation (Kress 2010). The journaler demonstrates their explicit assent to this theology of atonement—that implicates each believer as having a role in the Passion through their personal transgressions against the accepted moral code (the Kingdom of God/Gospel Values). Interpersonally, the journaler identifies themselves as having personally appropriated this theology in a profound way. Moreover, they demonstrate this through recourse to an endorsed visual discourse through the symbol of the nail and most emphatically through the splatters of blood across the page. In this way, they have mapped systemic choices onto the formal realisation of their multimodal illustrated Bible page. Real instantiations have been made by the journaler within a given stretch of discourse, a complex intersemiosis of verbal and visual communication

that can be readily received and understood by their implied readers/viewers within their social context.

Often the Easter-time reflections of Bible journalers on social media suggest that the viewer has been so emotionally engaged and sensorily, affectively transported that they feel they have watched a virtual “livestream” from Jerusalem, or a documentary rather than a creative artwork—a “fictional” film that displays the imaginative outworking of a large group of people with a precise theological agenda. A lack of rational distance and clear boundary appreciation is apparent in some commentary. However, what is of interest here is that these references to the film are often accompanied by journalings that feature the *Arma Christi*. There are also many journalings that do not mention the film but display one or more of the instruments of the Passion (see Figures 1–6 and Figure 9). It is evident that the film is a highly significant cultural influence in terms of the visual repertoire of social semiotic resources brought to the Bible pages by journalers. Bible journalers are both confirmed in their beliefs and inspired to create in a similar idiom, bringing something of that aesthetic register into their journalings. This may be seen in “I AM THE NAIL” in both the shape of the nail and in the dramatic splatters of blood across the page. Within the context of the social, faith setting, these semiotic resources have currency and are the most apt for this journaler in their interpersonal communications with the viewer, and with the God they may be addressing.

5.3. Examining the Compositional Metafunction at Work in “I AM THE NAIL”

The *textual* metafunction is that which brings all the modes at work into a meaningful cohesive whole. In the visual realm this often has much to do with composition, the layout of a piece, framing and positioning of the objects and so forth (Kress and van Leeuwen [2006] 2021). This metafunction examines the relationship between the represented and interactive participants and how they interact in terms of composition and framing.

If we concentrate on the left-hand margin and look at this as the focal point of the journaler’s intervention, it is a narrow vertical composition comprising the three elements of blood, nail and handwritten text. The nail is the dominant element and is centrally placed, both horizontally and vertically in this column. The verbal text “I AM THE NAIL” is situated beneath the illustrated nail. The drawing of the nail takes precedence. The personal declaration, although bold in type, is secondary. Placed in the bottom third of this composition it is grounded in the “earthly” realm, in the third that belongs to the “real” as opposed to the “ideal” of the uppermost third. This suggests that there is authenticity in this claim being made by the journaler. It is not aspirational but their genuine felt sense in the moment.

The central positioning of the nail is particularly interesting and astute as—most especially in vertical compositions—a central spatial location is indicative of a *Mediator* role for that represented participant. As the subject here is explicitly about the mediating role of Jesus in his atoning sacrifice through this suffering of crucifixion, the siting of the nail in this central position adds emphasis to the symbolic value of the metaphorical nail. The nail is not simply the visual metonym for the personal sin of the journaler but is also the nail as *mediator*—the nail that mediates the salvific suffering wrought from the innocent Servant Son on behalf of the journaler.

Compositionally, the sprinkled blood, while concentrated in the left margin is splattered across the full page thereby serving to link the journaler’s artistic interventions of nail and text in the margin with the printed text that occupies two-thirds of the page.

5.3.1. Time

There is a further dimension of past, present and future time construed here compositionally in subtle ways, I suggest. The blood spatters evidence the consequence of being “nailed”, being pierced, the effect of the spilled blood. As such, the blood signifies the past, it has already happened and the atoning sacrifice has taken place. The written declaration is in the present tense: “I am”. However, the nail does not have blood on it in the sense

of having already been driven through human flesh. It is not a nail removed from the hands or feet of Jesus at the deposition. Apart from a few small, seemingly transparent drops, it is essentially a clean nail. A nail that has the potential to be used—the ability to be actively “nailed”—to pierce, in the future. This reiterates the “out of time” quality of the nail that appears suspended in space, it does not have a shadow, it is not rendered in three dimensions lying on the page.

5.3.2. Blood, Framing and the Trinity

Within the paradigm of traditional Christian iconography, the number three forms a trinitarian motif: God the creator, Jesus the Christ, and the sanctifying Holy Spirit. The Holy Trinity has often been figured in a triangular arrangement in art, or in a descending order, where God is represented as a hand in the upper realm or corner of the page and the Spirit as dove hovers between the hand of God and the human Jesus. *The Baptism of Christ* by Andrea del Verrocchio and Leonardo da Vinci (c. 1475) is a good Renaissance example.

Here we have three significantly large drops of ink signifying the blood of Christ. The spatial arrangement of these drops of ink/blood may be spontaneous and accidental in the sense of the artist not being fully able to control exactly where the ink splatters will land on the page whilst flicking the paintbrush, or they may be deliberate. That they are close to the nail implies conscious choice in their placement for all that they look spontaneous—as blood splatters are—unpredictable and uncontrollable in real life. It is interesting to consider here a triangular and therefore trinitarian arrangement that “straddles” the nail. The three drops are equal in size and also slightly unique in shape and density of colour. They “contain” the nail in the sense of extending beyond its extremities both vertically and horizontally. However, the nail centrally divides this triangular dynamic. If we accept these three drops as signifying a trinitarian motif, Jesus is the drop on the right. God the creator is the uppermost drop on the left-hand margin and the Holy Spirit the lower-left drop. This would correlate vertically with traditions that place a hierarchy within the Trinity although orthodox theology disavows such a thing as antithetical to the fundamental inner coherence of equality within the Trinity. However, of course, a hierarchy is evident in the traditional linguistic formula of “Father, Son and Holy Spirit” as it occurs throughout mainline theology, liturgical language, and sacramental practice.

This arrangement of the three large drops of blood may be understood to “dialogue” with the biblical text alongside it in interesting ways. Repeatedly throughout this passage, we see words and phrases that refer to separation: “led to the slaughter” (v.7); “taken away”, and “cut off” (v.8). Within this atonement interpretation, these words spatially place Jesus in a different place, beyond, away from the people on whose behalf he suffers and the presence of God. The nail forms a frame line that separates the vertically centred blood drop on the right from the other two. The Suffering Servant, understood exegetically here to be Jesus, is placed on the other side of the nail, and therefore separated by this instrument of his suffering from the Creator and Spirit in this visual trinitarian scheme.

6. Conclusions

“I AM THE NAIL”—at a glance—is a simple yet interesting drawing in the margin of a Bible. It is important to bear in mind that these Bible-journaled pages are the personal, devotional reflections of believing Christians who venerate the Bible as the revelation of God. Their journalings are semiotically apt in that they have made the best use of the imaginative and semiotic resources available to them to convey something of their understanding of the Passion of Christ. They are communicating with their believing community, speaking to other “insiders” who equally value this theological position and will readily comprehend and appreciate the symbolic value of these apparently simple designs.

This journaler has made a complex and creative intertextual commentary on this fourth Song of the Servant, with particular emphasis on Isaiah 53: 3–5, and Christian interpretations of the NT. They have made a personal appropriation of this scripture,

imagining themselves into it in perhaps not too dissimilar a way as that of their medieval contemporaries under the spiritual direction of Anselm and Abelard. Considering this design in greater depth through the analytical framework of Multimodal Analysis reveals a complexity that is deeply entwined with ancient exegetical traditions that have been embedded in Christology and the reception of the Bible since the early Christians first reflected on the meaning of the Passion and Death of Jesus. Theologies of atonement arose out of a medieval context and served believers in that era. Those theologies of satisfaction, expiation, sacrifice, and ransom came to be expressed in a Passion-centred spirituality and aesthetic that placed the believer at the foot of the cross contemplating what had been borne on their behalf by the Son of Man. As one theologian puts it: “the mystical visions of Catholic nuns are sources that Evangelical Christians would view with great suspicion under normal circumstances” (Miller 2006) and yet a particular mortifying identification with and appropriation of the suffering of Jesus in his Passion, as evidenced here, continues to find traction among contemporary believers. There are important questions to be asked here about the value of a “biblically-based” spirituality for women that continues to valorise redemptive suffering.

The twenty-first century has seen a “revival” of sorts, of a theology of atonement that came in for critique and review in the post-Vatican II period. As Reid commends we need to be aware of the operating “hermeneutics of social location”—the social, cultural, and religious location that shapes our experience. One dimension of the social context for this renewed focus on atonement and suffering is the so-called “culture wars” of the United States where deeply fracturing and polarising political, social and religious ideologies vie aggressively for power and influence. For theologian Vincent Miller Mel Gibson’s excessive film *The Passion of the Christ* serves “a primary function as a marker in these culture wars.” (Miller 2006). The film continues to have far-reaching theological and aesthetic influence as we see in the visual output of Bible journalers. This regressive turn to outmoded theologies emphasises human sin and unworthiness and places value on suffering as redemptive. Brazilian liberation theologian Leonardo Boff fears that such a view of suffering is profoundly ambiguous. It can serve to “mask over the injustice of the practices of precisely those who manufacture the cross and death of others” (Boff [1987] 2001). Rather than seeking to identify and overcome the causes of suffering and oppression, they are normalised and accepted. Feminist and womanist theologians have shown the negative implications of this for women, especially those in situations of political and social oppression and poverty. Poor women elucidate that the phrase “He died for my sins” reminds them of their unworthiness of this gift from Jesus and the necessity of their suffering with him, daily “taking up their cross” and following him (Mark 8: 34). Nicola Slee asks: “Does an exclusive focus on the suffering and death of Jesus somehow cancel out or nullify women’s bodily and spiritual sufferings, deflecting attention from the bodies that cry out for care and healing in our world?” (Slee 2011).

The elevation of an instrument of torture as God’s chosen means of salvation may not provide a pathway to a spirituality of human flourishing for women. Biblical texts that tell of the value of women as reflections of the *Imago Dei*, divinely created, cherished and upheld for all their wisdom, courage, loving care, fortitude, leadership and service, need to be brought to the fore and reflected on widely. A spirituality that affirms women in the knowledge that God loves them unconditionally, empowers them in their giftedness, desires their flourishing, and protects and forgives is essential. Perhaps a later Isaian verse might form a healthier foundation for a contemporary biblical spirituality.

I will recount the gracious deeds of the Lord,
 the praiseworthy acts of the Lord,
 because of all that the Lord has done for us,
 and the great favour to the house of Israel
 that he has shown them according to his mercy,
 according to the abundance of his steadfast love.

Isaiah 63:7

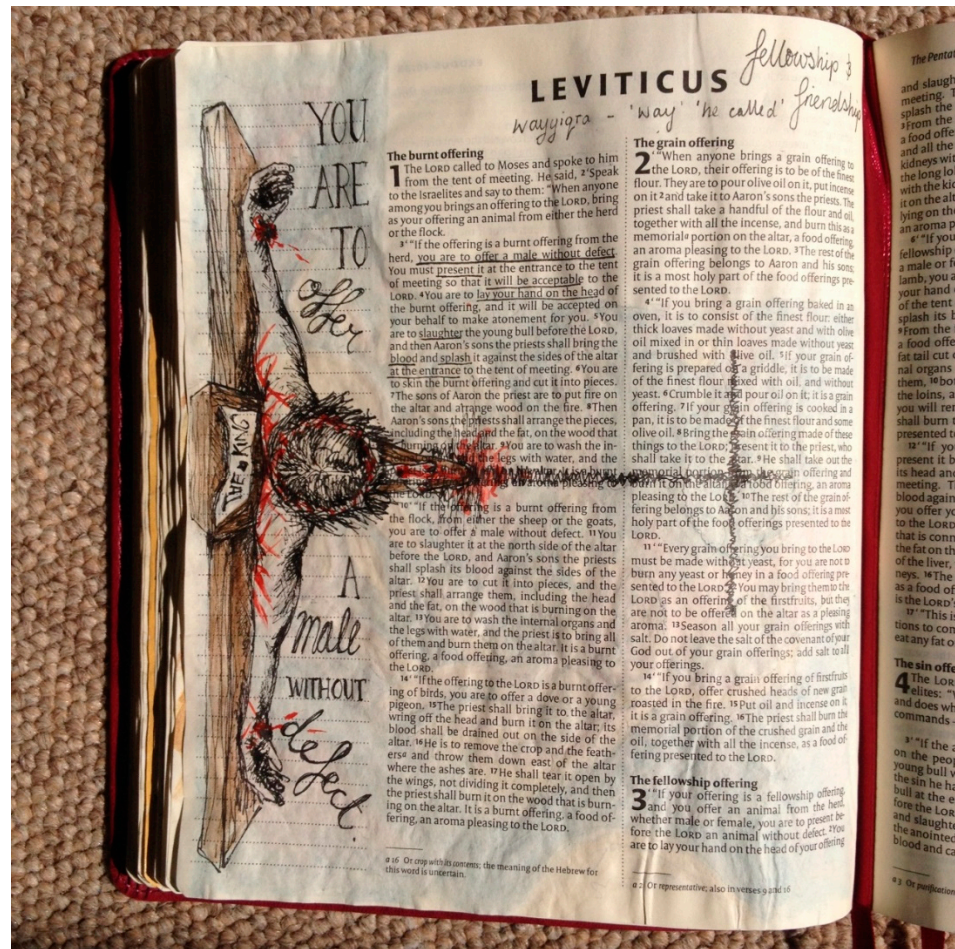


Figure 9. “Without Defect” (2017), Katy Hollway (with kind permission of the journaler).

Funding: The research conducted in this publication was funded by the Irish Research Council under grant number 21/PATH-A/9461.

Informed Consent Statement: Written informed consent has been obtained from the identifiable Bible Journalers to publish their photos of their journaled pages in this paper.

Data Availability Statement: The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available as they are not held in the public domain.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

¹ This is my observation over more than five years of following closely the social media platforms where Bible journalers gather, discuss and share their journaling practice and work. This includes Facebook groups, for example, with over forty thousand members, of which male members constitute a minuscule fraction (<0.1%) of which some are partners of Bible journalers and do

- not actively participate themselves. I have sought out male members within these groups and in other fora (conferences) and have interviewed them. Male Bible journalers are a tiny minority and acknowledge this themselves.
- 2 In 2021, one of the top-selling Bibles in the US was the NLT Life Recovery Bible. This is part of a nationwide addiction recovery programme run in many churches following the 12 Steps programme. Other volumes as part of a series in this programme and closely connected to this Bible include a Life Recovery Journal. Over a million copies of this Bible were sold in 2021. The CSB *She Reads Truth* Bible which has wide margins and journaling space sold over half a million copies in 2021. The popular NLT Inspire Bible sold over 100,000 copies in 2021 and has featured in the top 25 Bibles in annual Bible sales figures every year since it was first published in 2016 according to Christian Book Expo figures. One can extrapolate from these last two sales figures alone that there are hundreds of thousands of people engaged in this practice.
 - 3 There are high-profile Bible Journalers, including professional graphic designers, who have started online businesses producing digital graphic materials that can be bought and downloaded as PDFs and then either traced or printed off and pasted into Bibles. Some of this designed content is of high quality and aesthetically appealing and may be directly relevant to the content of the text being journaled.
 - 4 There is broad consensus amongst historical-critical biblical scholars that Isaiah 40–66 was written by one or two or more later prophets. Isaiah 40–66, usually referred to as a “deutero-Isaiah”, was written by an author specified as “Second Isaiah” and the general agreement is that this is not the same author as that of Isaiah 1–39 (Goldingay 2005).
 - 5 It is important to note that the artist of this particular page and image is anonymous and untraceable. This image is in the public domain and uncredited. As such, the gender, age, ethnicity, denomination, geographical, for social location of the journaler are unknown. This image has been shared multiple times on the social media image-sharing platform *Pinterest*. Despite considerable effort to trace back, like an archaeologist attempting to trace through layers of sharing and reposting, to the original layer or item, it has been impossible thus far to source the creator of the page. Likewise, efforts to communicate with those who have reposted the image have not been successful in terms of revealing the identity of the creator of the image. Moreover, attempts through various other Bible Journaling groups hoping to prompt a response have been to no avail, as yet. This is not uncommon or unsurprising as different SM platforms generate different levels of interest at different times, people close and change accounts and, on *Pinterest* in particular, as with the internet in general, it is almost impossible to trace back through the many repostings of an image. Once shared, a *Pinterest* posting—an uploaded image—takes on a travelling life of its own and cannot be contained, and so, like many an unknown, uncredited scribe of manuscripts past, our contemporary illuminator remains anonymous at this time. In the event, that someone does come forward in response to my requests for information and successfully claims the image as their own, I shall immediately, retrospectively add a note to this article crediting them as the owner of the image and creator of the work.
 - 6 In the liturgical practice of churches that use lectionaries, we find the pericope Isaiah 52: 13–53: 12, read from the *Revised Common Lectionary (RCL)* on Good Friday in all cycles (Years A, B, and C). Likewise, the same pericope is read from *The Lectionary for Mass* in the Roman Catholic church on Good Friday in all cycles (Years A, B, and C). The shorter pericope Isaiah 53: 4–12 appears again in the *RCL* in Year B in the season after Pentecost (Proper 24 or 29). In the Catholic Church, one will hear Isa 53: 10–11 on the 29th Sunday in Ordinary Time in Year B.
 - 7 “Opening on Ash Wednesday (2004), it had the highest grossing opening weekend in February, making nearly \$84 million in over 3000 theatres. Within a month it had reached \$300 million in US ticket sales alone . . . It is now the highest grossing R-rated film of all time. By May it had become the highest grossing film worldwide for 2004 (over \$608 million).” Timothy Beal, “Introduction” in (Beal 2006, pp. 2–3).

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