Margins of Meaning: Theopoetic Reimaginings of the Bible by Women

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Declaration

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Abstract

Helena Connolly

Margins of Meaning:
Theopoetic Reimaginings of the Bible by Women

Theopoetics engages in the mystery of God, self, world and others through imaginative and embodied practices that participate in the ongoing work of theology. It approaches theology as lived and relational, making space for many voices shaped within diverse contexts, thus opening up new possibilities of theological knowing. Situated within a broader interest in the relationship between theopoetics and creative practice, this thesis examines how theopoetics provides a framework for exploring contemporary Bible Journaling.

The creative practice of Bible Journaling has grown exponentially since 2014, with many thousands of women now engaged in this devotional activity internationally. Using a variety of art materials and creative media to decorate a page, artworks are created by individual Bible Journalers in response to their understanding and personal appropriation of the biblical text. A considerable number of these journaled pages of the Bible are photographed and shared publicly on social media accounts, forming a substantial archive of contemporary biblical engagement. In the field of theopoetic scholarship, there has been significant emphasis on poetry, prose and the written word, with comparatively less attention given to the visual and material dimensions of theological imagination. By bringing Bible Journaling into the conversation, this research brings a new perspective to theopoetic scholarship by expanding the field's engagement with visual art. In this study, process theopoetics will provide a framework with which to explore Bible Journaling, focusing on *imagination* and *embodiment* as central to theological meaning-making. Through close analysis of selected Bible Journaling artworks, the thesis examines how the interaction of art with biblical texts and the dynamic relationality between God and humanity invite a more experiential and embodied engagement with theological questions

Introduction

Situating Bible Journaling in Contemporary Practice and Culture

Since its emergence around 2014, Bible Journaling has become a significant contemporary and creative practice engaging thousands of women across the world. While practices of annotating or embellishing sacred texts are not new, Bible Journaling represents a contemporary way for predominantly women readers to respond creatively to biblical texts. Using a range of art materials and creative media – including paints, pens, collage, stamps, washi tape, printable sets, and mixed media – Journalers work directly on the pages of their Bibles, creating visual artworks that reflect personal engagement with what they are reading. These pages often layer colour, texture and handwritten words, where the act of *making* or creating something new becomes part of how the text is understood and experienced in the context of their own lives. Many of these pages are then photographed and shared publicly on social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook where they circulate beyond their original personal devotional setting.

The development of specially designed Journaling Bibles by publishers such as Crossway, Zondervan, Tyndale House Publishers, Holman Bible Publishers, and Thomas Nelson, has been an important dimension in shaping the growth of the practice.[1] These Bibles, with wide margins and thicker pages, make physical space for creative work directly adjacent to the biblical text. This commercial aspect is significant with the rise of popularity of Bible Journaling with resources available to support and guide the Journaler as they begin the practice. These include themed devotional kits, printable resources, and a wide range of

[1] Amanda Dillon provides the earliest extended scholarly account of Bible Journaling, outlining the emergence of Journaling Bibles and how these enable readers to engage the biblical text materially. She situates this development within a broader expansion of Bible publishing, where niche Bible editions featuring distinctive layouts and visual elements, alongside commercially driven trends, have helped drive the growth of Bible Journaling as a contemporary practice. For a more in-depth account of Bible Journaling – its emergence, development, and wider implications, particularly in relation to reader agency, material engagement with the biblical text, and publishing contexts, see Amanda Dillon, "Be Your Own Scribe: Bible Journalling and the New Illuminators of the Densely-Printed Page," in *From Scrolls to Scrolling: Sacred Texts, Materiality, and Dynamic Media Cultures*, ed. Bradford A. Anderson (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020), 153, https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110634440-008. See also Amanda Dillon, "Bible Journaling as a Spiritual Aid in Addiction Recovery," Religions 12, no. 11 (2021): 965, doi:10.3390/rel12110965; and Amanda Dillon, "'I Am the Nail': A Multimodal Analysis of a Contemporary Reception of Isaiah 53," Religions 14, no. 3 (2023): 370, doi:10.3390/rel14030370.

handmade materials produced through small businesses – particularly Etsy stores and independent websites run by Journalers themselves. Other items such as stickers, stamps, bows, decorated paperclips, fabrics, and collage materials have become popular as well as specialised techniques using napkins and mixed media. In addition to physical products, there is a strong online teaching culture, with tutorials, workshops, conferences and regular live sessions on platforms such as YouTube and Facebook. This has been a consistent feature of the practice over time. This commercial dimension also plays an important role in how Bible Journaling is accessed and learned and makes the practice highly accessible particularly for those without formal artistic training, offering ready-made materials and step-by-step guidance. As a result, Bible Journaling can begin at a very basic level with Journalers gradually developing their own styles over time.

Framework: Theopoiesis and Theopoetics

While this commercial development has played a key role in shaping the practice it does not fully account for the deeper theological dynamics at work. At the heart of my research is a recovery of the ancient yet often overlooked concept of *theopoiesis,* rooted in early Christian accounts of participation in God's creative life. The term names the understanding that the divine is revealed through a form of *making* or creating, and of course there is an obvious link here with Bible Journaling – but it also reaches beyond that, into the ongoing creativity of human life as it is lived in relationship with God. In this sense, *theopoiesis* involves creating in imitation of divine creation, as an act of sharing in the creative processes of the divine, where human acts of *making* align with and are guided by the divine source of creation. In modern scholarship, the term *theopoetics* is often used interchangeably with *theopoiesis* to describe a way of doing theology that is both reflective and creative, naming a long-standing intuition that theology and creativity belong together. This shared usage provides the important conceptual backdrop for how the term is taken up in this thesis.

This understanding of *theopoiesis*/theopoetics is further shaped through dialogue with process thought, process theology and process philosophy, rooted most centrally in the work of Alfred North Whitehead. Whitehead's description of God as *Poet of the World,* understood not as the writer of poems but as *poiesis* itself, offers a compelling account of the divine-world relationship as cocreative and interconnected, and provides a key conceptual grounding for the research. For Whitehead, creativity functions as the *ultimate*, with God neither exhausting nor monopolising creative activity but engaging the world through an invitational pull toward

possibility, *becoming*, and transformation – described as the divine *lure.* God is met within the unfolding creative process itself, entering into that very process rather than standing apart from it. Alongside this process-theological grounding, theopoetics as I use it has been shaped in conversation with thinkers such as Catherine Keller, Jack Caputo, Richard Kearney, Scott Holland and Roland Faber, whose work does not collapse into a single account of theopoetics, but converges within a shared field shaped through process thought, deconstruction, hermeneutics and imagination, constructive and postmodern theology, and materiality and embodiment, attentive to lived and embodied forms of theological expression.

Building on this conceptual work, here I develop a framework called *process theopoetics*, drawing on a term used by Catherine Keller. This is a creative theology grounded in the *act of making* itself (*poiesis*). Central to *process theopoetics* is an interweaving of call and response drawn forth by the divine *lure* that is shaped by desire: that is, God's desire for us and our desire for God. This opens a space in which creativity can emerge. Bible Journaling may be understood as a concrete site where this process is enacted, functioning as a shared creative space in which God participates in a common creative field, disclosed through *poiesis.*

Research Question

If *process-theopoetics* offers one way of understanding the dynamics at work in Bible Journaling, the question that follows is central to this study: **How does theological meaning-making take shape through Bible Journaling as a theopoetic activity?**

The research question approaches Bible Journaling as a space of theological meaning-making. It is not only descriptive but methodological, as it asks how practices of *making* can bear theological weight. It raises the question of how an approach that opens itself to *making* and *response* can avoid collapsing into subjectivism since theology cannot rest solely on autobiographical or therapeutic meaning, where what *feels* meaningful is taken as a primary reference point. Rather than trying to resolve this tension, the thesis approaches it through two areas of focus: *embodiment* and *imagination*. These are central and shape the chapters of the study as they arise from the practice itself. In Bible Journaling, interpretation is not confined to reflection alone but is worked through the act of *making* on the page. As such, it cannot be understood solely in intellectual or discursive terms. This act of *making* involves a tactile and creative engagement with the page and so draws attention to embodied and imaginative approaches to theology. *Embodiment* and *imagination* are therefore placed

alongside discursive and intellectual approaches rather than replacing them or standing in opposition.

Methodological Clarification

a) The Role of Biblical Interpretation in This Study

Given the framework and research question, it is necessary to clarify how biblical texts are approached within this study. Although this thesis is not a work of biblical studies in the traditional sense, it does engage closely and repeatedly with specific biblical texts drawing on relevant commentary where needed. This matters as the artworks cannot be read in isolation from but in relation to the biblical texts they draw on, usually in response to a particular verse or passage. Bible journaling is not just an aesthetic practice but one rooted in an encounter with the Bible itself. For this reason, the study moves between the biblical text, insights from commentary, and the Journaler's visual response, bringing these into dialogue through a process-theopoetic lens. This movement runs throughout the thesis. While the primary focus is on constructive theology and in how meaning takes shape within this lens, interpretation itself is not neglected. Rather, it is treated as integral to the movement between biblical text, artwork and theological reflection.

b) The Project Database

This section provides a detailed account of the construction of the project database, including how Bible Journaling images were sought, selected and categorised through the research process.

Across the wider field of Bible Journaling, Journalers often share their work openly on social media platforms. Images across these platforms are selected, downloaded and added to a larger project database. The database is hosted on the Omeka platform as part of the NISAR project,[2] where each uploaded Bible Journaling image is accompanied by its associated data, including: the name of the Journaler, date of upload, Bible translation and publisher, materials used, a description of the artwork, name of the Bible Journaler and the original source URL, and the biblical text with which the artist engages. All images used in this study come from the project database. The development of this project database formed a substantial part of the research process and developed over the course of the PhD. This work was integral to the

[2] The full project database can be accessed at https://nisar.omeka.net

study shaping both the scope of the material examined and the patterns identified throughout this work.

Throughout the duration of the research, Facebook groups, Instagram profiles, Pinterest boards and social media hashtags were monitored regularly in order to observe developments within the practice. I also attended the annual Bible Journaling Online Conferences each October which opened up emerging trends, introduced Journalers and offered a broad understanding of the practice.[3] Across these social media platforms, posts frequently contained links to YouTube channels, Etsy stores, personal blogs, and other websites, allowing individual Journalers and their wider online presence to be traced across digital spaces.

The earliest images for the database were located on Pinterest, however, this platform presented limitations because it was often impossible to identify the original creator of the artwork. Owing to the nature of the platform, images were frequently detached from their original context, making it difficult to trace them back to their source or establish authorship. The primary source for the database was a number of Facebook Bible Journaling groups. While many of the largest and most active groups were established between 2015 and 2017, one of the earliest groups identified during the research was *Bible Journaling Community | Illustrated Faith* which was created on 1st August 2014.[4] Many additional groups continued to emerge prior to the beginning and throughout the period of the research. These groups attracted members from a wide range of countries and played an important role in the ongoing development of Bible Journaling as a creative practice. Facebook, therefore, functioned as a central place for seeking Bible Journaling artwork and provided the principal entry point for constructing the database. Instagram became an increasingly valuable resource as the database developed. Many of the more established Bible Journalers maintained dedicated Instagram accounts and often provided additional insight into the images through

[3] An example is the *Blessed Conference 2025*, organised by Bible Journaling Ministries, see https://blessed.biblejournalingconference.com/?ac=aoz43IU7 This annual three-day online conference attracts a large international audience and is supported by an active Facebook community, with numerous Bible Journalers contributing workshops. The conference also provides participants with free resources and printable materials to help support and develop their practice. Attendance is available through both free and paid registration options making the event accessible to a broad audience.

[4] Early Bible Journaling groups that were set up in 2015 include *Bible Journaling*, *Bible Journal Love Circle*, *Creative Worship Bible & Art Journaling*, *Bible Art Journaling UK* and *Bible Journaling for Beginners Community*, the latter having a membership of more than 145,000 participants.

accompanying reflections. Instagram also functioned as a platform through which Journalers would promote Etsy stores, creative collaborations, and other aspects of their Bible Journaling practice providing valuable contextual information alongside their images. All of this data would also be included in the database.

Images were added to the database in a variety of ways. Some were collected retrospectively from earlier posts, while others were captured as they were published. Rather than organising images chronologically, they were grouped thematically as recurring patterns and visual motifs emerged through ongoing observation with social media content. As the database uploads increased, new images were continually added to existing categories, allowing each thematic collection to develop over time. The aim was to create a broad collection of images that reflected the diversity of Bible journaling practice. From this database, representative images were selected for detailed analysis. The purpose was to facilitate close reading of the images rather than produce statistical findings.

The database included both Bible Journaling and Art Journaling centred on biblical texts. While Bible Journaling is typically undertaken directly within the margins of a printed Bible, Art Journaling involved responding creatively to biblical passages within a separate art journal. Both practices were included although Bible Journaling represented by far the largest proportion of the material collected. Journalers worked across a wide range of Bible translations and editions, reflecting the diversity of the practice, although determining the relative popularity of individual Bible translations falls beyond the scope of this study. Hashtags also played an important part in organising and cross-referencing the database, enabling biblical passages, theological themes and visual motifs, languages and Bible translations to be traced across the collection. They made it possible to identify broader themes such as hope, consolation and trust, while visual motifs such as butterflies, rainbows, flowers, and hands could also be followed across numerous biblical texts, revealing visual and theological connections that were not immediately apparent within individual collections. Hashtags became an important tool for identifying intertextual relationships and recurring theological and visual patterns across the wider corpus.

c) Image Selection and Criteria

A further clarification concerns the selection of images included in this study. Given the scale of the wider collection of Bible Journaling artworks compiled over the course of this research, it is helpful to outline the criteria guiding the images chosen to be included here.

The selected images are not intended to represent the whole practice but are situated within a larger collection of approximately 2,500 images. The images analysed in this thesis are not chosen at random nor are they chosen simply for visual appeal. They have been selected because they provided focused sites through which the process-theopoetic framework developed in this study can be explored more closely. The intention is not to present these examples as exhaustive but as points of focus through which the wider field of Bible Journaling can be examined as a theopoetic practice. They are also selected because they clearly bring into focus how theology is taking shape, particularly in relation to *imagination* and *embodiment*.

A broader set of images drawn from the practice is included in the appendix. These images are not treated as primary case studies but support the arguments within the chapters indicating broader visual patterns and recurring motifs. The images are organised in relation to the chapters to which they relate and are referenced throughout in footnotes (e.g. Appendix A, Fig A1) where further details, including source information, are provided.

d) Diversity and Complexity within the Database

It is important to acknowledge the diversity represented within the database which reflects the breadth of Bible Journaling artwork shared across social media. While this study focuses on images through which theological meaning takes shape as a theopoetic practice, the wider collection also includes artwork that differs significantly from the images analysed here and may be interpreted or received quite differently. Alongside images selected for this study are others that reinforce more traditional or stereotypical understandings of women, family life and marriage, present domesticated or sentimental readings of the biblical text, or engage directly with contemporary political and cultural issues that some readers may find challenging or disturbing. For example, the collection includes strongly nationalistic or pro-Israeli theological perspectives alongside images responding to trauma, abuse, war, illness and social justice. These varied expressions form part of the wider Bible Journaling landscape and are acknowledged as such. Although they fall beyond the scope of this study, recognising

their presence is important because it avoids presenting the selected images in what follows as representative of Bible Journaling as a whole and acknowledges the breadth of material contained within the wider collection.

e) Interpretive Position, Theological Framing and Women's Practice

At this point, it is worth outlining the interpretive position and theological framing guiding this study. The focus is on how Journalers engage the biblical text and respond creatively, with theological meaning emerging through the act of *making*. It does not attempt to map out the theological positions of individual Bible Journalers or define the exact frameworks they work within. However, it remains important to recognise that interpretation is never theologically neutral and that Journalers bring their own faith and church traditions into what they create. These are not examined or classified in a formal way but their journaling is understood as reflecting these underlying perspectives. At the same time, the agency of the Journalers as readers remains central. Their personal engagement with the biblical text, shaped by their own lived realities and use of imagination, plays a key role in how meaning takes shape. They are, in this sense, *speaking for themselves,* though not apart from inherited Christian symbols and traditions that inform their work.

It is important to clarify that theopoetics is not a term used by Journalers themselves, and this thesis does not suggest that they understand or name their practice in these terms. A gap remains between the language used here and the terms by which they describe their practice, and their voice is not collapsed into this framework (as discussed above, in the movement between biblical text, artwork and theological reflection). The language of theopoetics does not arise from within the practice itself; however, this does not invalidate its use. Theology regularly offers language that interprets practices retrospectively, naming and making visible what is taking place where it might not be conceptually framed in such terms. This study offers a theological interpretation of the practice rather than an account of how the Journalers' themselves would describe it. In doing so, it seeks to take the practice seriously as a site of theological meaning-making, even where such language may sit outside the frameworks familiar to the Journalers themselves.

In this study, the artwork examined reflects a practice that is overwhelmingly carried out by women. All of the examples are drawn from work by women. This focus keeps attention on how women are engaging biblical texts through creative and embodied forms of response.

While this raises wider questions about gender, creativity and religious expression, these are not the primary focus here. Rather the thesis is concerned with how theological meaning is formed within the practice itself when viewed through a theopoetic lens.

f) Research Positionality and Reflexivity

This research was undertaken as an observer and interpreter of Bible Journaling rather than as a practicing Bible Journaler. My interest lies in exploring the link between Bible Journaling and theopoetics. This interest also reflects my own longstanding engagement with creative theological practice. As a researcher, photographer, singer/songwriter and musician, I have long been interested in theology and creative practice. This background shaped the questions I brought to the research and my attentiveness to the creative and theological dimensions of Bible Journaling.

Over several years, sustained engagement with online Bible Journaling communities together with the construction of a database of around 2,500 images, provided an in-depth familiarity with the practice while also requiring ongoing reflection on my own role as interpreter. Throughout the research I remained aware that my own theological interests and research questions inevitable shaped the questions I asked, the examples I selected, and the interpretations I developed. At the same time I sought to construct a database that was as broad and representative as possible, capturing the diversity of Bible Journaling. Although my own theological background is Roman Catholic, the Bible Journaling communities represented in this study span a wide range of Christian traditions. This required an openness to theological perspectives beyond my own. This study adopts a reflexive approach in which my position is recognised as part of the interpretive process.

Chapter Overview

Chapter 1 traces the hermeneutical roots that ground this study. It brings together philosophical hermeneutics and reception history. From these foundations, it engages feminist interpretation, transformational hermeneutics and biblical spirituality to show how interpretation is understood as ongoing and lived engagement that opens into *response* and, in turn, into theopoetics. Building on the location of theopoetics within a wider hermeneutical trajectory, Chapter 2 develops a process theopoetic framework, drawing on Whitehead to articulate a relational and dynamic understanding of God and world. This focus establishes the conceptual basis for the study and provides a framework for exploring the dynamics that

unfold within the practice of Bible Journaling. Chapter 3 examines Bible Journaling through the lens of embodiment considering both the tactile nature of the practice and the ways in which the female body is repeatedly depicted and explored. It considers how Bible Journalers trust themselves to encounter God through experiences carried in their bodies, with their artwork expressing the wisdom within the body as it tells its own story. Chapter 4 examines imagination as a key dimension of creative practice exploring two closely connected areas within Bible Journaling: imagination and the collective imaginary. It shows how Bible Journaling exists at this intersection as both a personal, private act of imaginative devotion and, through online sharing, a wider space of meaning-making. It develops the idea of a theopoetic imaginary shaped by individual acts of imagination and contributing to a theopoetic vision of human flourishing.

Chapter One: Literature Review

1.1: Situating the study within the wider framework of hermeneutics

To discuss contemporary interpretations of biblical texts by women, it will be helpful to situate this within a theory that not only reflects on the nature of understanding and meaning, but that also recognizes and emphasizes the interaction between the text and the reader. The field of hermeneutics, which includes both a theory of understanding and a body of historically varied methodologies for interpreting texts, is foundational for this study. From the 1960s onwards, as scholars began to dig deeper into how the interpretation of texts changed and evolved over time and in different contexts, hermeneutics gave rise to the development of reception history. Both hermeneutics and reception history form the theoretical underpinnings of the research and the first section of this chapter.

The second section will engage with a broader discourse. Building on this hermeneutical and reception-historical groundwork, this thesis traces a trajectory within modern hermeneutics that increasingly foregrounds the *effects* of interpretation on the interpreter, particularly where interpretation opens into lived response that may take creative form. Bible Journaling is situated within this trajectory as a contemporary practice through which such hermeneutical effects find imaginative and embodied expression in women's spiritual lives. Within this context, I propose a framework that attends closely to the aesthetic dimensions of biblical interpretation, in particular those aspects which are creative, imaginative and transformative. There are two areas to be considered here. Firstly, the field of biblical spirituality that regards the transformation of the reader as integral to interpretation; where the Bible, acting as a locus of encounter, opens up a new world before the reader. Second, this discussion resonates with and moves toward the field of theopoetics, which offers a way of articulating how meaning is shaped through participatory and creative engagement with texts. Theopoetics, a combination from the Greek *theo* and *poiein* (to make or to shape) names a mode of engagement that foregrounds experience, imagination and aesthetic participation in the shaping of theological meaning. Thus, biblical spirituality and theopoetics will frame the second part of this chapter, which culminates in situating theopoetics within a hermeneutical trajectory and opens toward the proposal of a theopoetic framework developed in the chapters that follow.

In the early nineteenth century, Friedrich Schleiermacher understood hermeneutics as part of the broader activity of thinking, and therefore as fundamentally philosophical. I thus begin with the philosophical foundations of biblical hermeneutics, in particular the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Hans Robert Jauss.[5]

1.2: Philosophical foundations underpinning biblical hermeneutics

Hermeneutics, broadly understood, is the theory and the practice of interpreting and understanding texts. Even though issues of meaning and understanding have been the subject of debate since the ancient world, the modern philosophical framework for examining these issues arose in the early part of the nineteenth century.[6] The influence of Martin Heidegger in particular enabled the field of biblical studies to introduce new methods of investigation into the foundations and process of understanding.[7] The philosophical foundations underpinning biblical hermeneutics were developed more fully by the German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer. Building on the foundation of Heidegger's hermeneutical theory, Gadamer went on to assert a universal status for hermeneutics, maintaining that its central task is, "not to develop a procedure of understanding, but to clarify the conditions in which understanding takes place."[8] For Gadamer, understanding is one of the key components of hermeneutical inquiry and constitutes the aim of interpretation. His concern is with the nature of understanding itself, focusing on philosophical and cognitive accounts rather than offering a step-by-step guide to how understanding might be achieved.[9] As a foundational concept

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[5] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1985); Hans Robert. Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception,* Trans. by Timothy Bahti, intro by Paul de Man (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982).

[6] Important voices in this period include Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768 – 1834), August Boeckh (1785-1867), Wilhelm Dilthey (1833 – 1911), Martin Heidegger (1889 – 1976).

[7] Martin Heidegger's philosophy of understanding emphasises that interpretation is historically and culturally situated, and that it is shaped within the limits and preconceptions of the interpreter. He argued that interpretation requires an openness to having one's prior assumptions challenged in order to arrive at a deeper understanding of the text. These insights, particularly as developed in *Being and Time*, proved influential for later hermeneutical approaches in biblical studies. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962). Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962)

[8] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2.

[9] Following Heidegger, Gadamer makes us aware that the definition of understanding has been narrowed in traditional hermeneutics. He reminds us that it has dual meanings: "Understanding is being-in-the-world" in other words, to be human, is to understand. Understanding cannot be confined to the realm of pure cognition but at every moment of life, as human beings we understand our interrelatedness through the world around us. Gadamer notes, "Understanding is the original characteristic of the being of human life itself." The second definition is to do with cognitive understanding such as coming to understand a mathematical equation or part of

Gadamer describes understanding as an *event* that occurs through a reader's dialogical engagement with a text from the past culminating in an encounter with meaning.

1.3: Understanding and the concept of *horizon*

For Gadamer, the *event* of understanding happens in the fusion of *horizons (Horizont).*[10] When readers approach a text, including biblical texts, there are two horizons forming: the *historical* horizon and the *present* horizon, that is, the context from which the original text speaks, and the reader's own current perspective. The historical horizon is like a window that looks into the past providing access to the historical, linguistic and cultural background of the author's world and the experience of the first receivers of the text. In order for a contemporary reader to understand an ancient text such as the Bible, they need to understand the contexts from which the text emerged and thus the various dimensions of meaning that are rooted in previous interpretations. Within this framework, according to Gadamer, there is no neutral understanding as contemporary readers enter into the world from which the original text emerged in order to understand inherited meanings and assumptions of what has been handed down within their tradition. The goal of the historical horizon is not solely to recover the author's intention but to create "a strong border to separate contexts so that they can fuse in dialogue."[11] The historical horizon is what helps readers to see the power of history and the ways in which contemporary beliefs and values are not isolated from the past but have been shaped by it. In this sense, Gadamer seeks to confirm the importance of *tradition* in the process of understanding and its link to historical distance. Tradition forms and conditions readers' present perspectives and can play an important role in opening up the meanings within the text. Prejudgements from within a tradition are carried forward however, creating challenges for readers to see beyond a distorted viewpoint. Sandra Schneiders refers

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a law "a person who understands.... has not only projected himself understandingly toward a meaning but the accomplished understanding constitutes a state of new intellectual freedom." Understanding is self-understanding, that is, coming to know and arriving at knowledge of something. Gadamer, *Truth and Method,* 254-264.

[10] Gadamer uses the concept *Horizont*, following Heidegger and Husserl, to describe the historically situated range of understanding within which interpretation takes place. In philosophy, a *horizon* is used to describe the limits of understanding and the way those limits are gradually expanded over time. Gadamer developed Heidegger and Husserl's concept of the *horizon* which moves with the interpreter as they live. Husserl's phenomenological work seeks to show how acts of meaning belong within a wider, unified whole of experience. See Gadamer, *Truth and Method,* 245, 302.

[11] Brennan W. Breed, *Nomadic Text: A Theory of Biblical Reception History,* Indiana Series in Biblical Literature (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2014), 9.

to this as *historical density* whereby one's own world of meaning is deeply integrated into one's lived reality. We see clear links here with Gadamer's ontological description of understanding:

> The knower, in all their historical density, is always implicated in the knowing and therefore in the known. The role of the knower in the process of understanding is integral. We can only understand that which has been integrated into reality within the horizon of effective historical consciousness.[12]

Gadamer writes that the *historical* horizon is superseded by the reader's own current or present horizon, so while the historical horizon is projected - that is, when the reader begins to understand the meaning of what has been handed down - it is also replaced by the reader's own contemporary meaning of the text. Understanding takes place in the fusion of these horizons *(Horizontverschmelzung)* that otherwise exist by themselves within this hermeneutical approach.[13] This fusion of horizons is the task that Gadamer calls *historically effected consciousness,* where one great horizon of our present reality and the past of the *other* moves from within and beyond, helping to shape a moving horizon out of which we live. Gadamer believes history is *effective* because it serves as the framework for all of life. It is the basic element which enables life. Almost everything that makes us who we are is owed to it, including our language, culture, questions, and worldviews.[14] As Gadamer writes,

> History does not belong to us; we belong to it. Long before we understand ourselves through the process of self-examination, we understand ourselves in a self-evident way in the family, society and state in which we live. The focus of subjectivity is a distorting mirror. The self-awareness of the individual is only a flickering in the closed circuits of historical life.[15]

Texts and their interpretations have an impact on and form history, while on the other hand, fresh applications and interpretations of texts result from *new* historical contexts and circumstances. This assumes that present horizons or perspectives can change through time

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[12] Sandra M. Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture,* 2nd ed (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 160.

[13] David Paul Parris, *Reception Theory and Biblical Hermeneutics*, Princeton Theological Monograph Series 107 (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2009), 150.

[14] For more on this, see Ulrich Luz "The Contribution of Reception History" in *The Nature of New Testament Theology*, ed. Christopher Rowland and Christopher Tuckett, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 125.

[15] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 276.

and are always forming due to shifting standpoints. The combining of the old and new is ongoing, culminating in something of a living value:

> The true locus of hermeneutics is this in-between. Temporal distance lets the true meaning of the object emerge fully. But the discovery of the true meaning of a text or a work of art is never finished; it is in fact an infinite process. Not only are fresh sources of error constantly excluded, so that all kinds of things are filtered out that obscure the true meaning; but new sources of understanding are continually emerging that reveal unsuspected elements of meaning. The temporal distance that performs the filtering process is not fixed but is itself undergoing constant movement and extension. And along with the negative side of the filtering process brought about by temporal distance there is also a positive side, namely the value it has for understanding.[16]

Gadamer's best known model for this *in-between* encounter is that of question and answer, a dialogue between reader and text that allows meaning to pass into the readers own thinking, opening possibilities of meaning otherwise anticipated. It follows a logic of questioning that recognises what is already known within the author's initial question.[17] As Gadamer explains "A person who wants to understand must question what lies behind what is said. He must understand it as an answer to a question."[18] A literary work is viewed as an answer to a specific query about a particular subject area, therefore its future interpretation follows the same dynamic.[19] The urge to know within human experience often takes the form of a question-like structure. The *other* serves as a tool for gaining a deeper understanding of oneself because doing so requires a fresh perspective on the self. As Jauss writes in his work *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*,

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[16] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 295.

[17] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 374.

[18] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 370. Gadamer follows R.G. Collingwood (a British philosopher and historian at Oxford in the 1930s) in his development of a logic of question and answer. Collingwood argues "we can understand a text only when we have understood the question to which it is an answer." For Collingwood, this is the nerve of all historical knowledge and requires that it be applied to historical tradition. Gadamer recognized the flaw in Collingwood's methodological guidance, particularly the way it neglected to take the interpreter's historicity into account. The backward movement toward the text's question ignores the fact that the interpretation of the text's question is always done from the interpreter's present-day horizon. For Collingwood, it is always possible to retrieve and uncover the original meaning of the historical text using the logic of question and answer; however, for Gadamer, the meaning of the text is constantly shifting, making interpretation and reinterpretation endless tasks. See also Chris Lawn, *Gadamer: a Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Continuum, 2006), 74, https://doi.org/10.5040/9781472546555.

[19] See Ormond Rush, *The Reception of Doctrine: An Appropriation of Hans Robert Jauss' Reception Aesthetics and Literary Hermeneutics* (Rome: Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 2016), 123.

> Literary tradition is a dialectic of question and answer that is always kept going from the present interest. A past text does not survive in historical tradition thanks to old questions that would have been preserved by tradition and could be asked in an identical way for all times including our own.[20]

Ormond Rush notes, "the answer which emerges (its meaning for today) is a different understanding of the subject matter than the original answer from the past. To understand is to understand differently, and still differently again."[21] This knowing of the *other*, or alterity, is the hallmark of the hermeneutics of Hans Robert Jauss.

1.4: Hans Robert Jauss – Literary Hermeneutics

The concept of the fusion of horizons was developed further by Hans Robert Jauss in his work on literary hermeneutics.[22] Jauss, who was a student of Gadamer and expanded on his theories, regarded Gadamer's hermeneutics as the "immediate impetus" for his work "without which my undertaking would have been unthinkable."[23] Jauss chose to use the term *mediation of horizons* rather than Gadamer's *fusion of horizons*, suggesting a more active role on the part of the reader: "In the triangle of author, work and public the last is no passive part, no chain of mere reactions, but rather itself an energy formative of history."[24]

Like Gadamer, Jauss agreed that understanding occurs within a historical horizon and regards the triangular relationship as a deeply connected process. Texts carry incomplete meanings as every generation brings a new perspective to the process of interpretation. This constant renewal of texts result in a changing *horizon of experience* from one generation to the next. As Jauss writes,

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[20] Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception,* 65.

[21] Rush, *The Reception of Doctrine,* 124.

[22] Jauss was not a theologian or biblical scholar but a literary scholar and philosopher who spent much of his academic career at the University of Konstanz. It was here that he developed his hermeneutical approach that would later prove influential for biblical studies, particularly through the emergence of reception history.

[23] Hans Robert. Jauss, *Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics,* trans. by Michael Shaw, intro. *by Wlad Godzich.*, Theory and History of Literature 3 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982). Xxxvi

[24] Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception,* 19.

> Only as the horizon changes and expands with each subsequent historical materialization, do responses to the work legitimize particular possibilities of understanding, imitation, transformation and continuation.[25]

The development of Jauss's hermeneutic includes the historical horizon in which the text initially appeared, the reader's present horizon and the "historical materialization" of interpretation from the original horizon until the present time, that is the *tradition* of interpretation.[26] David Parris writes that Jauss's development introduced a liberating feature in that interpretation of the Bible must be made by each generation since every act of understanding takes place in a historical horizon.[27] In his book *Reading the Bible with Giants,*[28] Parris speaks about the broadening of Jauss' theory and the changing interaction of a two-way dialogue to a three-way dialogue. This shift names the inclusion of the tradition of interpretation as an active participant alongside text and reader. He builds on Jauss's notion of the third participant, that is the practice of biblical interpretation in where meaning is extracted during the process of its reception. The changing *horizon of experience* opens up an aesthetic of reception and influence. Regarding biblical texts when the author is not present, Parris describes the text as a container or channel through which the author communicates to the reader. Jauss writes,

> It is not a mystic whole that can reveal itself totally on its first showing..... We can see the whole wealth of the past for the enlightenment of our present and for our deeper understanding of it.[29]

This development eventually formulated his theory of *Rezeptionsgeschichte* or *aesthetic of reception*. This theory was concerned with *many* receptions, not just the individual reader and also the impact the work might continue to have for future interpretations.[30]

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[25] Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception,* 64.

[26] Parris, *Reception Theory and Biblical Hermeneutics*, 155.

[27] Parris, *Reception Theory and Biblical Hermeneutics*, 156.

[28] David P. Parris, *Reading the Bible with Giants: How 2000 Years of Biblical Interpretation Can Shed New Light on Old Texts*, 2nd ed. (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2015).

[29] Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception,* 59.

[30] In the 1960s Jauss applied the theory to the Bible, that is, that the meaning of the text is not fixed but determined by the dynamic interplay between the text and the reader. Understanding and meaning were dynamic and interactive, not static but rather ever-evolving. This work has had significant impact on literary theory and biblical studies.

1.5: Hans Robert Jauss – Reception Aesthetics or an Aesthetics of Reception

While Gadamer's fusion of horizons was based on *tradition* with the reader serving as the interpreter within a historical horizon, Jauss expanded on Gadamer's analysis by foregrounding the role of aesthetic experience in reception. Jauss proposed a literary hermeneutic that prioritised the reader's aesthetic experience of a work, creating a new dynamic of effect and reception. As well as his work in the development of literary hermeneutics, Jauss developed the understanding of art as a reception aesthetic. The receiver's reception or subjective response when the work first appears and the effect the work has on them provides a criterion of its aesthetic value and ensures that meaning making remains active through time. In this way, aesthetic value is not located solely at the point of origin or exhausted by the work itself, but emerges through the ongoing interaction between the work and its successive readers. Meaning remains active insofar as each new act of reception discloses fresh possibilities of understanding shaped by historically situated experience. Whether the work is pleasing or displeasing it is received in all its strangeness.[31] Jauss' reception aesthetics understands that the receiver contributes just as much to the meaning of a work of art as the creator does. The aesthetic effect that is intrinsic in the work itself is revealed through the recipient's reception. Ormond Rush believes that Jauss's advancement is attentive to both the distinctively aesthetic nature of literary texts as well as the dynamic of all human understanding as described in philosophical hermeneutics. His hermeneutical approach emphasised the variety of understanding horizons derived from the aesthetic experience of various receivers.[32] Parris surmises that Jauss's *aesthetic of reception* offered a framework, a model that could fit within and complement Gadamer's hermeneutic.[33] Christine E. Joynes notes that Jauss's work enabled reception history to function as an adoptable interpretive approach within biblical studies.[34] In 1967, Jauss gave a public lecture bringing the new discipline of the study of literature and art with a

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[31] Robert Charles Evans, *Reception History, Tradition and Biblical Interpretation: Gadamer and Jauss in Current Practice*, Library of New Testament Studies (London: Bloomsbury T&T, 2014), 42.

[32] Rush, *The Reception of Doctrine,* 64.

[33] As noted by David Parris, Jauss's formulation of seven thesis in "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory," develops a more explicitly structured account of reception, extending Gadamer's hermeneutical framework.

[34] Christine E. Joynes, "Changing Horizons: Reflections on a Decade at Oxford University's Centre for Reception History of the Bible," *Journal of the Bible and Its Reception* 1, no. 1 (2014): 165, https://doi.org/doi:10.1515/jbr-2014-0007.

hermeneutical priority of reception to the public arena and crossfire of debate. No longer was this theory confined only to Germany; it called forth a new research interest which found expression in many disciplines, including biblical studies.[35]

1.6: The movement of understanding and its impact on biblical studies

It was not long before the philosophical discipline of hermeneutics, and particularly Jauss's reception theory, began to influence the field of biblical studies. In the 1960s and 1970s doubts surrounding the historical critical method began to emerge, with scholars questioning its claims to objectivity and accuracy. The historical critical method was largely rooted in a rationalist and scientific approach to the Bible, aiming to uncover the original meaning of the text, free from the perceived interpretive biases of earlier readers. One of the main concerns was its tendency to distance interpretation from the living communities in which biblical texts continue to be read and received.[36] By prioritising historical reconstruction and authorial intention, interpretation risked becoming the domain of the specialist alone with limited attention given to how biblical texts function within communities of faith in the present. Mainstream biblical scholarship for much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries had been guided and controlled by scientific historical critical methods where the nature of understanding had been assumed: a single correct interpretation revealed by the exegete seeking the meaning the author intended for the original audience. Understanding, taking the traditional historical critical approach, remained the same throughout history - the text was separate and independent from the reader and confined by the circumstances and context of its production. The work of Gadamer and Jauss was *historical* in a much wider sense than traditional historical critical methods as it ensured the constant renewal of texts by every generation through analysis and interrogation. In a sense, they restored the historical dimension for all readers, past and present, as the mediator of texts and rewriters of history "continued and enriched through further *receptions* from generation to generation."[37] Jauss likened this new approach to an orchestration which continually strikes anew chords among

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[35] Jauss, *Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics.* Xxxi

[36] Concerns about the historical-critical method's tendency to distance interpretation from contemporary communities of faith became increasingly prominent in the 1960s and 1970s, in the wake of Gadamer's *Truth and Method* (1960) and Jauss' inaugural lecture in 1967. The 1970s in particular are often characterised as a period of growing doubt regarding the method's adequacy.

[37] Hans Robert Jauss and Elizabeth Benzinger, "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory," *New Literary History* 2, no. 1 (1970): 8.

its listeners and makes it meaningful for its current time.[38] One of the benefits brought to the field of hermeneutics by Gadamer and Jauss was that understanding was something dynamic and not static, a movement, and not always guaranteed. The notion emerged "that hermeneutics was an art rather than a science."[39] Although the exegetical task of discovering what the author intended to say was an indispensable element in biblical scholarship, the philosophical discipline of hermeneutics showed the inaccuracies and limitations of reducing understanding to only the historical or philological context of the text:

> The purpose of interpretation is to come closer to the truth on the subject by letting the text challenge our preconceptions and by questioning the text from our perspective so that it yields more, in the light of our shared tradition, than it could when it was originally composed.[40]

As theories of understanding developed, historical criticism was seen as only one of a multifaceted set of methods that must be applied in the understanding of a biblical text. This had a significant impact on the field of biblical studies bringing with it a plurality of methods and approaches.[41]

1.7: The Emergence of Biblical Reception History

With the increasing influence of philosophical hermeneutics within biblical studies, the work of Gadamer and Jauss became foundational to the emergence of biblical reception history. Gadamer's concept of *Wirkungsgeschichte***,** often translated as *effective history* or *history of influence*, and Jauss's *Rezeptionsgeschichte***,** understood as *reception history*, are central to this development and frequently used together, despite their distinct emphases.[42] Gadamer's account of *Wirkungsgeschichte* focuses on how texts affect readers across time and how interpretation is shaped by historical consciousness, rather than proposing a specific

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[38] Jauss and Benzinger, "Literary History," 10.

[39] Anthony C. Thiselton, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction, (*Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2009) 10.

[40] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 273.

[41] Biblical Studies was thrust into the multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary environment of the contemporary higher education sector. The historical disciplines were no longer used to categorise biblical study. Questions about how to interpret biblical texts have been raised in the fields of sociology, psychology, literature, philosophy, and aesthetics. There was also an increasing concern on the part of believers in general with the role of scripture in their spiritual lives. For more on these development, see Sandra M. Schneiders, "From Exegesis to Hermeneutics: The Problem of the Contemporary Meaning of Scripture," *Horizons* 8, no. 1 (1981): 23–39, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0360966900018223.

[42] Joynes, "Changing Horizons." 161-163

interpretive method. Jauss's concept of *Rezeptionsgeschichte* extends this insight by foregrounding reception and the ongoing history of interpretation over time.

Scholars such as Ulrich Luz played a key role in bringing these ideas into biblical interpretation. In his work *Matthew 1-7: A Commentary*, he demonstrates how reception history can be integrated into biblical interpretation by placing the history of a text's interpretation alongside historical critical exegesis, showing how meaning unfolded through its reception across time.[43] He believes that Gadamer's interest was not in the development of a new discipline called *reception history* but what came out of his work without initial intent, however, it was Jauss' development of *Rezeptionsgeschichte* that alludes to a compilation of reception or literary series. He believes incorporating both approaches can result in a more comprehensive understanding of how the Bible has been understood and appropriated over time.

Taken together, the work of Gadamer and Jauss, and the subsequent emergence of *Wirkungsgeschichte* and *Rezeptionsgeschichte* within biblical studies, reflects a shift toward interpretation as a historical unfolding practice of engagement. This hermeneutical reorientation is particularly significant for my present study. By recognising that meaning emerges through reception rather than being fixed at the point of origin, these approaches draw attention to the ways readers engage with the Bible and legitimate forms of engagement that are imaginative and grounded in lived experience. Practices such as Bible Journaling can therefore be understood as contemporary modes of reception in which readers dwell with the text and participate in the shaping of meaning through aesthetic and creative engagement.

If understanding is also historically situated and shaped through reception, as Gadamer and Jauss argue, then attention must also be given to *who* is doing the interpreting and from what contexts interpretation takes place. This focus is important for my present study, as Bible Journaling is predominantly taken up by women readers. Feminist interpretation follows as a necessary extension of this hermeneutical theory by focusing on *women* as readers and on the lived contexts in which the Bible is received. The following section therefore turns to feminist interpretation and reception history in order to examine how women have engaged

[43] Ulrich Luz et al., *Matthew 1-7* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2007).

with the Bible and how these engagements have been treated within the wider history of interpretation.

1.8: Feminist Interpretation

Biblical reception history was given a new focus in the emergence of feminist reception history and feminist hermeneutics. The increasing scepticism towards historical-critical methods of interpretation in the 1960s and 1970s was intensified by feminist and liberationist theologies, which questioned not only the limits of historical reconstruction but also whose experiences and voices were being privileged within biblical interpretation. These new fields of research questioned and challenged aspects of historical-critical approaches, in particular the bias that existed within exegesis and interpretation in male-dominated intellectual discourse and scholarly frameworks. The history of interpretation, especially in so far as it was available in written form, had represented the interests and thoughts of the powerful in church and society.[44] As Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza writes, "Oppressed people do not have a written history. They remain invisible in the reality-construction of those in power."[45] A tension emerged between interpreting the Bible in service of the movement towards social reform regarding the role of women and the value placed on objectivity by historical critics.[46] By interrupting male-centred historical critical approaches and *Wirkungsgeschichte* of the Bible, feminist biblical scholars sought to break down structures that shaped women's biblical interpretation with more emphasis placed on plurality and complexity. Alongside Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, biblical scholars such as Phyllis Trible, Letty M. Russell, Rosemary Radford Ruether, Pheme Perkins, Carolyn Osiek, and Beverly Roberts Gaventa brought a feminist perspective into the interpretive process and raised the much-needed critical feminist voice in biblical studies. Carolyn Osiek, following Rosemary Radford Reuther, writes that the historical-critical method could no longer claim to be *the* method.[47]

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[44] Jeremy Punt, "Inhabiting the World in Front of the Text: The New Testament and Reception Studies," *Neotestamentica* 34, no. 1 (2000): 207–24.

[45] Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "Feminist Theology and New Testament Interpretation," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament 22 (1976).* 32 – 45

[46] See, Adela Yarbro Collins ed., *Feminist Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship,* Biblical Scholarship in North America 10 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985), 3.

[47] See Carolyn Osiek, "The Feminist and the Bible: Hermeneutical Alternatives," *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 53, no. 4 (1997): 956-68. http://hdl.handle.net/2263/18202.

Its limits and biases have been brought into the light. It was now being complemented by a variety of methods and approaches.

While feminist approaches to biblical interpretation were often critical of traditional historical-critical methods, this did not result in a wholesale abandonment of historical research. Rather, feminist scholars re-engaged historical interpretation critically while insisting on its importance for recovering women's histories and experiences. The edited volume *Feminist Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship* examines the tension between historical-critical scholarship and feminist biblical scholarship.[48] Rather than framing this tension as destructive, Adela Yarbro Collins suggests that it can be understood as a creative space that opens new interpretive possibilities and contributes to social transformation. Schüssler Fiorenza has been a leading figure in articulating this approach, consistently situating the study of *women and the Bible* at the intersection of women's struggles for justice and the academic study of biblical texts on the other.[49] For Schüssler Fiorenza, feminist biblical interpretation must engage critically with historical scholarship, since abandoning historical methods would risk severing women from their religious and historical inheritance.[50] She writes of *critical contextualization* which involves examining the historical, social and political context of biblical texts that leads to knowing how these factors influenced the texts meaning. She calls this historical-theological detective work that does not rely on facts but is engaged in an *imaginative* reconstruction of the past. Readers need to "enter an old text from a new critical direction... as an act of survival."[51]

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[48] Collins, *Feminist Perspectives,* 3.

[49] Feminist biblical studies share the critical impulses of historical-critical scholarship, on the one hand, and the theological goals of liberation theologies on the other hand. It challenges not only the androcentric reality construction in language but seeks to move from androcentric texts to patriarchal-historical contexts. Whereas androcentrism characterizes a *mindset*, patriarchy represents a social-cultural system in which a few men have power over other men, women, children, slaves, and colonialized people. Feminist theology as a critical theology of liberation, therefore, seeks to develop not only a textual-biblical hermeneutics but also a historical-biblical hermeneutics of liberation. Fundamentally, it challenges textual interpretations and historical reconstructions. See Collins, *Feminist Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship.*

[50] While Schüssler Fiorenza does not frame her work explicitly within reception history, her feminist hermeneutics engages many of the same concerns, particularly the historically situated effects of interpretation and the role of readers within communities. See, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word: Feminist Biblical Interpretation in Context* (London: T&T Clark, 1998). Also, Joynes, "Changing Horizons," 164.

[51] Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), 15–16.

Schüssler Fiorenza developed a feminist hermeneutical rhetorical model of interpretation based on how the Bible and its reception are read in both a deconstructive and a reconstructive mode. The deconstructive task involves identifying and challenging dominant androcentric language and interpretive frameworks, while the reconstructive task calls for feminist participation in order to keep *open* neglected historical meanings.[52] In this way, Schüssler Fiorenza expands the scope of hermeneutics and offers a feminist revision of the hermeneutical approach proposed by Gadamer, insisting on feminist models of historical reconstruction. History, she argues, must point to a *different* historical reality and integrate this into a feminist model of reconstruction. This does not involve a rewriting of history; rather it recognises that *historical imagination* is always at work in interpretation and in the reconstruction of historical events. Feminist interpreters, therefore, should not simply reject biblical texts on the basis of silence alone.[53]

> If the silences about women's historical experiences... are produced by androcentric language... then we have to find ways to break the silences of the texts. Rather than understand the texts as an adequate reflection of the reality about which they speak, we have to search for rhetorical clues and allusions that indicate the reality about which the texts are silent.... androcentric biblical texts are part of an overall puzzle and design that have to be fitted together in creative critical historical interpretation.[54]

Building on her deconstructive and reconstructive approach to biblical texts, Schüssler Fiorenza develops a feminist way of thinking about interpretation itself.[55] Rather than focusing solely on the relations between reader, text, and tradition, she explicitly brings *the world* into the interpretative process as a shaping presence.[56] The *new* element, the inclusion

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[52] Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "Remembering the Past," in Collins, *Feminist Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship,* 55. Also, Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word,* 80.

[53] Collins, *Feminist Perspectives,* 60.

[54] Collins, *Feminist Perspectives,* 60.

[55] Schüssler Fiorenza develops this framework through which she describes as a seven-step *hermeneutical dance*, designed to enable women to reclaim their spiritual authority, potentially leading to social and religious transformation. These interrelated strategies include: a hermeneutics of experience that socially locates interpretation; a hermeneutics of domination; a hermeneutics of suspicion; a hermeneutics of assessment and evaluation; a hermeneutics of reimagination; a hermeneutics of reconstruction; and a hermeneutics of change and transformation. As Schüssler Fiorenza emphasises, "These strategies are not to be construed simply as successive and progressive but must be understood as corrective, repetitive and interactive." Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word,* 76–77. For a more extensive discussion and use of this model in interpreting a text, see Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone,* 1–21.

[56] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word,* 78. The seven-step process integrates all four levels of meaning in the quest to revision biblical reception history from a feminist perspective.

of the *world* brings in socio-political formations and institutions ensuring that female Bible readers and all women struggling for survival and change, are given hermeneutical priority at the outset of the interpretation process. This expanded understanding of interpretation, particularly the inclusion of the *world,* provides an important foundation for the discussion that follows and will be taken up later in this chapter.

The emergence of feminist interpretation marked a new chapter in biblical interpretation and biblical reception history. Building on earlier work in this field, feminist scholars challenged the assumption that the history of interpretation was neutral, drawing attention to the ways in which power and exclusion have shaped how the Bible has been read and received. Feminist reception history therefore contributed to a broader redirection of attention toward the positions from which readers encounter and interpret the Bible.

1.9: Towards a Transformational Hermeneutic: *The World in Front of the Text*

The developments traced thus far – philosophical hermeneutics, reception history, and feminist reception history – have brought attention to interpretation as situated. In this context, the focus shifts from how biblical texts have been understood, towards the *effects* of interpretation in the lives of readers and communities. In this section, the concern is to identify and explore how interpretation takes effect both personally and within wider social contexts, and to consider the transformational potential. *Transformation* is not an incidental outcome of interpretation but a vital dimension of meaningful engagement with biblical texts, well captured by Lombaard's observation that "without transformation, spirituality is stagnant."[57] Importantly, for the purposes of this study, the link between understanding and *transformation* is already present within philosophical hermeneutics. Gadamer notes that the *event* of understanding, that is the end goal of interpretation, potentially leads to *transformation* of the reader. He writes,

> To reach an understanding is not merely a matter of putting oneself forward and successfully asserting one's own point of view but being transformed into a communion in which we do not remain what we were.[58]

[57] Christo Lombaard, "Biblical Spirituality and Transformation," *In Die Skriflig* 49, no. 2 (2015): 2, https://doi.org/10.4102/ids.v49i2.1950.

[58] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 379.

By linking the *event* of understanding and *transformation*, Gadamer believes that the reader is not simply grasping information but is involved in a deep interpretive engagement that can lead to change. The ontological and epistemological implications of understanding, as both an event and an outcome, remain at the core of Gadamer's writing on interpretation. To clarify how this transformative encounter takes shape, the work of Paul Ricœur is helpful. What Gadamer describes as the event of understanding, Ricœur articulates in terms of how texts open a world that reshapes the reader's self-understanding. Part of Ricœur's hermeneutical emphasis is on *opening oneself* to the possible world which unfolds in the reading of biblical texts.[59] Meaning is disclosed and revealed, rather than buried or hidden, thus shaping the reader towards a deeper understanding of oneself. [60] Ricœur writes,

> The interpretation of a text culminates in the self-interpretation of a subject who thenceforth understands himself better, understands himself differently, or simply begins to understand himself.... understanding the text is not an end in itself; it mediates the relation to himself of a subject who does not find the meaning of his own life.[61]

The Bible like any literary text has the capacity to create a world which it projects *in front of itself.* Texts open up ways for readers to situate themselves within what is disclosed. Ricœur names this dynamic *the world in front of the text* as opposed to the world out of which the text came, or the *world behind the text*. According to Ricœur, readers have a finite capacity for understanding yet when they allow themselves to be addressed by the text they may receive what he describes as *an enlarged self* - an understanding that is not merely informative but potentially transformative.[62] In *Interpretation Theory,* Ricœur argues that once a text is written it is not bound to the intentions of its author nor limited to its earliest reception. Unlike the spoken word in conversation, the written text is able to move beyond the circumstances of its production.[63] The contemporary reader is therefore not disadvantaged in relation to earlier readers, since meaning is not confined to what an author once intended to

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[59] Paul Ricœur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation, ed. and trans. John B. Thompson* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981) 18.

[60] Ricœur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences,* 177.

[61] Ricœur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 159.

[62] Ricœur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences,* 143.

[63] Ricœur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning*, (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976), 31.

say but unfolds through the encounter between text and reader. For Ricœur, texts project a world in front of themselves, inviting readers to see themselves and their lives differently.

In his book *The Conflict of Interpretations* Ricœur develops the movement of the reader from a first naïveté, through criticism, to the second naïveté.[64] The first naïveté is an immediate and unreflective mode of understanding, in which the subject matter is so transparent that the reader is scarcely aware of the text as text – for example, a street-sign or a placard. In the naïveté within this first context, meaning is received without distance. Movement toward the second naïveté requires a process of critical distancing, in which the reader steps back from the text and takes a critical view. Ricœur refers to this moment as a *hermeneutics of suspicion,* an approach that focuses on questioning and analysing the motives and underlying assumptions in the text. By calling attention to the ways in which texts are shaped by power and ideology, it helps to encourage readers to examine their own presuppositions rather than simply confirming them. Here, clear links emerge with feminist scholars such as Schüssler Fiorenza, as well as with Gadamer's emphasis on *tradition* and the role of prejudgement in understanding.

For Ricœur, this *critical distancing* is essential if interpretation is to become transformative. Without distance, the reader remains enclosed with familiar readings. When the text is allowed to retain its otherness and strangeness, however, a genuine dialogue can take place between the text and the reader. It is through this dialogue that the reader may move beyond critique toward what Ricœur calls the second naïveté, or *appropriation*: making one's own that which is initially other. In this moment, the text becomes the medium through which the reader's self-understanding may be reshaped.[65] At this point, Ricouer's thought comes into close conversation with Gadamer. Understanding moves away from explanation alone and towards participation in a meaning that addresses the reader and draws them into a transformed way of seeing and being. It is also worth noting – as anticipated earlier – that both Ricouer and Schüssler Fiorenza give priority to the *world* disclosed by the text, a shared

[64] While Ricœur develops this movement across a number of works, it is perhaps most memorably expressed in *The Symbolism of Evil,* where he writes, "It is in the age when our language has become more precise, more univocal, more technical... that we want to recharge our language, that we want to start again from the fullness of language... Beyond the desert of criticism, we wish to be called again." Paul Ricœur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, trans. Emerson Buchanan, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967). 351

[65] Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text,* 170–71.

emphasis highlighting how meaning is continually reconstituted through acts of reception across time, as readers enter and inhabit the world the text opens before them.

1.10: The Bible and Transformation - The Work of Sandra M. Schneiders

If interpretation is understood in these terms, then questions of *transformation* can no longer remain implicit but require a framework that attends explicitly to how engagement with the Bible shapes readers. In this context, my attention now turns toward what has come to be described as the emerging field of *biblical spirituality*, understood by Schneiders as "transformative participation in the spiritual dynamics of Scripture."[66] Here, interpretation is oriented toward the ways readers are formed, challenged and changed through their encounter with the biblical text.

In *The Revelatory Text,* Schneiders builds on the hermeneutical work of Paul Ricœur.[67] She draws on philosophical hermeneutics and critical biblical scholarship to argue that the end point of biblical interpretation is transformation, "not some willed change in attitude or behaviour brought about by an intrinsic process that follows from exegesis or criticism, but rather the *effect* of interpreting on the interpreter."[68] For Schneiders, sacred texts function as a locus of encounter in which a new world opens before the reader, allowing them to enter, dwell within and be transformed in the process.[69]

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[66] Sandra M. Schneiders, "Biblical Spirituality," *Interpretation* 70 no. 4 (2016): 421, https://doi.org/10.1177/0020964316655108. Schneiders also draws on Lombard's distinction between transformation *and* the Bible and transformation *in* the Bible, the former referring to the way the Bible shapes the lives of readers. Related hermeneutical concerns are also addressed earlier by Anthony C. Thiselton who explores how interpretation becomes transformative when readers appropriate biblical texts through analogy and self-involving understanding, so that, by means of parallels and analogies, readers experience these biblical examples as instructive to their lives. See, Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description with Special Reference to Heidegger, Bultmann, Gadamer, and Wittgenstein* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1980).

[67] Schnieders has repeatedly acknowledged the formative influence of Paul Ricouer on her work, noting that his book *Interpretation Theory* has had a more profound impact on her thinking than any other single book. Schneiders draws especially on Ricœur's account of appropriation, understood as a process by which meaning moves from explanation to self-involving understanding, and aligns this with his progression from first naïveté through critical distance toward second naïveté. This Ricœur framework underpins her account of interpretation as both participatory and transformative.

[68] Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text,* 21.

[69] Schneiders reminds us that it is important to realize that the "world the text projects" is not the imaginative, fictional world of the work, for example, the land of Oz or the inn to which the Good Samaritan took the victim of the robbers. The fiction is the vehicle that carries the reader into a possible alternative *reality.* The reader has experienced a whole range of emotion that is not related to a response to everyday life. The reader can be moved to tears or elated or with a renewed sense of hope. One has lived a different life, in a different world, and returns to the reality of everyday life changed in some way. Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text*, 167.

Schneiders' work is central to this study because she brings hermeneutics and spirituality into explicit conversation, establishing *biblical spirituality* as a distinct academic field.[70] She succinctly defines spirituality as "the *lived experience* of Christian faith" and she returns to the central question of this discipline time and again; how has the Bible promoted the lived experience of God through Christ – does it give rise to and shape the faith of believers? She is primarily interested in how people encounter God in the process of interpretation. Her vision for this work does not only have an intrinsic connection to biblical hermeneutics, but it also belongs firmly in the living faith life of the reader - a *living* and *active* participation in transformative interpretation and a willingness to be challenged to living a true Christian vocation.

A defining feature of Schneiders *biblical spirituality* is its insistence that *transformation* belongs to interpretation, not something that is added on to the process. Interpretation reaches its fulfilment, for her, in the *transformation* of the reader that may subsequently become visible in changed actions or decisions in one's life. As Schneiders writes,

> The transforming effect.... is analogous to the effect on the audience of participating in a play. Watching the play participatively is an act of interpretation that terminates in the transformation of the viewer through the aesthetic experience itself.[71]

Here, the influence of reception-oriented and aesthetic approaches to reading is evident. As with Jauss, meaning emerges through the reader's engagement, as understanding unfolds in what the text discloses. Schneiders' work can be understood as part of a wider movement in this chapter. She does not propose a standalone theory but builds on Ricouer's hermeneutics by bringing an aesthetic attentiveness into view. Aesthetic engagement is not incidental, but

[70] In her article "Biblical Spirituality: Text and Transformation", Schneiders presents a threefold distinction among meanings of biblical spirituality. Firstly, the lived experience that gave rise to the biblical text – it is the spirituality of the chosen people of God, discerned by exegesis. Secondly the various ways in the which biblical text has been interpreted in different contexts and various interpretations by individuals and communities. Thirdly, how the bible functions or has engaged to promote the *lived experience* of God in Christ down through the ages. It is this third meaning, the spirituality that the Bible produces in readers by their interaction with it, is what concerns her. Sandra M. Schneiders, "Biblical Spirituality: Text and Transformation," in *The Bible and Spirituality: Exploratory Essays in Reading Scripture Spiritually*, ed. Andrew T. Lincoln, J. Gordon McConville, and Lloyd K. Pietersen (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013), 130–34.

[71] Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text,* 196.

integral to her description of Ricœur's three hermeneutical perspectives in *The Revelatory Text* and to her understanding of biblical spirituality.[72]

1.11: Expanding the Field of Biblical Spirituality

In 2013, the *Centre for the Study of the Bible and Spirituality* at the University of Gloucestershire published a volume of essays arising from an international symposium on the Bible and spirituality. The symposium acknowledged that relatively few biblical scholars had explicitly engaged with the broader phenomenon of spirituality within their work. By bringing together biblical scholars with others working in spirituality, however, it became possible to foster critical and constructive cross-disciplinary dialogue on contemporary perspectives and on the place of spirituality within biblical studies. Academic work in biblical spirituality was, at this point, still in its early stages as a distinct field of inquiry.

Within this emerging context, the work of Sandra Schneiders remains foundational, particularly in her insistence that biblical interpretation must be understood in relation to *transformation*. Alongside Schneiders, the work of Kees Waaijman is also of note, especially in his articulation of biblical spirituality as lived experience and his emphasis on transformation as a characteristic feature.[73] Related work has also emerged internationally, including research centres in South Africa at the University of Free State, Bloemfontein, and at the Titus Brandsma Institute at the University of Nijmegen in the Netherlands.

While Schneiders' contribution has been central in shaping *biblical spirituality* as a field concerned with transformative interpretation, her work also raises further questions about the *aesthetic* dimensions of how biblical texts are received. It is at this intersection of biblical studies and spirituality that Schneiders has, in her more recent work, turned to theopoetics as a way of articulating experiences of God that cannot be fully carried by conceptual theological language alone.[74]

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[72] Schneiders develops Ricœur's three hermeneutical perspectives through an explicitly aesthetic lens. By *behind the text* she refers to the theological-spiritual imagination of the communities and authors that gave rise to the text, corresponding to the historical dimension emphasised by Gadamer. *The text itself* highlights the ways biblical texts function through narrative, imagery and dramatic presentation, engaging readers in a world that can be imaginatively inhabited. *Before the text* names the reader's aesthetic surrender to the *world before the text,* an openness to the world the text projects. This is followed by critical existential interpretation of the meaning of the truth claims of the text, culminating in the transformative encounter Schneiders understands as the completion of interpretation. See, Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text,* 148–50.

[73] Kees Waaijman, *Spirituality: Forms, Foundations, Methods, trans. John Vriend* (Leuven: Peeters, 2002).

[74] For further development of this turn, see Schneiders later work wherein she explicitly turns to the category of theopoetics to address dimensions of religious experience that are not always adequately expressed through conceptual or analytical theological discourse alone. In her study of Teresa of Avila, she argues that her writings

1.12: Theopoetics

In engaging theopoetics, Schneiders provides an entry point into a wider field of theological reflection concerned with the aesthetic and imaginative expression of religious experience. This move signals a concern not only with the *effects* of interpretation, but with *response* - with the many creative and experiential ways people come to speak about God.[75] This section situates theopoetics within the hermeneutical trajectory already outlined – from philosophical hermeneutics, through reception history to the world-disclosing and transformative dimensions of interpretation – offering a way of thinking about how interpretation opens into *response.* Within this trajectory, theopoetics recognises readers as active participants in interpretation whose engagement contributes to the ongoing articulation of meaning.[76] One definition of theopoetics that helpfully captures this is offered by Schneiders:

> The interactive meeting ground of literary biblical studies, theology, and spirituality is precisely theopoetics or a theory of the spiritually transformative power of biblical texts as texts, actualized through a certain kind of reading or interpretation . . . It would probably be accurate to say that theopoetics is the literary or textual face of the wider concern with theological aesthetics as an approach to spirituality.[77]

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are best understood as theo-poetic rather than theo-logic, insofar as they employ aesthetic and imaginative language to give form to lived encounter with God. Schneiders suggests that such theopoetic articulation offers a complimentary mode of expression, creating an experiential hermeneutical dwelling place that invites readers into participation. Sandra M. Schneiders, "The Jesus Mysticism of Teresa of Avila: Its Importance for Theology and Contemporary Spirituality," *Berkeley Journal of Religion and Theology*2, no. 2 (2016): 43–74.

[75] Amos N. Wilder's account of theopoetics is formative here. In *Theopoetic: Theology and the Religious Imagination* Wilder frames theopoetics as a critical mode of reflection on religious experience that reflects the close relationship between humans and the divine. Poetic and imaginative forms of expression, he argues, can convey the depth of religious experience in ways that remain close to how faith is lived. Wilder's approach to theopoetics is rooted in biblical studies, where language discloses and shapes religious experience through image, symbol and narrative. Wilder writes, "we speak about a theopoetic because the theme of divinity requires a dynamic and dramatic speech. Divinity has to do with the glory of God and the creature's participation in it." Amos N. Wilder, *Theopoetic: Theology and the Religious Imagination* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2013), 12.

[76] For an accessible and wide-ranging introduction to the field of theopoetics, see L. Callid Keefe-Perry et al., *Way to Water: A Theopoetics Primer,* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014). Also, Silas Krabbe, *A Beautiful Bricolage: Theopoetics as God-Talk for Our Time* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2016).

[77] Sandra M. Schneiders, definition of theopoetics, *Arts Religion and Culture (ARC)* https://artsreligionculture.org/definitions *Arts, Religion, and Culture (ARC)* is a project devoted to the exploration of theopoetics and the dialogue between theology, the arts and contemporary culture. It traces its origins to the *Society for Arts, Religion and Contemporary Culture (SARCC)* founded in 1962 with Marvin Halverson as executive director. The founding board included Alfred Barr, founder of the museum of modern art, theologian Paul Tillich, and biblical scholar Amos N. Wilder. SARCC was established to recognise and foster work that advanced religion, the arts and contemporary cultural expression. Over the decades, this work developed through a number of institutional forms, including the *Association for Theopoetics Research and Exploration (ATRE)*. In 2017, SARCC and ATRE merged to form *Arts, Religion and Culture (ARC)*. ARC continues the legacy by providing a platform for scholarship and practice that attends to the imaginative,

A turn to theopoetics matters here because when interpretation is understood as genuinely *transformative*, opening readers to the *world in front of the text* and inviting new ways of seeing and living, then the language and forms used to speak about that encounter must be able to hold the depth of what is experienced. While analytic or descriptive accounts of interpretation can describe or explain clearly, they do not always convey experiences that are lived or affective in character – experiences that are *felt* as well as understood. In such cases, other forms of expression are needed: metaphor, story, art, music, poetry, journaling, symbol, or testimony. These forms *come out* of the encounter itself and give voice to understanding as it is experienced. More technical language can describe *what a text means*, but additional forms of expression are often needed to speak of the *lived change* that interpretation brings about in how people feel and live. Theopoetics attends to this difference by opening space for multiple voices, making room for statements such as, *this is what the text did to me*.[78] Theopoetics names this hermeneutical pressure point as the need for language and form capable of holding what cannot be exhausted by interpretation, as the meaning disclosed in interpretation continues to unfold and deepen in lived experience.

This pressure on language is not confined to biblical interpretation alone and points beyond hermeneutics itself. It is important to note that questions about language and interpretation did not emerge in isolation but took shape within a wider moment of the 1960s. To understand the emergence of theopoetics as a field within its own right, it therefore needs to be situated within this wider theological and cultural context of the mid-twentieth century. This period also saw the emergence of movements such as *Death of God* theology, alongside liberation, feminist and other contextual theologies, each responding in different ways to a growing sense that theological language had reached a point of crisis and needed new ways of speaking about God.[79] Although feminist reception history and feminist hermeneutics were

aesthetic and experiential dimensions of religious life. See Arts, Religion, and Culture, 'Our Story', https://artsreligionculture.org/history

[78] This emphasis resonates with Heather Walton's account of theopoetics as emerging where theological language breaks down in the face of lived experience, rupture and loss. Walton argues that such moments require "the confrontation of theology with claims it has denied and the creation of God-speech beyond the forms in which it is currently expressed." She frames her own project as a search for "a theopoetics that can communicate in the context of broken, stone-flesh faith" signalling a mode of theological speech that stays with fragility and loss rather than trying to resolve or explain them away. Heather Walton, "Theopoetics in Ruins," *Toronto Journal of Theology 36, No. 2*, (2020): 159–69.

[79] The 1960s brought significant cultural and social change in the United States that contributed to a broader apprehension that Christianity was declining. One of the philosophical and theological movements that emerged was known as the *Death of God* movement that rejected traditional concepts of God as an all-knowing, all-

considered earlier in this chapter, the trajectory traced here is not intended as a chronological history. Theopoetics is taken up here because it brings sharply into focus questions that have been emerging at this point rather than because it comes last historically. Theopoetics can be understood as an early response to these shared pressures distinctive in its attention to the renewal of language and the role of imagination in religious life. As Wilder writes,

> When imagination fails doctrines become ossified, witness and proclamation wooden, doxologies and litanies empty, consolations hollow, and ethics legalistic.... Then what once gave life begins to lull and finally to suffocate us.[80]

It is against this backdrop that the term theopoetics emerges. The term itself can be traced to Stanley Hopper, and later to Amos Wilder, both writing in a context marked by widespread disengagement from traditional forms of Christian belief and language.[81] For Hopper, and subsequently for Wilder, theopoetics named an attempt to respond to the situation by recovering ways of speaking about God that could once again engage imagination and symbol. Their work did not announce the collapse of faith nor was it an abandonment of theology but it sought forms of theological renewal capable of responding to a perceived crisis of meaning. Alongside Hopper and Wilder, a number of theologians were exploring related concerns during this period, contributing to what would later be recognised as a broader theopoetic conversation.[82]

While theopoetics generated some early interest, the theological landscape of the 1970s and 1980s in the United States was increasingly shaped by a resurgent conservative

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powerful deity and argued that God was a human construct. Thomas J.J. Altizer and William Hamilton, *Radical Theology and the Death of God* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966).

[80] Wilder, *Theopoetic*, 1.

[81] Stanley Hopper (1937 – 2010) was an American theologian and writer who is credited with coining this term in the 1960s. His theological approach focused on the creative and imaginative aspects of religious thought and practice. In 1975 he co-founded the journal CrossCurrents which aimed to explore the intersections of theology, culture and the arts. Stanley Romaine Hopper, "The Literary Imagination and the Doing of Theology," in *The Way of Transfiguration: Religious Imagination as Theopoiesis*, ed. R. Melvin Keiser and Tony Stoneburner (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992), 207–29.

[82] Alongside Hopper and Wilder, a number of theologians writing in the 1960s and early 1970s contributed to the emerging theopoetic sensibility, often without using the term itself. Particularly influential is Rubem Alves, whose early work explored imagination and poetic language as central to theological reflection; see for example, Rubem Alves, *Transparencies of Eternity: The Poetics of Religious Experience* (New York: Crossroad, 1989). Rubem Alves, *Tomorrow's Child: Imagination, Creativity, and the Rebirth of Culture* (London: SCM Press, 1972).

evangelicalism. This context tended to prioritise biblical authority and doctrinal clarity leaving little space for a theological approach that emphasised imagination and aesthetic expression.[83] Within this climate theopoetics remained marginal. This situation would change in the decades that followed. Its re-emergence in the 1990s occurred for two reasons. First, renewed critical attention to the relationship between theology and structures of power created space for other theological possibilities. Second, a new generation of theologians and philosophers, shaped by continental thinkers such as Ricœur, began to retrieve theopoetics within university settings as a hermeneutically grounded approach to religious meaning and transformation.[84] As a result, theopoetics came back into view and was taken up again in new ways and renewed attention to its possibilities.

1.13: Conclusion

This chapter has charted the relationship between biblical interpretation and theopoetics, exploring hermeneutics, feminist interpretation, reception history, biblical spirituality, and theopoetics. It gives language to what emerges within interpretation without leaving interpretation behind, remaining faithful to a historically situated and relational understanding of *meaning*. This chapter has situated theopoetics within a trajectory that moves from questions of understanding toward the effects of interpretation and the forms of response they call forth, rather than treating theopoetics as a standalone method.

What remains unresolved, however, is how a theopoetic approach that opens out to *response* can be theologically sustained without collapsing into subjectivism. Theology cannot rest solely at the level of personal experience. If theopoetics remains only a mode of individual expression, it risks becoming autobiographical, therapeutic or private spirituality rather than theological reflection. There is also a risk that creative expression becomes self-justifying, so

[83] For a widely read account of the rise and consolidation of conservative evangelicalism in the United States during this period, see Kristin Kobes Du Mez, *Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation* (New York: Liveright Publishing, 2020). Although this is not a work on theology, Du Mez provides a helpful overview of cultural and religious aspects that shaped evangelical priorities around authority and orthodoxy.

[84] These include Melanie Duguid-May, Scott Holland, Catherine Keller and Richard Kearney. Their work was concerned with how religious discourse was tied up with questions of power, embodiment, representation, and the self. The 1980s drew theological focus to methodology in general, particularly in relation to liberation theology, pragmaticism and emerging identity-based approaches. By the 1990s theologians such as Duguid-May, and soon after Holland, began to retrieve theopoetics as a constructive theological mode. At the same time, Keller and Kearney were developing closely related accounts of imagination and relationality that would later contribute to its renewed significance.

that what *feels* meaningful is taken as sufficient in itself. In going forward, theopoetics requires theological grounding.

These concerns are taken up in the following chapter through a turn to *process theopoetics*. This emphasis on *process* does not represent a departure from the hermeneutical foundations established here but offers a way of further grounding theopoetics within a theological framework suited to understanding what Bible Journalers are doing in and with their Bibles. It provides a way of interpreting their responses to biblical texts as theopoetic, while remaining rooted in theological reflection. If hermeneutics is understood in *transformative* terms, then a theological framework becomes necessary that can hold interpretation and response together. This next chapter explores *process theopoetics* as one such framework.

Chapter Two: Exploring a Framework of Process Theopoetics

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I traced the relationship between biblical interpretation and theopoetics, exploring hermeneutics, feminist interpretation, reception history, biblical spirituality, and theopoetics. I also proposed theopoetics as a constructive lens and conversation partner for engaging the practice of Bible Journaling. Building on this trajectory, this chapter turns to *process theopoetics* as the specific theoretical framework that grounds and extends my inquiry. By introducing the concept of *process* into theopoetics, I seek to deepen the account of how Bible Journaling can be understood theologically and to explore further the connection between theopoetics and Bible Journaling.[1]

2.1: Towards A Process Theopoetics Framework

In chapter one, I discussed the origin of the term theopoetics as it emerged with Stanley Hopper in the 1960s. Rooted in the philosophically grounded movement towards social change, theopoetics offered a distinctive theological emphasis by highlighting the poetic nature of religious language within traditions shaped by conceptual systematics. Since the initial emergence and use of the term in the 1960s, a wide range of thought has come under the heading of *theopoetics*, combining elements of poetic analysis, process theology, narrative theology and postmodern philosophy. In more recent years, there has been a renewed interest in theopoetics along a number of distinct but overlapping trajectories. One prominent strand integrates insights from process theology, postmodern philosophy and radical theology, with notable figures such as Catherine Keller, John D. Caputo, Roland Faber, Richard Kearney, Peter Rollins, Scott Holland, Melanie May and Matt Guynn, contributing in different ways to this development. Alongside this, another trajectory within contemporary theopoetic reflection draws more explicitly on classical theological aesthetics, especially the themes of beauty, truth and transcendence, often in conversation with Hans Urs von Balthasar.[2]

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[1] In what follows, all biblical quotations are from the NRSV unless otherwise stated

[2] This approach is led by scholars, Anne M. Carpenter of St. Mary's College, California, Richard Viladesau of Fordham University, and Brian Nixon of Veritas International University. This particular strand of theopoetics is rooted in von Balthasar's belief in the use of poetic expression as a conduit through which God communicates with humanity. God speaks to us in the Incarnation; therefore, all qualities of human language are employed as created *grammar* by which God expresses Godself to us. By placing God at the centre of creative expression, poetry assumes an authentic role in theological language. Anne M. Carpenter, *Theo-Poetics: Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Risk of Art and Being* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2015).

The framework for my thesis aligns with the first trajectory as described above. It builds upon the scholarship in recent years that emphasises a more interdisciplinary approach to theology and poetics. The framework I am developing, which I have titled *process theopoetics,* necessitates a broad definition at this foundational stage. Process theopoetics combines the insights of process philosophy[3] and process theology[4] with the imaginative and creative power of the arts. While the previous chapter traced the hermeneutical foundations of theopoetics, I will now broaden the scope of theopoetics, while at the same time narrowing the focus of this thesis, through the introduction of *process*. Why is this important? Firstly, incorporating process enables exploration into the relationality between God and humanity. By exploring artistic expression as a creative response to a God who creates, insights emerge within this relationship that invite a more embodied and transformative engagement with theological questions, recognising that abstract and cognitive reasoning alone does not exhaust theological inquiry. Such an approach acknowledges that theological understanding is not solely an intellectual exercise but also a *lived* and *embodied* experience. Secondly, by incorporating the concept of process into theopoetics, we recognise that creative interpretation is ongoing and continual thus inviting more interpretations, more artwork and new insights. In line with process thought, there is never a fixed endpoint and each interpretation only brings new perspectives. Therefore, this line of inquiry incorporates aspects pertaining to meaning-making, imagination and expressing the mystery of God. Finally, incorporating process into theopoetics enables exploration into *poiesis,* a Greek word which means to make something that previously did not exist, via action, through a creative

[3] Process philosophy is a perspective that focuses on change and becoming rather on fixed states – Hegel, Bergson and Dewey are among influential modern thinkers who have stressed *process* in contrast with static being or substance. See John B Cobb Jr. and David Ray Griffin, *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition.* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976). Process philosophy builds on the works of philosophers such as Henri Bergson 1859 - 1941 (see, *Creative Evolution* 1907) and William James 1842 - 1910 (see *A pluralistic Universe* 1909. James, in particular, explored the nature of consciousness and argued that the self is not a fixed entity but rather an ever-changing process, continually shaped by our thoughts, emotions, and interactions with the world. It's most influential figure, however, is Alfred North Whitehead, whose *Process and Reality* laid out the foundations of process philosophy and provided the most comprehensive metaphysical articulation of process philosophy, presenting reality as constituted by events ("actual occasions") rather than enduring substances.

[4] In terms of theology, process theology emerged within twentieth-century Protestant contexts and has developed in dialogue with liberation, feminist and ecological movements. It arose from liberal Protestantism and became institutionally associated with the Claremont School of Theology, Los Angeles California, a major centre for Whitehead's ideas. While rooted in Whitehead's metaphysics, it was John B. Cobb Jr, who developed it into a constructive Christian framework, most notably in *A Christian Natural Theology* (1965), widely recognised as a foundational text in process theology. Through his work at Claremont, Cobb helped institutionalise process thought as a theological movement and founded the journal of *Process Studies.* In later decades, process theology entered into dialogue with liberation, feminist and ecological theologies, expanding its constructive scope and challenging dominant Western ways of doing theology.

practice. The conceptual roots of theopoetics can be traced to the word *poiesis* which is particularly relevant when considering the practice of Bible Journaling. In the opening section of this chapter, an exploration of the concept of *poiesis* will be undertaken along with its relevance to Bible Journaling. From this, the investigation will trace a trajectory towards process theopoetics, incorporating the foundational contributions put forward by process thinkers including Alfred North Whitehead.

2.2: *Poiesis*: The Conceptual Root of Theopoetics

Contemporary discussions of theopoetics often locate its emergence within the hermeneutical pressures surrounding meaning, language, and interpretation that emerged in the United States during the 1960s, as outlined in chapter 1. While this modern context is significant, theopoetics also draws on a deeper conceptual inheritance in the ancient Greek word *poiesis*. This earlier concept continues to inform how the term is used in modern scholarship where *theopoetics* is often used interchangeable with *theopoiesis* to describe a way of doing theology that is both reflective and creative, naming a long-standing intuition that theology and creativity belong together. This shared usage provides an important conceptual backdrop for the discussion that follows.

Poiesis conveys the idea of making or bringing something into presence.[5] While this term has an obvious connection to poetry, this *making* extends beyond poetry to encompass various art forms including, music, literature, visual arts as well as any form of creative expression. In its classical usage, *poiesis* does not refer specifically to divine activity but more broadly to the processes of making or bringing forth. Its theological use here, within the context of *poiesis* as a conceptual root of theopoetics, involves an extension of this meaning to describe divine creativity. Human acts of making can be understood as participating in the creative activity of God, rather than simply imitating it, with creative practice functioning as a form of responsive or inspired form of *making* in which human creativity aligns with and is guided by

[5] Derek H Whitehead, '*Poiesis and Art-Making: A Way of Letting-Be*' *Contemporary Aesthetics* 1 (2003): 5. In this article, Whitehead writes that the word *poiesis* was conceived as bringing something from concealment into the light of a created work, describing it as an unveiling, a making that leads works of art into presence. This understanding of *poiesis* has ancient Greek lineage. In *Nacomachean Ethics* Aristotle discusses *poiesis* in relation to art or technical skill (techne), where it refers to a form of making that produces something or "causes to appear." Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics,* Trans. J.A.K. Thomson (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), 208. A related development appears in Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," in *Aesthetics*, ed. David Goldblatt, Lee B. Brown, and Stephanie Patridge, 4th ed. (London: Routledge, 2017) esp. section 1 "Thing and Work."

the divine source of creation. The creator God *makes* humanity that reflects their creator, with humans subsequently *re-making* their Creator through images, prose, songs, paintings and poems. This concept underscores the belief that creativity and *making/re-making* are not just human endeavours but can also be regarded as acts of co-creation with the divine. Within this context, *making/re-making* is considered a sacred activity since it involves *making* something in the likeness of something else, thus art becomes a divine-human interplay, perpetually creating again and again.[6]

In what follows, I argue that Bible Journalers engage in a process that may be understood as *poiesis.* The act of creating artworks within Bible Journaling functions as a form of bringing forth in which Journalers' creative outputs participate in the divine act of creation and orient themselves toward the God who brought forth the world.[7] This claim will be developed within the process theopoetic framework that shapes this chapter.

Given that the *poiesis* of Bible Journaling unfolds within the pages of the Bible I now turn to the biblical texts themselves to consider how divine creative activity is expressed within

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[6] The language of likeness and divine-human interplay recalls the patristic doctrine of *theosis* (*divinization*) articulated in Eastern Christian theology as growth into the likeness of God through participation in divine life. Athanasius' well-known formulation "God became human so that we might become God" – and Irenaeus' claim that "the glory of God is the human being fully alive" express this transformative vision. In patristic thought, *theosis* concerns union with and participation in God grounded in the incarnation and must be understood within its Christological context. Although distinct from the Greek notion of *poiesis, theosis* is introduced here because its emphasis on likeness to God provides a theological backdrop for understanding why acts of making might be described as sacred within a relational divine-human framework. For more, see Michael J. Christensen, "Partakers of the Divine Nature: The Problem, Promise and Process of Theosis," *Journal of Christian Education & Information Technology* 8 (2005): 15–30.

[7] This is a common thread and theme in many Bible Journaling entries; the idea that God has created, thus enabling and empowering the Bible Journaler also to create:
Example 1: @biblejournalingsuss, "ex35createdtocreate," *The New Illuminators*, accessed November 25, 2024, https://nisar.omeka.net/items/show/528. See Appendix A, Fig. A1

Example 2: @ninas.bible.journal, "gen1iamcreatedtocreate," *The New Illuminators*, accessed November 25, 2024, https://nisar.omeka.net/items/show/583. See Appendix A, Fig. A2

Example 3: @createfullliving, "john4reflectinghisglory," *The New Illuminators*, accessed November 25, 2024, https://nisar.omeka.net/items/show/653. See Appendix A, Fig. A3

Example 4: Jeanette Morrison, "gen1create," *The New Illuminators*, accessed November 25, 2024, https://nisar.omeka.net/items/show/766. See Appendix A, Fig. A4

Example 5: Lori C Johnson, "1cor12iamcreatedtocreate," *The New Illuminators*, accessed November 25, 2024, https://nisar.omeka.net/items/show/861. See Appendix A, Fig. A5

Example 6: Leslie Ryan Cherry, "exod35theultimatecreator," *The New Illuminators*, accessed November 25, 2024, https://nisar.omeka.net/items/show/872. See Appendix A, Fig.A6

them. This shift is important in order to preserve the distinction between human and divine making, while also allowing the concept of *poiesis* to be used as an interpretive lens to further understand God's ability to create from the viewpoint of relational love.

In Genesis 1:1, 1:7 1:27 a range of verbs are used to describe God's creating including both creating and making. Although this range is less visible in the English translation, it is reflected in the varied descriptions of divine action within the text. For example,

> In the beginning, God *created* the heavens and the earth...So God *made* the dome and separated the waters that were under the dome from the waters that were above the dome. And it was so... God *created* humankind in his image, in the image of God he *created* them; male and female he *created* them.

While there are various Hebrew terms used for God's creating and making in the Hebrew Bible, these accounts may be read through the concept of *poiesis* as it has come to be understood by those in theopoetics.[8] Similar imagery can be found in Proverbs 8: 22 – 29 we see the developing scene of God's creation of wisdom,

> The Lord *created* me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of long ago.
> Ages ago I was formed, at the first, before the beginning of the earth.
> When there were no depths I was *brought forth*,
> when there were no springs abounding with water.
> Before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills, I was *brought forth*
> when he had not yet *made* earth and fields, or the world's first bits of soil.
> When he *established* the heavens, I was there,
> when he *drew a circle* on the face of the deep,
> when he *made* firm the skies above,
> when he *established* the fountains of the deep.

The verses above are cited from NRSV and the italicised verbs reflect the English translation's rendering of a range of Hebrew terms associated with bringing forth, establishing, and creating. While the underlying Hebrew and Greek texts use different verbs, the emphasis here is on how these actions collectively portray divine creative action.[9]

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[8] The Hebrew text employs a range of verbs for divine creation, particularly *bara* (to create) and *'asah* (to make or do) which are rendered in the Septuagint through a range of Greek verbs, including *poieō* (to make) and *ktizō* (to create). See, G. Johannes. Botterweck, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* vol. 2 s.v. bara, 'asah for discussion of the range of meanings associated with divine creation (Eerdmans, 1977).

[9] Proverbs 8:22 presents notable differences between the Hebrew and Greek traditions. The verb *qanah* can mean "to acquire" or "to bring forth" while the Septuagint renders this with *ktizō* "to create." See, G. Johannes

In the Wisdom of Solomon 9:1-2 the significance of wisdom's foundational power is even more explicit,

> God of my ancestors and Lord of mercy,
> Who have *made* all things by your word,
> and by your Wisdom have formed humankind.

This portrayal of God as one who both makes and forms is not confined to a single text but recurs across biblical literature. It extends towards the Psalms and Prophets where similar imagery emerges,

> Yet, O Lord, you are our Father;
> We are the clay and you are our potter;
> We are all the work of your hand. Isaiah 64:8
>
> For it was you who formed my inward parts;
> you knit me together in my mother's womb Psalm 139:13-14

The verses convey the imagery of God's ability to bring forth new life as an act of deep connection and intimacy with creation.[10] These texts portray God's creative activity as within this relational bond characterised by tenderness and sustaining care. Read through the concept of *poiesis* such portrayals of divine making may be understood as acts of bringing forth, inviting us to see the act of creation as an ongoing dialogue of love between God and the created world. In the later Christian tradition, this dynamic develops further through the idea of participation in completing the *new creation*. In light of *poiesis*, this may be understood as representing *a play of recreation* where humanity and divinity collaborate in the coming of the Kingdom, that is, first creation calls for second creation, re-creation or creation again.[11]

Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, eds., Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament, trans. John T. Willis, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975).

[10] The Hebrew verb *yatsar* meaning "to form" or "to shape" is frequently used in relation to divine creativity often in the context of a potter shaping clay (Isaiah 64:8). This imagery conveys a sense of intimate, hands-on formation emphasising the relational nature of God. Botterweck, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*.

[11] Richard Kearney, "God Making: An Essay in Theopoetic Imagination," *Journal of Aesthetics and Phenomenology* 4, no. 1 (2017): 31, https://doi.org/10.1080/20539320.2017.1319625.

> For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but a new creation is everything! Galatians 6:15.
>
> Thus, he has given us, through these things, his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of lust, and may become participants in the divine nature. 2 Peter 1:4
>
> For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life. Ephesians 2:10

Building upon this biblical foundation, the concept of *poiesis* is developed further in contemporary scholarship, particularly within process thought. The relational and dynamic patterns of divine creativity identified in the biblical texts find a natural point of development within process theology, which offers a framework that envisions a world marked by interrelatedness and relationality in which God maintains an intimate closeness and connection to the world. When read alongside *poiesis*, process thought offers a way of understanding how divine-human interplay is relationally interconnected within artistic and imaginative practice. In the following section, I will focus on the process thought of Alfred North Whitehead.[12] It is important to highlight that while process thinkers differ in their perspectives, this study will be grounded in the work of Whitehead, whose thought is notoriously difficult to comprehend. In this context, I will refrain from presenting a comprehensive overview or a definitive interpretation of Whitehead's ideas. Instead, I aim to outline the aspects of his philosophy that hold the most significance within my research framework and establish a connection with process theopoetics.

2.3: Alfred North Whitehead

Process thought is a broad philosophical framework based on the philosophy of its founder Alfred North Whitehead; a philosopher and mathematician whose later work engages theological questions in much depth. In Whitehead's magnum opus, *Process and Reality,* one of the most influential philosophical works of the twentieth century, Whitehead challenges readers to perceive and contemplate the world through a fresh lens.[13] He argues that

[12] Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947) is the founder of process thought. Whitehead often gets named with another important exponent of process philosophy, Charles Hartshorne. See, Charles Hartshorne, *The Divine Relativity: A Social Conception of God* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948). This study will focus on Whitehead as a pioneering figure in the conceptual development of process thought.

[13] Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, ed. David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne, corr. ed. (New York: Free Press, 1978).

traditional language, shaped by substance-based metaphysics, is often inadequate for articulating a process-relational vision of reality. Whitehead therefore introduces a distinctive and technical vocabulary in order to express this process-relational vision. He characterizes his philosophy as *speculative*, albeit with caution, as this notion can be misconstrued as presenting unsupported ideas.[14] However, Whitehead rejects this and contends that speculative thinking permeates all thought, implying that it does not settle on definite conclusions or doctrines claiming absolute certainty.

Whitehead's philosophy proposes a relational and process-oriented understanding of God, an *ongoing process,* rather than depicting God primarily as a static and isolated entity. He presents God as dynamically engaged with the unfolding world, responsive to and inclusive of temporal events. While process theologians find support for this understanding within Scripture, other Christian traditions also draw on Scripture in defending different understandings of God. Whitehead emphasises the ongoing nature of existence, highlighting the intrinsic value and creative potential present within every moment of reality. God is a *God-of-becoming* characterised by interconnectedness, a living, responsive God, an emphasis that process theologians find reflected in the Christian Scriptures, in contrast to classical theological interpretations that emphasise God's immutability. In this sense, *becoming* is more fundamental than *being* as the reality of the world is temporal and inherently creative.[15]

Whiteheadian philosophy presents an outlook of a universe striving for beauty and guided by a divine influence. Anything that can be thought or imagined *exists,* according to Whitehead; however more importance is given to a concrete particular, a *fully actual entity* – for example, a person or persons who are fully real and present in the world. A central task of Whitehead's philosophy is to explain what is *fully actual* and how it occurs. If we take a fully actual entity as a person or individual, each individual *actual entity* has their own unique experiences, thoughts, feelings and actions which embody the continuous flow of change and creativity that characterizes the world we experience. Various occurrences, happenings and events in life can affect individual *actual entities* which leads to interaction and connection to one another thus forming a web of interconnectedness. This Whitehead calls *actual occasions*

[14] Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 3–17.

[15] Gary Dorrien, "The Lure and Necessity of Process Theology," *CrossCurrents* 58, no. 2 (2008): 316–36, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1939-3881.2008.00026.x.

regarded as the *fundamental* building block of reality, and representing the inherent movement of creativity itself. An *actual occasion* represents a specific instance or *event* within this broader framework; therefore, it continuously rises and perishes, giving rise to the multiplicity of the world. John B. Cobb Jr states that the two clearest examples of *actual occasions* are a momentary experience whether of a human being or of some other animal, and a quantum of energy.[16] He believes that by giving them the same name, Whitehead calls attention to what, with all their differences, they have in common, what it *becomes* informs future *actual occasions*. An *actual occasion* is acted on, it acts in its own synthesizing of its data, and it acts in future occasions. Therefore, everything *actual* is in *process.*[17] Instead of the viewpoint of the world that is composed of physical entities that exist in space and time, with events being occurrences affecting or experienced by these entities, Whitehead's process thought brings an emphasis to the dynamic and relational nature of existence.

However, according to Whitehead, there is one *actual entity* that is not an *occasion* because it is everlasting and eternal. This *actual entity* is called God.[18] God is *primordial* and *consequent*, both the ground of all being (*primordial*) and intimately involved in every moment of existence (*consequent*). God's *primordial* nature is unaffected by the temporal unfolding of the world but is a presence at the heart of all possibilities and potentialities, the source of creativity that makes new experiences and *events* possible. In this view, God is not a distant, static figure but a presence within the ongoing creative process of the world. God is not before all creation but *with* all creation. Cobb, one of the chief builders, thinkers, and leaders of process theology, writes that Whitehead's notion of the *primordial* nature of God does not exhaust what God is as God is also *consequent,* responding to and experiencing the

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[16] John B Cobb Jr, *Whitehead Word Book, A Glossary with Alphabetical Index to Technical Terms in Process and Reality* (Claremont, CA: Process and Faith Press, 2008), 253.

[17] *Process* is a comprehensive term for all that is going on. For example, the *process* of dying and decay or the *process* of new life and growth. Connected to this term is *concrescence* which means a completed *actual occasion*, or quite literally "concrete." The use of this term places emphasis on the idea that there is a *process* of becoming and then there is a completed occasion. This takes time, focusing attention on the inner dynamics of the *becoming* of a single occasion. Whitehead, *Process and Reality,* 210 - 12

[18] Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 343. For a concise overview, see Charles Hartshorne, *Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984). This work provides the clearest outline of process theology's understanding of God. According to Hartshorne, this version of God is not perfect or unchanging. Notably, he emphasises that God *experiences* emotions and demonstrates sympathy towards human lives. Additionally, God does not possess omnipotence. As a result, human beings possess both creativity and freedom.

ongoing events within the world.[19] The characteristic feature of this response involves a compassionate and understanding involvement with the actualities of the world. As it unfolds, God engages in active responsiveness to the choices and experiences of all entities, aiming to promote harmony, beauty and overall well-being. According to Whitehead's work, God's nature at any given moment is contingent upon the unfolding events transpiring within the world. Therefore, the *consequent* nature of God always includes the *primordial* nature. Classical theologians such as Anselm and Aquinas affirmed divine immutability and timelessness yet have raised enduring questions of how such a God might be understood as responsive to human suffering.[20] Process theologians, drawing particularly on Whitehead, address this tension by rejecting the notion that God is timeless and unchanging by distinguishing between the *primordial* and *consequent* natures of God.

2.4: God Creates the World. The World Creates God

One of the most unique aspects of Whitehead's work is the presentation of six antitheses that although appearing self-contradictory, articulate the interconnectedness and mutual relatedness of God and world as a creative process. Found in the later sections of *Process and Reality*, these six antitheses can be regarded as an overview of Whitehead's understanding of the interaction between God and the world, offering a comprehensive summation of the entire creative process:

> It is as true to say that God is permanent and the world fluent,
> as that the world is permanent and God is fluent.
> It is as true to say that God is one and the World many,
> as that the World is one and God many.
> It is as true to say that, in comparison with the World, God is actual eminently,
> as that, in comparison with God, the World is actual eminently.
> It is as true to say that the world is immanent in God,
> as that God is immanent in the World.
> It is as true to say that God transcends the World,
> as that the World transcends God.
> It is as true to say that God creates the World,
> as that the World creates God.[21]

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[19] Whitehead, *Process and Reality* 345.

[20] Anselm, *Basic Writings*, ed. and trans. Thomas Williams (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2007); Thomas Aquinas *Summa Theologica,* trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (London*:* Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1989). See esp. *Summa Theologica* I, q. 21, a. 3; and II, q. 83, a. 2.

[21] Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 348.

These six antitheses can be applied to the world and its relationship with God and vice versa. Not only does the interaction go both ways but it continuously changes, revolving around four thematic contrasts: *permanence and flux*, *multiplicity and unity*, *immanence and transcendence*, and *actuality and creativity*. The most important antithesis for this thesis is the sixth in how it speaks about God and world mutually and asymmetrically creating each other, in reciprocity, in an *interprocess*[22] of *intercreativity.*[23] "It is as true to say that God creates the World, as that the World creates God." Before exploring the implications of the sixth antithesis for this thesis it is crucial to acknowledge the complexity that arises when presenting God and world in this way. Does it suggest that both God and world are somewhat equal in their capacity to create, make and remake one another? Keller writes that such an understanding takes on a new and risky meaning and asks if such God-creating is really only code for making God up. She agrees that by a certain reading, the answer could be yes.[24] She also asserts that no ancient theologian could let the making-divine unfold in the mutual making of God and world that the process model imagines. Considering this complexity, it is essential to now explicate what Whitehead means by this sixth antithesis.

Whitehead does not propose that God and world have equal abilities to create or that human and divine creating are the same. Rather, it is an understanding that lies in considering the distinct roles of the *primordial* and *consequent* natures of God. The *primordial* aspect of God is independent of the world process and is not conditioned by the world "the primordial nature of God has within it no components which are standards of comparison."[25] Whitehead is clear in his work that God's *primordial* nature is unaffected by the world; however, the

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[22] The term *interprocess* essentially emphasises mutual influence, dependence and connectedness between different processes. *Actual entities* are constantly interacting, shaping and being shaped by interactions. *Interprocess* underscores the belief that creativity is not solely contained within individual processes but emerges through their interactions, collaborations and interdependencies. It suggests that creativity emerges as God and world interact contributing to ongoing development and transformation.

[23] The term *intercreativity* is the creative matrix describing the essential mutual immanence of both God and world. There are two fundamental aspects to *intercreativity,* linked to Whitehead's concept of immanent and transcendent creativity which distinguishes between *active creativity* (involving the use of imagination, intention, and dynamism) and *receptive creativity* (seeking new ideas, knowledge or stimuli). I suggest that the field of Bible Journaling can be understood as an example where *active* and *receptive* creativity combine, where a relational and communicative world is revealed showing the same creativity in the mutual relation of God and Bible Journalers.

[24] Catherine Keller, "Theopoiesis and the Pluriverse: Notes on a Process," in Theopoetic Folds: Philosophizing Multifariousness, ed. Roland Faber and Jeremy Fackenthal (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 184.

[25] Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 47.

primordial God is eternally initiating through the eros of the *lure*, an aspect that will be considered in detail later in this chapter. The focus of the mutual creativity in the sixth antithesis, however, lies in the *consequent* nature of God. It is important to explore this further, by firstly considering Whitehead's understanding of *creativity* and then what he means by God and world mutually creating one another within the understanding of God's *consequent* nature.

When Whitehead speaks about *creativity* he identifies this as "the ultimate."[26] For Whitehead, creativity in the world should be thought of as *pure activity* and the ability of *events* to bring things forth, aligning more closely with the concept of energy in physics rather than what is meant when physicists speak of matter.[27] Whitehead writes about the *energy* of the past as a form of causal influence or even struggle that creates space for future choices. Although the future is unknown, it is imbued with the potential to reveal what is attainable or what is possible. Creativity thrives through the unfolding ongoing process emerging from the past and becomes effective within the arising of new *events.*

Whitehead has outlined creativity in the world; but how then can God the creator also *be created* as the sixth antithesis implies? Whitehead does not suggest that the world brings God into existence. Within the creative process there is a form of divine communication, or what Whitehead describes as divine *receptivity*. In our attempts to see the face of God, what we see is God's vision for us. That when we seek to hear the divine, we are being heard by God. That when we develop a connection or desire to know God, that desire is not isolated, but is felt and prehended within God's consequent nature. Creativity shapes God's consequent *becoming*, not from nothing, but in response to the *becoming* of the world. God calls and God seeks to be communicated – and so to *be created* insofar as it contributes to the enrichment of God's consequent nature. In other words, the ability to *be created* signifies the relational potentiality within God. This marks a distinct departure from the classical doctrines of divine

[26] Creativity plays the role in Whitehead that "being itself" plays in the Thomistic tradition. Whitehead calls creativity "the ultimate," a term notably he does not ascribe to God. Whitehead believes that if God were "the ultimate," God would be as responsible for the existence of evil in the world as for the good. For Whitehead such a God would not evoke worship. In this respect, there are real differences between the dominant Western understanding of God and that of Whitehead. John B. Cobb Jr., *Whitehead Word Book: A Glossary with Alphabetical Index to Technical Terms in Process and Reality* (Claremont, CA: P&F Press, 2008), 1760.

[27] https://www.britannica.com/browse/Matter-Energy#:~:text=Matter%20is%20the%20material%20substance,nuclear%2C%20or%20other%20various%20forms.

impassibility, while remaining central to Whitehead's interpretation of the sixth antithesis. As Keller writes "the divine in its consequent nature incessantly feels, prehends, and takes in the world – becomingly."[28]

In the sixth antithesis, Whitehead keeps the dynamic between the creating and the creatable God, a crucial aspect of Whitehead's vision. Another important aspect of Whitehead's thought is the shift from *opposition* to *contrast* which occurs in the words "as that."[29] It is this nuanced twist that converts the opposition (God and World) into a contrast.[30] Whitehead acknowledges this as he refers to it as a "contrasted opposite" and "apparent self-contradictions." This shift of meaning from opposition to *contrast* emphasises the interconnected and relational character of the relationship between God and world and brings up the dynamic processes that underlie our understanding. God is disclosed within the creative process of the unfolding world and enters into that very process.[31] In *contrast*, not opposition, God and world interact and challenge the notion of separation. According to Whitehead, God and world *encounter* each other and *communicate* where Godself is willing to share within this common creative field at a meeting point or *between.*[32]

It is within this context we see the relevance to contemporary Bible Journaling as this devotional practice offers this meeting point or *between.* Within the space of *poiesis* in Bible Journaling (that is, the making of something that did not exist and its outward action through a piece of artwork) individuals exemplify the dynamic encounter described by Whitehead. Bible Journalers speak of how they are influenced and shaped through their interactions with one another by sharing and commenting on individual journal entries (*interprocess),* and in their use of both *active* and *receptive* creative aspects in their practice (*intercreativity*).[33]

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[28] Keller, "Theopoiesis and the Pluriverse," 184.

[29] "It is as true to say that God creates the World, ***as that*** the World creates God."

[30] Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 193.

[31] Roland Faber, *God as Poet of the World: Exploring Process Theologies* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 82.

[32] Faber, *God as Poet of the World,* 170.

[33] While these terms are introduced above in relation to Whitehead's theological account of the God-world relationship, they are used here in a more practical sense to describe the relational and collaborative dynamics evident among the Bible Journaling community. There are many threads like this one on social media where Journalers encourage one another and assist each other in how to implement various techniques and the materials suitable to use. Commenting on each other's art, answering questions, engaging in one another's posts

There is also another connection between Whitehead's writings on the interconnectedness and mutual relatedness of God and world as a creative process and the field of Bible Journaling. As Whitehead's process philosophy suggests, nothing exists in isolation but instead emerges from and is orientated towards something else. This is relevant when considering the various arcs within people's lives such as hope and despair, becoming and perishing, growth and decay, weakness and strength, fulfilment and emptiness or presence and absence. Bible Journalers skilfully depict these themes through imaginative creations that illustrate the balance between tensions and harmonies present within the interconnected tapestry of our lives.

So far, I have introduced the work of Whitehead as a potential useful conversation partner for thinking about how Bible Journaling serves as a convergence or meeting point where God, the biblical text and the creative *poiesis* intersect. To advance this line of argument, I would like to explore this interconnected relationship further, under Whitehead's vision of God as *The Poet of the World.*

2.5: The Poet of the World – Theopoetics in Process Theology

In his exploration of God's *consequent* nature, Whitehead employs language and imagery that offers insights for exploring the field of Bible Journaling within a process theopoetic framework. According to his formulation, God can be understood as, "the *poet of the world*, who does not create the world, God saves it... with tender patience leading it by his vision, truth, beauty and goodness."[34] This perspective highlights two significant aspects: the notion of *God as Poet* and the concept of *tender patience.* Roland Faber interprets theopoetics as presenting God in the role of the Poet. Faber affirms Whitehead's conception of the term does

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and building up the community is an important part of many Facebook Bible Journaling groups: https://www.facebook.com/groups/167595257122263/permalink/1331054854109625

[34] Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 346. In the context of the sixth antithesis, it is not contradictory to assert in this instance that God "does not create the world." The creativity of God in the sixth antithesis refers to the process of mutual immanence that underlies all creative processes. This understanding aligns with one of the fundamental principles of process theology which posits that God does not create or control worldly events in a coercive manner. For example, God does not create the presence of evil in the world and does not exert power equated with human forces or oppressive measures. The most important insight of this thought for theopoetics can be found in the confirmation that Whitehead does not identify divine reality with the metaphysical ultimacy of creativity. God cannot be limited by a fixed definition, such as being understood as a person, force, or substance. Instead, God's influence is likened to gentle persuasion, working towards meaningful and harmonious resolutions for peace amidst the chaos of the world.

not reduce God to a writer, such as a writer of poems, but to *poiesis*.[35] For Faber, nothing has more determined his own understanding of the irreducible character of process theology than the growing conviction that process theology is before all else theopoetics. His book *God as Poet of the World* serves as the *sine qua non* of process theopoetics.[36] Here he extensively covers significant elements of Whitehead's work and beyond. His particular use of the term theopoetics, however, focuses on elucidating a specific passage from Whitehead's concluding section in *Process and Reality* that pertains to the investigation of the dynamic relationship between God and world, in particular the notion of God as Poet. Faber believes that Whitehead, in describing God as Poet, was reconfiguring classical conceptions of divine omnipotence – from an all-powerful creator acting unilaterally in might and transcendence, often associated with *creatio ex nihilo* – to a divine *poet* of a very different character. The divine poet is understood as a unique *actual entity* in the process of *becoming,* receptive and connected to other processes permeating the fabric of existence in order to bring about harmony. The character of the divine poet is not overpowering and does not force any dogmatic image. The poetic understanding is that of the divine not as an effective cause but as an attractor, suggestive of a seducer of beauty. God as poet is concerned in the arousal of the desire of truth, goodness and beauty, engaging in a process that aims at the harmonization of possibilities that offer self-creation and ever new re-creation. In Whitehead's terms, God does not exhaust the creativity that creates nor is God the only agent of creative acts.

[35] Faber presents Aristotle's differentiation of constructs of knowledge here as a useful way to understand what Whitehead means by *God as Poet:* neither *theoria* (theoretical knowledge / contemplation), nor *praxis* (practical knowledge / action), but *poiesis* (productive knowledge / creation). Roland Faber "Process Theology as Theopoetics" YouTube, 7th December 2021. Centre for Process Studies https://youtu.be/pgIjSpvD5q4?si=BcLGs2r7nqZfmSom

[36] At this stage I would like to clarify how I am using the term *process theopoetics*. While the phrase does not have a settled or uniform usage within academic theology, I employ it here to indicate a constructive convergence between process theology and theopoetics. Drawing on the concept of *God as divine poet* this approach not only incorporates the conceptual framework of process theology but also embraces the creative and aesthetic dimensions central to theopoetics. As such, process theopoetics contributes significantly to the field of theological study by extending its imaginative and constructive scope. In alignment with Catherine Keller's understanding of the "supplement" in a Derridean sense, theopoetics does not undermine theology but rather it enhances and reorients it toward future possibility. Process theopoetics is therefore not meant to water down or dilute the principles associated with process thought; instead, it seeks to foster the growth of theological thought and resist stagnation so as to maintain vibrancy and relevance.

> If anything, God, rather than being suggestive in the first place, received the more or less creative answers into God, suffering from their incompleteness as compared with the infinite vision of truth, goodness, and beauty that speaks forth from God's suggestions in all events, transforming and thereby saving their greatness, as implicit or neglected as it might have been, in their very act of happening into a poetic vision that will again become and is worth becoming, the basis for a new alternative, divinely inspired future chain of cosmic events.[37]

Whitehead draws the conclusion that the divine engages the world through the continual emergence of creative expressions within it.[38] This means that the response to the divine *poet* is intricately connected to the human receiver. By aligning the concept of God as *poet* within the field of Bible Journaling, it holds potential to enrich our knowledge of the divine-human relationship in how this concept can be seen as arousing a desire for truth, goodness and beauty. If the divine *lure* does not connect with the Journaler's lived horizon of experience, it may not be actualised in creative response. Therefore, the impact of the encounter is also dependent upon the Journaler's *own* experiences and cannot solely rely on the poet's ability to express themselves, especially if a Journaler lacks personal experiences with which to connect. Process theology outlines that the response is undecided, an outcome that God and the world eagerly await, anticipated and embraced, always in divine patience. I would now like to explore a visual representation of the idea of *God as Poet* by means of a Bible Journaling artwork.

[37] Roland Faber and Jeremy Fackenthal, *Theopoetic Folds: Philosophizing Multifariousness* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 4.

[38] Whitehead, *Process and Reality*. This is the focus of Part V, Section IV 344-345

Becoming God's Poetry

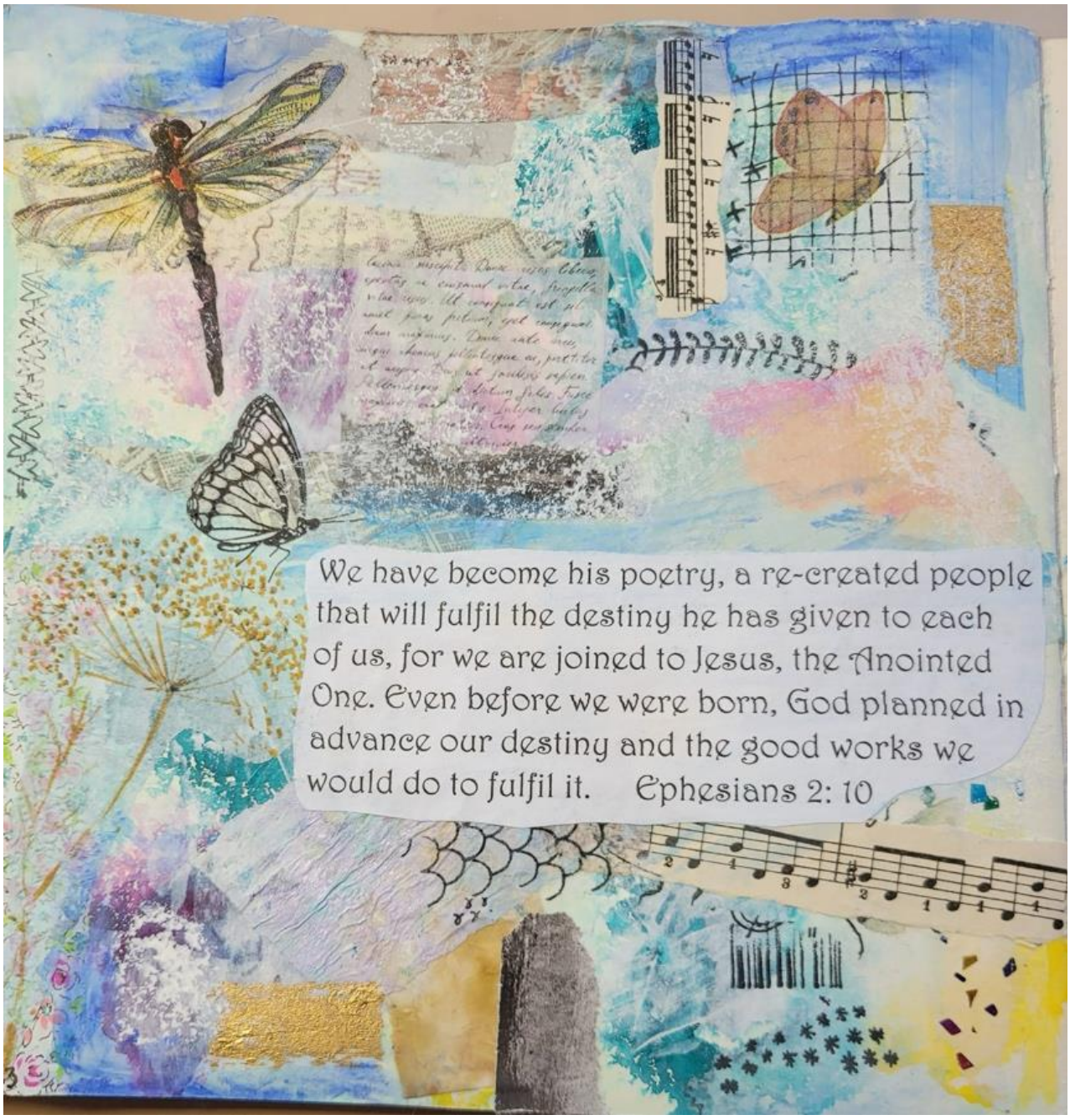


Figure 2.1 Art-Journaling based on text from Ephesians 2:10.[39]

[39] Sarah Chalmers, "eph2godspoetry," *The New Illuminators*, uploaded 23rd September 2023, 2026, https://nisar.omeka.net/admin/items/show/525.

Figure 2.1 depicts an art journaling creation that has been created on a blank page of a journal as opposed to within the Bible.[40] It is a mixed media creation that uses acrylic paint and possibly some watercolour as a background. It features pastel shades of pink, peach, blue, purple and green. A variety of techniques such as sponging, scraping and blending have been used to apply the background paint resulting in a fusion of colours with different levels of intensity and saturation across different areas. The colour palette features light and bright tones, with minimal dark shades or patches of grey or black. There is one notable dark section on the bottom section of the artwork that stands out due to its contrast with the overall choice of colours; conveying a sense of lightness rather than a transition from darkness to light. On top of this colour palette, there are a number of interesting visual elements including stamped motifs, music manuscript, paper scraps and printed text and images. The overall assortment of elements adds depth and texture to the overall aesthetic appeal, enhancing the visual interest of the design. In particular, the butterfly and dragonfly are interesting motifs to use as they often symbolise new life, personal development and growth when depicted in Bible Journaling.[41]

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[40] In the practice of art journaling, the pages used are usually thicker and more robust than the Bible itself which allows for use of different methods such as layering and acrylic paints, which are heavier than watercolours and more likely to bleed through the page when used on the Bible.

[41] Across history, various symbols have held significant meanings that transcend time. Symbols like the butterfly and dragonfly offer ever-expanding possibilities revealing an essential part of the subject to be understood. These timeless symbols reach deep into the human experience and reveal essential truths. In Christian iconography, the butterfly was adopted as a symbol of rebirth or resurrection. The idea is that the soul undergoes metamorphosis at death, leaving behind its earthbound larval state to take wing in a glorious form. Sometimes a butterfly is a messenger, a kind of angel, that brings grace and change of heart. See, Michael Ferber, ed., *A Dictionary of Literary Symbols*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 38–39, https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511481475.002. Images of the Christ Child may show him with a butterfly in his hand or nearby. These delicate creatures may also appear in still life paintings as a reminder of transience. See, Sarah. Carr-Gomm, *The Hutchinson Dictionary of Symbols in Art* (London: Herbet Press, 2005). Likewise, the dragonfly can also share butterfly symbolism of renewal and new life. See, J.C. Cooper, *An Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Traditional Symbols* (London; Thames & Hudson, 2012), 124. Both creatures embody the ideas of growth, change and the cyclical nature of life, offering hope and inspiration to those who seek deeper meanings in the world around them. Within Bible Journaling practice such imagery is frequently appropriated and often carries personal significance for Journalers. For discussion of the use of butterfly imagery, see Amanda Dillon, "Bible Journaling as a Spiritual Aid in Addiction Recovery," *Religions* 12, no. 11 (2021), https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12110965.

The dragonfly and butterfly are common motifs, demonstrated in the following artworks:
Liz Travers, "2cor5-6floralbutterfly," *The New Illuminators*, accessed November 14, 2024, https://nisar.omeka.net/admin/items/show/99. See Appendix A, Fig. A7

@n.hug_baj, "1cor15transformed," *The New Illuminators*, accessed November 14, 2024, https://nisar.omeka.net/admin/items/show/699. See Appendix A, Fig. A8

kimberley@hispalette.com, "rom12butterflytransformation," *The New Illuminators*, accessed November 14, 2024, https://nisar.omeka.net/admin/items/show/72. See Appendix A, Fig. A9

The biblical text employed in this image, Ephesians 2:10, has been printed and affixed to the page. The text comes from the TPT translation of the Bible (The Passion Translation) a modern English paraphrase of the New Testament, re-worded and re-written.[42] This translation is unique because it uses the word *poetry,* to render the Greek word *poiema* a choice that leads to an uncommon translation: "We have become his *poetry*." In other translations this is rendered as "For we are what he has made us" (NRSV), "For we are God's masterpiece" (NLT), "For we are God's handiwork" (NIV), or "For we are his creative work" (NET). The use of the word *poetry* in this translation and the Bible Journaler's use of it within this artwork is interesting. When read in light of Whitehead's theories, it can be suggested that the characteristic of God as poet – that is, suggestive instead of imposing; holding a subtle pull in inspiring and captivating – is mirrored in Figure 2.1. The artwork is abstract, subtly suggestive rather than overtly focused on a specific subject. The integration of various elements that merge seamlessly without overpowering one another is suggestive of harmony and balance. The addition of music notation also adds to this sense of coherence and flow. Given the theoretical framework presented by Whitehead and his discourse on the intercreativity between God and world, the artwork enacts or performs the logic of divine persuasion. Rather than depicting God directly, the artwork reflects the character of the divine poet through the way its different elements sit together participating in a shared field of possibility. This perspective offers a nuanced understanding of God and invites us to reflect on the divine presence within the creative unfolding of the world. It fosters fluidity and openness rather than a closed or restrictive portrayal of God. It invites the viewer to question how God might be the artist or poet in their own life and, conversely, how they become the poetry of the poet via their own creative endeavours such as music, writing, or through awareness of the interconnected world of nature and their surroundings. By refraining from a prescriptive portrayal, it brings a sense of curiosity and wonder within the viewer.

So far, I have considered key points in Whitehead's work that open up possibilities in exploring Bible Journaling artwork within a process theopoetic framework, particularly in exploring creativity as a *response* to God, as an important facet of the dynamic intercreative

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@amayah_biblejournaling, "rev21imakeallthingsnew," *The New Illuminators*, accessed November 14, 2024, https://nisar.omeka.net/admin/items/show/207. See Appendix A, Fig. A10

[42] It is a translation by Brian Simmons, a translation described as "a heart-level translation" that uses Aramaic, Hebrew and Greek manuscripts. It is described as a modern and easy-to-read translation that aims to evoke an emotive response in the reader. See, https://www.thepassiontranslation.com/about-the-tpt/

interprocess between God and the world. Just as Whitehead envisions God as the poet of the world, guiding it with patience, so too do Bible Journalers navigate the complexity of the world and seek harmony between their lived experiences and the wisdom they perceive in the biblical text. In the creative *poiesis*, individuals respond to the divine *lure* through their artistic expressions, and that response is received within the *consequent* nature of God.

In what follows, I build on these key ideas by incorporating them more specifically into the practice of Bible Journaling. In this discussion, I consider two overlapping aspects of inquiry that connect the ideas explored so far with Bible Journaling: 1. *The Lure and Desire for God,* and *2. Becoming and Transformation.* Together, these trace a movement from divine initiation (lure), through human becoming (transformation), mapping the relational dynamic at the heart of process theopoetics. By exploring these two aspects, the aim is to examine how themes emerging from process theopoetics are reflected within the practice of Bible Journaling.

While remaining rooted in a Whiteheadian process framework, the following sections widen the lens. They engage theopoetic thinkers who, though emerging from distinct philosophical and theological contexts, each arrive at and shape the field of theopoetics alongside the process-relational vision traced thus far. The two aspects outlined above cannot be adequately developed without situating them within the wider field of contemporary theopoetics.

To illustrate each point, I will consider a specific journaling artwork. It is important to note that one image alone cannot fully encapsulate the breadth of the exploration of each section, but the purpose of presenting each image is to provide an overarching example that strengthens my research framework in going forward, particularly in the deeper exploration that will take place in the subsequent chapters. These two areas, together with the selected images, offer a broad illustration of the dynamic between Bible Journaling and theopoetics.

2.6: The Lure and Desire for God

In her book *Divine Enticement – Theological Seductions*, Karmen MacKendrick describes theopoetics as "a seductive theology."[43] She writes of how poetry can *seduce us* beyond any

[43] Karmen MacKendrick, *Divine Enticement: Theological Seductions* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 45.

literal meaning. One does not simply believe a poem, but is seduced by it, precisely by its "irreducibility to literal and comprehensible paraphrase."[44] Extending this insight theologically, MacKendrick suggests that the divine likewise *lures* us beyond the limits of language, toward a withdrawal of fixed meaning, to a place where familiar ways of understanding begin to fall away.

This language of divine *lure* resonates with the process thought of Whitehead and Faber, discussed above, where divine love operates persuasively. Within this framework, the divine *lure* becomes a creative attraction that awakens desire: God's desire for us and our desire for God.[45] Such desire unfolds within a wider relational field, defined by what Keller calls *polyphilia,* "the love of and for multiplicity," a love that embraces the many relations and possibilities through which creativity unfolds.[46] Within this dynamic of attraction and relationality, *eros* emerges as part of creativity itself – the life-drive of desire towards the divine. As Kearney puts it, "creation is a love affair. God is cracked about us. Theopoetics is theoerotics."[47] This language of divine attraction helps frame the dynamic of desire that unfolds between God and humanity. MacKendrick goes on to suggest that we are *seduced* by the divine lure, not only by how this love calls to us but because it awakens the call within us. To respond is to open oneself to it, to respond to it in ways that allow it, as well as oneself, to

[44] MacKendrick, *Divine Enticement,* 56.

[45] The main scholarship here on the aspect of *desire*, see William Large, *Levinas' Totality and Infinity:* Reader's Guide (London: Bloomsbury, 2015); John D. Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997); Jacques Derrida, *On the Name,* ed. Thomas Dutoit, Meridian: Crossing Aesthetics (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995).

[46] Keefe-Perry, *Way to Water,* 205; Catherine Keller similarly describes theopoetics in terms of *polyphilia*, a love of multiplicity and relational unfolding. See, Catherine Keller, Catherine Keller, *Cloud of the Impossible: Negative Theology and Planetary Entanglement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 179. Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition,* trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994). James Williams, *Gilles Deleuze's Difference and Repetition: A Critical Introduction and Guide* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004).

[47] Richard Kearney and Matthew Clemente, *The Art of Anatheism* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), 5. Emmanuel Levinas writes, "God created man because two have a better time than one." Approaching the concept of the divine "eros" can be examined through the Song of Songs, often considered a metaphor for the relationship between God and God's people through its depiction of love and desire between two lovers, or more recently through the contemporary philosophers of the "desire of God" in writers such as Levinas, Derrida and Caputo. Richard Kearney, *Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers: The Phenomenological Heritage: Paul Ricœur, Emmanuel Levinas, Herbert Marcuse, Stanislas Breton, Jacques Derrida (*Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1984).

flourish. The response is a gift that demands more exploration. The entanglements of call and response are crucial.[48]

Another proponent of this idea of call and response is John D. Caputo who takes up theopoetics as a fresh expression of *radical theology* - a theology of *perhaps*.[49] Caputo understands theopoetics as a human response to the *insistence* of God, where insistence names not a divine essence or metaphysical substance but an event or call that elicits a response.[50] He believes that the name of God, what he refers to as the *weakness* of God, must be met by the *strength* of a response. He says that "God does not exist but God insists."[51] In this interplay between weakness and strength, "God needs us as much as we need God."[52] Richard Kearney writes, "the *insistence* can happen anywhere as the name of God is entangled with the course of mundane life, with the rhythm of its joys and fears."[53] Kearney invites us to consider God as *Posse* rather than *Esse*.[54] *Posse* or *The God of the Possible,* names a God whose offered possibility seeks actualisation through human response, transfiguring what *may-be* into the actual. Kearney quotes a well-known traditional proverb to illustrate this stance, "God made the sea, we make the ship; He made the wind, we make the sail; He made the calm, we make oars."[55] Kearney believes that it is wiser to interpret divinity as *may-be* or as a possibility-to-be, desiring always again and again, instead of

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[48] MacKendrick, *Divine Enticement*, 113.

[49] Caputo explains that this term does not refer to something firmly grounded but to a theology radically exposed to the unforeseeable. His "theology of perhaps" revisits the roots of classical theology by unsettling its reliance on metaphysical certainty and by rethinking religious language in more poetic terms. Rather than focusing on the existence of God as a metaphysical being, radical theology attends to the *insistence* of God as event and call, which invites human response. See John D. Caputo, *The Insistence of God: A Theology of Perhaps* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013).116.

[50] Caputo, *The Insistence of God* 7-9 and 104-16.

[51] Caputo, *The Insistence of God,* 8.

[52] Caputo, *The Insistence of God,* 116.

[53] Richard. Kearney, *The God Who May Be: A Hermeneutics of Religion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 4.

[54] Kearney draws on Nicholas of Cusa's notion of *posse* (possibility to-be) in contrast to *esse* (being as actuality or presence). The *God of the possible* is one who is intimately involved in human affairs, a God of desire and possibility, as opposed to God's existence as a certainty of being, something already done Richard Kearney, *The God Who May Be*, 4-5, 22-30.

[55] Kearney, *The God Who May Be*, 3.

claiming that God neither is nor is not. The *God of the possible* calls for human interaction and response in order to be actualised in history.[56]

> By choosing to be a player rather than an emperor of creation, God chooses powerlessness. This choice expresses itself as self-emptying, *kenosis*, letting go. God thus empowers our human powerlessness by giving away his power, by possibilising us and our good actions – so that we may supplement and co-accomplish creation. To be made in God's image is therefore paradoxically, to be powerless; but with the possibility of receiving power from God to overcome our powerlessness, by responding to the call.... [57]

Bible Journaling, as a practice, can be seen as an example of this *response* to the divine. Bible Journalers are drawn into the biblical text and respond creatively to the mystery that is within the space of the possible. The desire for God through the wisdom of the Bible is where the *God who may-be* finds voice.[58] Although Journalers may approach the biblical text as having a fixed, immutable and literal meaning, their response creates an open space, perhaps in their decision to use specific art materials, for example, or the exact line of text they might focus upon whilst letting go of others. During the creative *poiesis* this open space where creativity emerges enabling an entanglement in a call and response. This creative space is crucial for God's insistence as it allows for exploration and personal connection to the text, transforming the text into a living dialogue between God and journaler. As theologian Anne Carson writes, "a space must be maintained or desire ends."[59]

I will now consider a Bible Journaling artwork in light of the aspects discussed above. In presenting this image and the next, I adopt a structured approach. I begin by presenting an overview of the artwork, the materials used and a description of what the artwork presents to the viewer. Following this, focus shifts to the biblical text that has been appropriated and how the artwork interacts with the biblical text discussing the artist's interpretation. Lastly, I

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[56] Nicholas of Cusa's distinction between *posse* and *esse* informs Kearney's retrieval of the divine as "may-be." In *The God Who May Be* Kearney draws on Cusa's understanding and interprets God not as a static presence but as the possibility of love and justice that calls for realisation in history. Kearney, *The God Who May Be*, 107. 12

[57] Kearney, *The God Who May Be,* 108.

[58] Kearney, *The God Who May Be*, 53. Kearney also writes that "God will be God at the eschaton. That is what is promised. But precisely because this promise is just that, a promise, and not an already accomplished possession, there is a free space gaping at the very core of divinity: the space of the possible. It is this divine gap which renders all things possible..." Kearney, *The God Who May Be*, 4.

[59] Anne Carson, "*Eros the Bittersweet*" from MacKendrick, *Divine Enticement*, 200.

conclude by summarising how the image reveals the dynamic interplay through which Bible Journaling and process theopoetics resonate with and inform one another.

Romancing the Divine

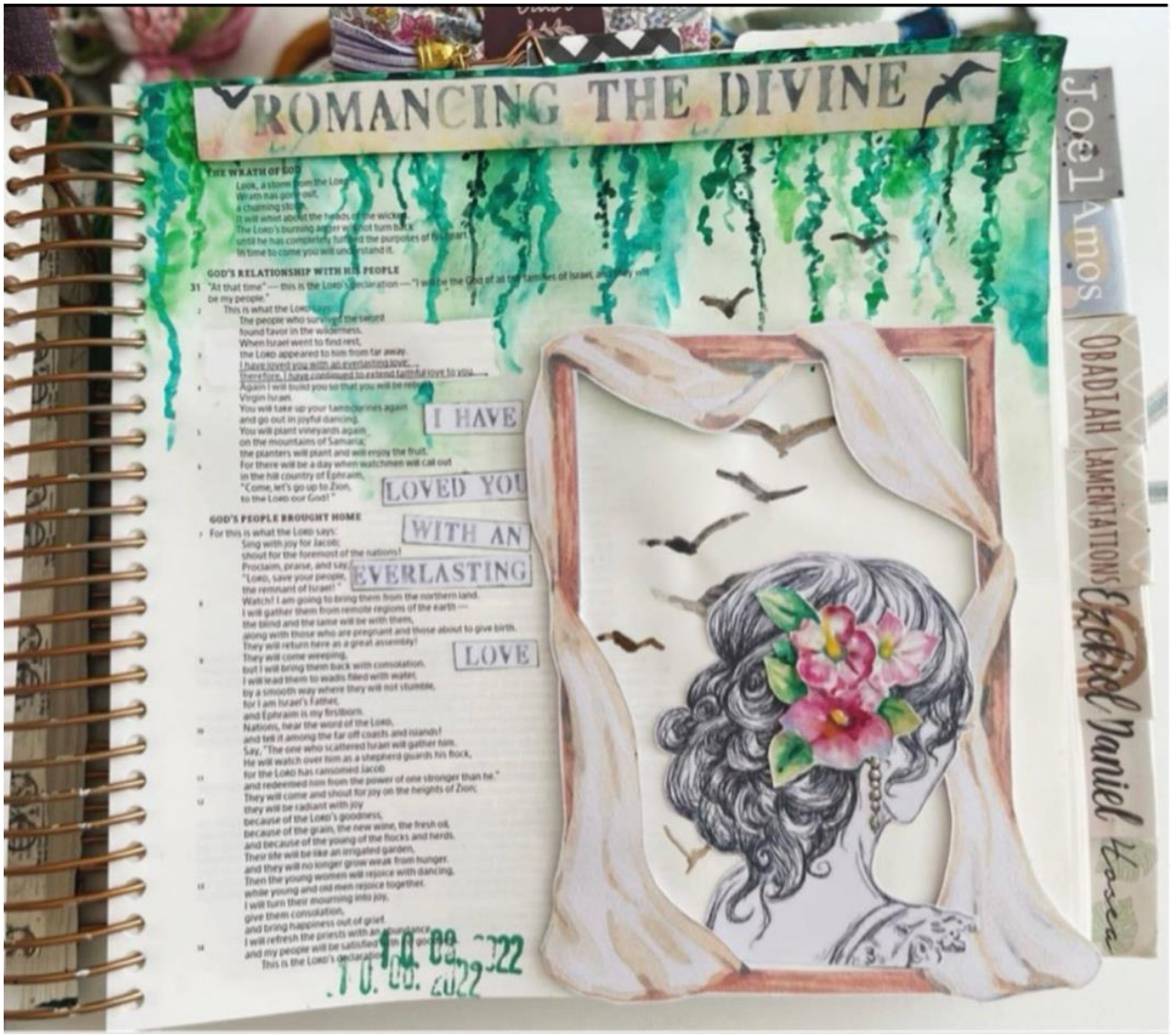


Figure 2.2 Bible Journaling artwork focusing on Jeremiah 31:3.[60]

[60] @charlenewarwick, "jer31romancingthedivine," *The New Illuminators*, uploaded 7th September 2022, https://nisar.omeka.net/admin/items/show/662. The Bible used is the Illuminating Bible CSB by DaySpring

Figure 2.2 uses a combination of printable elements, printed text and watercolour.[61] There are two key visual aspects to this artwork: a woman enclosed in a wooden frame, and a green watercolour section along the upper edge of the page. I consider first the woman within the frame. In the blank margin section, a wooden frame made from card is affixed to the page, resembling a window and covered loosely draped white fabric that appears to blow freely in the wind. Inside the frame there is a woman with a bright flower in her hair and long earrings, with only her shoulder, neck, hair and the back of head visible. She is depicted in profile, facing away from the viewer, and it is unclear to whom or what she is looking. Flying birds surround her in the background. Adjacent to the frame are the words "I have loved you with an everlasting love" prominently placed. Along the top edge, a green painted section resembling cascading ivy in varying shades of intensity flows downward onto the biblical text. Affixed text reads "Romancing the Divine." The artwork is a visual interpretation of Jeremiah 31:3 (CSB) that reads,

> the Lord appeared to him from far away.
> I have loved you with an everlasting love;
> therefore, I have continued to extend faithful love to you.

Jeremiah 30-31 forms a distinct body within the book of Jeremiah known as the *Book of Consolation.* These chapters are distinct in that,

> The Book of Consolation stands as a refuge amid the storm of divine wrath that blows through the rest of the book of Jeremiah. The content of the Book of Consolation repeatedly deals with the relationship between present suffering, further danger and future salvation.[62]

These two chapters offer a certainty in their message of hope of an eventual restoration of Israel to its own land. In particular, Jeremiah 31 emphasises God's faithfulness and love as God pledges a New Covenant unlike the old ones, inscribed not on tablets of stone but within

[61] Printable elements are an important aspect in Bible Journaling, especially for individuals who may not feel confident in their artistic abilities or are hesitant to draw or paint directly into their Bible. Digital images are often created by online artists and small business owners and are available to purchase on online platforms like Etsy. Typically consisting of two or three pages of various visual motifs and using a specific theme or biblical text, printable sets can be bought relatively cheaply or given away for free. The popularity of printable elements has seen a steady increase in recent years and empower Bible Journalers to enhance the visual appeal of their Bible without the need for advanced artistic skills.

[62] Gerald L. Keown, Pamela J. Scalise, and Thomas G. Smothers, *Jeremiah 26-52*, Word Biblical Commentary 27, (Dallas: Word, 1995), 83.

the hearts of the people.[63] The chapter includes prophecies about the restoration of Israel and Judah, describing a future of joy and prosperity for the people.[64]

The artwork in Figure 2.2 focuses solely on the line "I have loved you with an everlasting love," affirming God's enduring faithfulness and the promise of Israel's future grounded in divine love. Kerry H. Wynn calls the imagery presented in this verse and the surrounding passages as poetic, expressed through the series of short positive affirmations that anticipate Israel's restoration. The declaration of everlasting love points to an intimate relationship between God and Israel characterised by steadfast loving-kindness (*hesed*).[65]

I will now explore the interpretation of this verse by the Bible Journaler, focusing on two main points. Firstly, I will consider the significance of the woman portrayed within the spatial constriction of a window frame and the relevance of the woman's confinement to the artist's interpretation. Secondly, I will explore the aspect of *desire* as discussed earlier, and the artist's depiction of God's intimate and close relationship, which is a key theme in the biblical text itself.

The artwork captures a moment of introspection, inviting the viewer to consider the significance of various visual elements that are represented, in particular the window and the free flowing fabric that surrounds it. The historical significance of the metaphor of the *woman at the window* is important here,[66] a subject that has attracted more attention in scholarship than those male counterparts.[67] It is a well-known and prevalent motif in the arts, literary texts and indeed the architecture of ancient near Eastern civilization, for which there

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[63] Kerry H. Wynn, "Between Text and Sermon: Jeremiah 31:1-6," *Interpretation* 68, no. 2 (2014): 184, https://doi.org/10.1177/0020964313517533.

[64] Prophecy was seen as a declaration of God's definite plan and purpose for God's people. R. E. Clements, *Jeremiah,* Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988), 292.

[65] Tremper III Longman, *Jeremiah, Lamentations,* Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2012), 294. Wynn, "Between Text and Sermon: Jeremiah 31:1-6."

[66] Carl E. Savage, "Woman at the Window: Biblical Tales of Oppression and Escape," *Hebrew Studies* 41, no. 1 (2000): 256–58.

[67] Don Seeman, "The Watcher at the Window: Cultural Poetics of a Biblical Motif" *Prooftexts* 24, no. 1 (2004): 15, https://doi.org/10.1353/ptx.2004.0015.

is both archaeological and textual evidence.[68] One of the most famous is the Phoenician ivory relief *Woman at the Window* from the 8th century BCE, now the property of the British Museum in London.[69] It is a pagan image consistent with related representations found in archaeological evidence. In this and other similar portrayals from this time, the image is linked to female sexuality and fertility cults of the ancient world.[70]

The depiction of a woman looking through the window or standing at the doorway also appears in several biblical narratives, opening up new perspectives on the roles and identities of women in biblical contexts and shedding light on their experiences, agency and cultural significance.[71] Cheryl Exum, in her book *Tragedy and Biblical Narrative*, contends that women positioned at windows are "confined.... looking out upon the world to see what men have accomplished."[72] She highlights the character of Michal, introduced in 1 Samuel 14:49, as a woman without voice or narrative presence, underscoring the impossibility of autonomy and lack of freedom to make choices amid conflicting allegiances.[73] The repeated phrase "through the window" in Samuel 19 draws attention to her place inside, confined. The text provides our window on Michal, offering a glimpse, the kind of view a window gives that is limited in range and perspective. It is as if we are outside, watching her, inside, watching David.[74] David passes through into the larger world, to meet his destiny. Michal stays behind, inside, attending to domestic matters. In Figure 2.2, the window frame itself implies a feeling of being enclosed or confined as the woman is gazing outwards from inside turning her back

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[68] Philip J. King, *Amos, Hosea, Micah: An Archaeological Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press, 1988).

[69] For similar objects from Arslan Tash, Samaria, *P.E.F.Q.,* 1933, pi. 3, and Khorsabad, See, H. Frankfort, *Iraq Excavations of the Oriental Institute, igj2-j* (Orient. Inst. Communications No. 17, f. 78). https://isac.uchicago.edu/research/publications/oic/oic-17-iraq-excavations-oriental-institute-193233-third-preliminary-report

[70] Nehama Aschkenasy, *Woman at the Window: Biblical Tales of Oppression and Escape* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998), 13.

[71] See, 2 Kings 9:30-34, Judges 5:28, Joshua 2:15, 1 Samuel 19:12, Judges 4:18.

[72] J. Cheryl Exum, *Tragedy and Biblical Narrative: Arrows of the Almighty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 89.

[73] Exum, *Tragedy and Biblical Narrative*, 84.

[74] Exum, *Tragedy and Biblical Narrative,* 89. Another example Exum cites is 2 Kings 9:30. Queen Jezebel, having painted her eyes and adorned her head, looks out the window for the insurgent Jehu's arrival, apparently knowing what ferocity to expect from him. And Sisera's mother peers out the window, watching in vain for her son's return from battle lade with Spoil (Judges 5:28).

to the room behind her. Perhaps she is experiencing a longing for the unknown, possibly wanting to escape from her surroundings. It might reflect an everyday reality where women are more likely to stay indoors in the home while men predominantly occupy public spaces. She might see herself as an observer or spectator rather than an active participant in public life. In modern interpretation the woman at the window gives the impression of the person hemmed in, even locked in. According to Don Seeman, in recent years the *woman at the window* has become an important site for feminist Bible commentary because of the widespread assumption that the window signifies a natural portrayal of women's oppression. In this context, the spatial constriction in the above artwork is noteworthy as it evokes questions of freedom and constraint. The confined framing may suggest boundaries or limitations in everyday life, inviting viewers to reflect on experiences of restriction within their own contexts.[75] Yet this spatial constriction of the window frame also intensifies the sense of longing within the artwork. Within the experience of limitation or confinement, the window creates the conditions for desire and awakens an awareness of the divine call.

The awakening of desire also reveals a second aspect of the artwork: the sense of God's intimate and close relationship with the depicted woman. The artwork portrays a longing for connection to the divine and captures elements of lure, desire, call and response, as explored above. The ethereal and dreamlike scene adds to the mysterious allure of the woman's desire for divine connection. A sense of openness and longing is conveyed through the free-flowing fabric, the woman's elegant attire and hairstyle, and the open window. By using the word *romancing*, themes of seduction and longing are brought to the fore breathing life into the texture of desire. When considered in light of MacKendrick's view of theopoetics as "a seductive theology" the artwork gestures toward a love that calls rather than commands. The love of the divine poet awakens response. We might say that the divine *lure* has stirred the Bible Journaler's desire for God, drawing her into participation and opening a space for creative expression.

In this context, the words from Jeremiah 31:3 "I have loved you with an everlasting love" situate the woman's longing as a response to an already given call. The desire depicted does not originate with her alone; the initiative lies with the divine. The love that is named and clearly written on the page precedes the Journaler's creativity, functioning as a *lure.* It is

[75] Seeman, "The Watcher at the Window: Cultural Poetics of a Biblical Motif." 3

precisely because this love has addressed her that she is drawn into the biblical text, selecting and bringing forward this particular verse. In this sense, the artwork does not just depict a woman yearning for God, but brings to life the relational movement in which desire is awakened by something prior, that is, the enduring love of God. The divine invites participation through beauty and tenderness. The Journaler's act of "romancing" becomes a theopoetic response, an answering of a call that has already addressed her. Desire here unfolds within a relational becoming as a space in which love insists and response takes shape. Seen through a process theopoetic framework, this awakening of desire reveals divine love as relational movement – a *lure* that draws the Bible Journaler into creative response.

2.7: *Becoming* and Transformation

The theme of *becoming* and transformation offers a second point of contact between Bible Journaling and process theopoetics. While the previous section considered the awakening of desire as response to the divine *lure*, this section turns to what unfolds afterwards: the shaping of that response within the ongoing movement of relational becoming. Change and transformation are important factors in Whitehead's thought as neither God nor creation are static entities.[76] God is not a changeless God, unresponsive to the happenings of the world, but a God who participates in the world through the gift of meaningful realisations and of the transformative gathering of broken actualisations.[77] As Whitehead writes, "God is the fellow sufferer who understands."[78]

What is at stake here is not simply personal growth, but a transformation that participates in a wider relational horizon. Within this discussion, a deeper consideration of the *poesis* of Bible Journaling will be explored as it provides insight into processes of becoming and transformation, both personally and within the wider processes of becoming in the world. An artwork will therefore be considered that demonstrates how this notion of *becoming* within the *poesis* of Bible Journaling has the potential to extend outward beyond the page, contributing to the wider processes through which the world itself is continually transformed. In order to explore this more fully, insights from process thought and contemporary feminist

[76] Whitehead's book *Religion in the Making* is dedicated to the patterns of *becoming* and how to find the eternal in the temporal. Alfred North Whitehead, *Religion in the Making* (Cambridge University Press, 2011).

[77] Faber, *God as Poet of the World, 204*.

[78] Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 351.

theology will be brought into conversation. The poet Rainer Maria Rilke also serves as a helpful interlocutor in this section, particularly as a voice attentive to interior transformation and creative becoming. His poetry helps us to see how artistic response becomes part of the work of transformation.

This dynamic of becoming and transformation is often expressed within Bible Journaling through images that emphasise the closeness of God to human experience. The close relationship between God and the human condition is frequently brought to the fore in these artworks, presenting God's love for the world as a *reciprocal relation*.[79] God is intimately present in human experiences, not distant or separate, but involved in times of suffering and hope, joy and sorrow. Bible Journalers often draw on their own life lessons, reflecting on difficult decisions, the need for forgiveness, transformation and healing,[80] or recalling moments of God's presence with gratitude during periods of quiet journaling.[81] The creative *poiesis* allows Journalers to draw upon personal experience and reflect on life events. At the same time, the *poiesis* creates a dialogue with the select biblical text which may resonate with, inspire, or teach in that moment alongside the Journaler's personal experiences. In this way, the biblical text can function as a catalyst for transformation, perhaps speaking to the

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[79] Whitehead, *Process and Reality,* 351.

[80] **Example 1**: Andrea Buttry - Dodge, "lambrokenmirror," *The New Illuminators*, accessed November 19, 2024, https://nisar.omeka.net/items/show/879. In this Bible Journaling artwork, an interpretation from Lamentations, the journaler has depicted a cracked mirror alongside the words, "when you see broken beyond repair, I see healing beyond belief." See Appendix A, Fig. A11

Example 2: Diane Noble, "ps41wesingodheals," *The New Illuminators*, accessed November 19, 2024, https://nisar.omeka.net/items/show/485. In this Bible Journaling artwork, an interpretation from Psalm 41: 1-4, the journaler has depicted silhouetted figures with their arms raised in praise and the message "We Sin, God Heals." The Bible Journaler also includes the following text, "How very grateful I am, Lord for the mercy and grace you extend to me. My heart, soul, spirit have been sick with my own sin in others. But in grace you have gathered me to you, have shown me your love and you healed me!" See Appendix A, Fig. A12

[81] **Example 1:** @chelsies_bible, "deut32rainydays," *The New Illuminators*, accessed November 19, 2024, https://nisar.omeka.net/items/show/686. A depiction entitled "Thankful for the rainy days!" The handwritten text reads, "thank you Lord that in my most anxious and uncertain moments that you are always there to provide hope. Even when everything seems hopeless and overwhelming you walk with me, promising a prosperous future. Despite me being lonely sometimes, I feel so blessed that you bestow quiet time for me to connect with your word." See Appendix A, Fig. A13

Example 2: @kellybangscreative, "isa40theartofholynoticing," *The New Illuminators*, accessed November 19, 2024, https://nisar.omeka.net/items/show/1834. The handwritten text reads, "I find God in the [heart] and the practice of noticing! Noticing - gratitude - thanksgiving - turns me to God!" "the art of holy noticing." See Appendix A, Fig. A14

Journaler's life journey and facilitating growth and learning from their experiences;[82] inspiring the Journaler to leave old ways behind and to move positively in a new direction;[83] or even to know that God is with them in the ups and downs of their own lives, always guiding and protecting.[84] Therefore, the *poiesis* becomes a space where personal experience, and the biblical text come into dialogue, opening the possibility for transformation.

In considering *poiesis* as a site of becoming and transformation, the poet Rainer Maria Rilke serves as significant interlocutor for understanding this dynamic.[85] Although Rilke did not use the term theopoetics, his work has been widely received as formative for contemporary theopoetic thought.[86] His work aligns closely with the present discussion, emphasising that the creative *poiesis* is not a technique but a way of inhabiting experience – a mode of attention that enables transformation. As he writes, "poems are not, as people think, simply emotions, they are experiences."[87] For Rilke, creative *poiesis* arises from a deep interior space in which God is held, dwelt within and slowly brought into expression. In his famous letters, the author Mr. Kappus noted the significance of "the root word *poiesis* which simply, for Rilke means *to make*"[88] signifying the act of bringing forth inherent creativity through

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[82] **Example 1:** Pat Nygren Davis, "phil3presson," *The New Illuminators*, accessed November 18, 2024, https://nisar.omeka.net/items/show/224 In this Bible Journaling artwork, an interpretation of Philippians 3:14, the journaler has depicted a woman jogging alongside the words "I press on towards the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" and "Forget those things which are behind and reaching forward to what's ahead." See Appendix A, Fig. A15

[83] @matawisfavorites, "is43leaveoldways," *The New Illuminators*, accessed November 18, 2024, https://nisar.omeka.net/items/show/167 In this Bible Journaling artwork, an interpretation of Isaiah 43: 18-19, the journaler has handwritten, "Leave old baggage behind! Keep moving forward" suggesting the way to go is by taking a *new* direction in life. See Appendix A, Fig. A16

[84] The Secret Life of a Scrappy Wife (Pinterest), "2cor12justkeepgrowing," *The New Illuminators*, accessed November 18, 2024, https://nisar.omeka.net/items/show/368. In this Bible Journaling artwork, an interpretation of 2 Corinthians 12: 9-10, the journaler has incorporated many butterflies emerging from an opened glass jar. A small bird cage sits beside the jar alongside the text "It's ok to let go." Beside the printed text are the words "just keep growing." The Bible Journaler has written her thoughts on struggling with anxiety: "My anxieties are real and cause me to struggle most days. But working through the anxiety brings glory to God. He give me strength to put myself out there, to conquer fears and to keep growing into the person I am meant to be." See Appendix A, Fig. A17

[85] Rainer Maria Rilke was born in Prague in 1875. He died in Switzerland in 1926, aged 51

[86] Rilke is one of the key poets studied in the theopoetics programme at Bethany Theological Seminary: *Master of Arts: Theopoetics and Writing* https://bethanyseminary.edu/academic-programs/master-of-arts-in-theopoetics-and-writing/

[87] Rainer Maria Rilke, *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge* (Oxford University Press, 2016), 19.

[88] See the *Afterword* in Rainer Maria Rilke, *Prayers of a Young Poet* (Paraclete Press, 2012), 94.

poetic expression that is already stirring within. For Rilke, the creative *poiesis* begins within this interior space where God dwells and "transforms suddenly into magnificent sense,"[89] a transformation that "happens within us in the ways we come to *know ourselves* as a beginning for God, and in the longing this instils within us."[90] Rilke's understanding of his own creative *poiesis* resonates with the approach evident in the *poiesis* of Bible Journaling. With each new *making*, Journalers can be understood as participating in an ongoing journey of growth and self-discovery that reveals new insights about God. Each artwork invites new interpretations, leading to continued reflection and opening up the possibility of spiritual growth and a deeper encounter between the Journaler and the divine.[91] Such a *poiesis* brings no endpoint, but remains open and generative.

This also opens into another aspect of *becoming*, raised at various points in this chapter: the process is not only about human experience but is also understood in relation to the ongoing life of God. This related theme of transformation also appears in Keller's work, who writes, "God becoming, means to become ourselves – selves utterly distinct, bottomless, entangled, moment by moment enfolding a world and together unfolding it, making it, otherwise."[92] In this passage Keller echoes Whitehead's view that God is not static but is involved in the ongoing becoming of the world. It suggests that transformation concerns not only the human subject but also forms part of the relational process through which God and world are intertwined. This perspective provides a useful lens through which to approach Rilke's reflections on *becoming* before applying these insights to Bible Journaling.

For Rilke, God is a God-of-becoming – "an anticipated radiance, the coming of light in the darkness,"[93] which enabled him to embrace *poiesis* particularly in moments of darkness in his own life. In his poem [11] he writes,

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[89] Rainer Maria Rilke, *The Poet's Guide to Life: The Wisdom of Rilke* (Random House Digital, Inc., 2005), 11.

[90] Rilke, *Prayers of a Young Poet*, 94.

[91] As Scott Holland suggests in defining theopoetics, "it is a kind of writing that invites more writing. Its narratives lead to other narratives, its metaphors encourage new metaphors, its confessions invoke more confessions, and its conversations invite more conversations." Scott Holland, "Theology Is a Kind of Writing: The Emergence of Theopoetics," *CrossCurrents* 47, no. 3 (1997): 317–31. This generative quality can be applied as readily to the *poiesis* of Bible Journaling as to poetry, prose or any written forms.

[92] Keller, *Theopoetics A Becoming History,* 40

[93] Rilke, *Prayers of a Young Poet*, 89.

You, darkness from which I come,
I love you more than the flame
that bounds the world,
shining
in a single ring
beyond which no creature knows of it.

but the darkness seizes everything,
folds and flames –
how it grasps them,
people and powers...

and it is possible that a great strength
stirs near where I dwell.

I believe in nights.[94]

Here, darkness becomes a site in which strength stirs and becoming unfolds. While this stirring may resemble the language of divine *lure* discussed earlier, Rilke's reflections move further toward an understanding of God as the one who *becomes* within the depths of night. The darkness of the poem functions as the depth from which new possibilities emerge. Rilke had a desire to loosen God from the intellect, to seek the divine not through concepts or doctrine but rather in the experiences communicated in the deep by means of images and metaphors. Much of his poetry explores the *becoming of God*, as he writes, "God is the becoming one who stands before us for an eternity, the future one, the inevitable fruit of a tree whose leaves we are."[95] For Rilke, God's *becoming* forms the matrix of the artistic life, a driving force behind creative expressions.[96] A similar dynamic appears in many examples of Bible Journaling, where Journalers engage the divine through colour, technique and a range of art materials that give rise to new insights and responses to God. God always has something to reveal and teach as the divine life continues to unfold through creative

[94] In these prayers, the 'You' refers to God. This particular prayer opens with an address to God as 'You.' Rilke, *Prayers of a Young Poet*, 11.

[95] Rilke often describes God in poems with references, direct and implicit, to a tree; for example, see numbers 31, 34, 47, 66. Rilke, *Prayers of a Young Poet*, 120.

[96] This echoes Keller's reflections on beauty as a form of *making*. As Keller notes, "The aesthetic significance of the very word *becoming* has often been missed: in English the verb has an odd transitive form, related to the adjective *comely*. We say, "That shirt becomes" as though beauty results from something becoming part of another, from some participatory genesis (The shirt is so right for you, that shirt is you!). In other words, if theopoiesis means the human becoming divine through the divine becoming human: God *becomes* us. That God is comely, becoming, in us – clothes us in beauty. It is in becoming that we become divine." Keller, *Theopoiesis and the Pluriverse*, 192–93.

engagement with the biblical text that Bible Journaling makes possible. Keller suggests that in order to discover God's *becoming* a rigorous *poiesis* is needed. She writes,

> The poet of the world, the world of endlessly entangled cocreativity, comes here into play as one figure, an iconoclastic icon of an ultimate becomingness. The creativity – and the createdness – of God loops interdependently through the creativity of the world..... As to God, it is a matter not of believing but of making, of materialising God. *Doing* God.[97]

In Keller's account, the divine becomes entangled with the ways in which life is shaped and lived, echoing Rilke's vision of a divine becoming that stirs within creative life and that finds concrete expression in the practice of Bible Journaling. In light of Keller's account of *making, materialising and doing God*, the creative *poiesis* within Bible Journaling cannot remain contained within the page. If creative practice participates in the stirring of the divine, it cannot remain confined to the artistic act alone but moves outwards and extends into the shaping of life itself. Keller's notion of *doing God* suggests that creative *poiesis* functions as a path to transformation that is intertwined with all actions, doings and makings in life. In other words, God's *becoming* is made visible in the Journalers growing capacity to respond – to create, to act, and to inhabit the world differently. Keller suggests that God's becoming is revealed in the various "arts of action*"* particularly in the way the creative *poiesis* infiltrates in the *making* of daily life. It means that flowing out from the creative *poiesis* there are ripples felt in one's life, a flowing outward into the world, weaving interdependently with God. *Becoming* divine, in this context, names not a transformation into divinity, but deepened participation. *Becoming* and transformation do not happen in an isolated vacuum, it necessitates a sustained *poiesis* and, as Keller continues, a reopening of old and ancient ways of "vibrant relation."[98] This emphasis on response also resonates with Caputo's insistence that, "The name of God is something to *do*... the weakness of God must be addressed by the strength of a response, which is its chiasmic partner."[99] The following artwork explores this outward flow that transforms in *to* the world, where what forms on the page does not remain contained within it.[100]

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[97] Catherine Keller, "Theopoetics: A Becoming History," in *The Art of Anatheism*, ed. Richard Kearney and Matthew Clemente (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), 39.

[98] Keller, "Theopoetics: A Becoming History," 40

[99] Caputo, *The Insistence of God,* 116.

[100] This theme is common within Bible Journaling practice. This artwork provides one such example, where the journaler reflects on leadership as something that creates "ripples" outward into the world rather than remaining

Transform the World through me



Figure 2.3 Bible Journaling artwork focusing on Psalm 93.[101]

confined to the page. www.scrappy wife.com, "rom12transformasaleader," *The New Illuminators*, accessed March 16, 2026, https://nisar.omeka.net/admin/items/show/482. Accompanying this blog post, the Bible Journaler has included the following text: "Looking at this verse through the lens of leadership shows us that we are called to be a different kind of leader. We are called to transform those in our circles, not just interact in the transactional nature of our culture. We need to be leaders that make ripples, not leaders that drain those around us. For me, that means showing up every day and doing the hard work of parenting, teaching, and leading my kids. The hope is that they will someday go forth and lead others, creating ripples that may just change the world."

[101] Marnelle Vd Merwe (Instagram: @marnellevdmerwe4) created 18th May 2023, uploaded 25th June 2024 https://nisar.omeka.net/admin/items/show/1185. The Bible used is Illustrating Bible CSB DaySpring

Figure 2.3 uses a combination of printable elements, printed text and black paint. On the blank margin section, the black background creates a sombre tone. There is a depiction of a woman wearing a white dress with her arms by her side, palms turned upwards. The woman's body possesses cracks as if she was made from porcelain. Small cracks are visible on her arms while larger fractures are covering her body. Many butterflies lie underneath these cracks, some emerging and flying outwards towards the biblical text. At the bottom of the page a young girl with outstretched arms is seen either releasing or trying to catch a white dove. The printed elements reads, "Transform the World through Me," "Psalm 93: He is the King" and "Thank you that your testimonies are true and steadfast because you are a Holy God who cannot lie. Your house is filled with your holy presence, just as my body is filled with your holy spirit; what a power laden truth that calms my floods. Help me to be overwhelmed by You and not the world around me. I Love you Lord."

Psalm 93 is part of a group of psalms called "The Kingship Psalms"[102] where the metaphorical expression *The Lord is King* repeatedly occurs.[103] This phrase was most commonly used in the postexilic period, after the collapse of the Judean monarchy when there was no longer an earthly King on the throne and the Judean people relied on the notion of God as a trustworthy King.[104] According to Prinsloo, this phrase should not be treated as a static theological idea but as an expression of the belief of God's people that God is likened to a King in whom they could trust.[105] The theme of stability is central in Psalm 93 which emphasises the enduring and steadfast nature of God's Kingship. The psalm emphasises that in perilous and insecure times, there is stability in the world precisely because *The Lord is King* serving as a source of comfort and hope for God's people.[106] In verse 1 of the psalm, alongside the expression that *The Lord is King*, the concept of *Creator God* is also introduced. This dual theme emphasises God's role in establishing the world as well as the

[102] Susan Gillingham, "Psalms 90-106: Book Four and the Covenant with David," *European Judaism* 48, no. 2 (2015): 83–101, https://doi.org/10.3167/ej.2015.48.02.12.

[103] Other psalms that also use the expression "The Lord is King" include Psalm 93, Psalms 96-99. Also, Psalm 47. It is the sovereignty of God which dominates this collection of psalms.

[104] Willem S Prinsloo, *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible: Psalms* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2019), 261.

[105] Prinsloo, 261.

[106] J. H. Eaton, *Psalms of the Way and the Kingdom: A Conference with the Commentators*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 199 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 62

strength that God's Kingship brings. As we move to verse 3, God begins to defeat the chaos of the world, symbolised by the rising floods: "The floods have lifted up, O Lord, the floods have lifted up their voice; the floods lift up their roaring." (NRSV) Susan Gillingham notes how the use of three long lines in verses, 1, 3, 4 and 5 mimic the rhythm of the waves of the sea, while verse 2 with its two short lines, suggests the firm establishment of God's heavenly throne.[107]

Turning to the Bible Journaler's interpretation, the central declaration "He is King" is emphasised through its placement at the top right of the page. Drawing on the imagery of the waves of the sea present in the psalm, the Journaler identifies with the reference to "my floods" as expressing the overwhelm of the world around her, articulated in the additional text she adds to the page. However, the chaos is depicted not through water but through the stark black background and the fractured figure. Whereas God confronts the chaos of the world, symbolised in the psalm by the rising floods, the Journaler portrays this disorder through the cracked and fragmented body. The depiction of the woman may symbolise both individual and shared brokenness in the world, emphasised by her large scale in comparison to the young girl positioned below. Yet an important aspect of this artwork is the suggestion that the world can be transformed *through* her, conveying the possibility of hope amidst the chaos and struggles of the present reality.[108] In the artwork this hope is symbolised through the butterflies and the white dove. Some butterflies remain hidden while others appear to emerge from the woman's broken body, suggesting transformation and renewal. The presence of the young girl is also significant, pointing toward the continuation of hope carried by future generations. The white dove reinforces this theme, traditionally symbolising the Holy Spirit, as the Journaler herself alludes to in the written text.[109]

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[107] Gillingham, Psalms 90-106, 83–101.

[108] An interesting interpretation of this psalm has been put forward by Franz Delitzsch, a German Lutheran theologian (1813 – 1890). He writes about the imagery of the roaring sea waves representing hostility and linked to the anger among Kingdoms, such as the Nile for Egypt, Jer. 46:7 "who is this, rising like the Nile, like rivers whose waters surge" (NRSV). It is worth considering Delitzsch's rather complex interpretation of the psalm, as he interprets this psalm as the *future* perfection of the kingdom as though present, whilst not to neglect the suffering of the actual present, an interpretation similar to what the Bible Journaler has done in her artwork. See, Eaton, *Psalms of the Way and the Kingdom,* 55

[109] The white dove is a species frequently referenced in biblical narratives. The relevance of the dove is discussed at length in Chapter 3 with reference to the image *A Body Tied to the World*

The artwork opens space to consider themes of becoming and transformation within the shared life of God and the world. To explore this more fully, this aspect of the artwork will be brought into conversation with contemporary feminist theology. There are significant points of contact between process thought, as it is presented by Whitehead and his interpreters, and feminist theological discourse.[110] Both emphasise relationality, mutuality, and *becoming* over static and hierarchical models of power. In this respect, the figure of the divine *poet*, understood as persuasive and not coercive, relational and not dominating, resonates with key concerns within feminist theology. This convergence opens a space for dialogue in what follows below.

A particularly significant feminist articulation of *becoming* can be found in the work of Grace M. Jantzen. In her book *Becoming Divine – Towards a Feminist Philosophy of Religion,* she proposes a new imaginary of religion that replaces rigid structures of the masculine symbolic with a feminist symbolic of natality and flourishing.[111] Within this framework, Jantzen develops the notion of *becoming divine* as an orientation towards human flourishing and embodied life..[112] From this feminist perspective, *becoming* divine involves a commitment to solidarity with human suffering. The symbolic of the divine becomes one of outrage, imaginative resistance and compassionate action. A feminist response to suffering begins with outrage and bewilderment at suffering and evil themselves: how can the world be like this? How are we to respond out of love for the world? In this context, *becoming* divine does not require the suppression of anger, but its transformation into solidarity and compassionate action, recognising and accepting this shared solidarity and compassion in one another and in our own suffering.

Within this framework, creative practice can become one way in which solidarity takes form, as individuals seek imaginative and compassionate responses to the suffering of the world.

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[110] The intersection of process theology and feminism has been noted particularly in their shared critique of the autonomous, androcentric subject and their respective affirmations of relational subjectivity. Within feminist process theology, Catherine Keller has been especially influential in rethinking subjectivity in relational and entangled terms. Susan Hekman, "Feminist New Materialism and Process Theology: Beginning the Dialogue," *Feminist Theology* 25, no. 2 (2017): 198–207, https://doi.org/10.1177/0966735016678544.

[111] Grace. Jantzen, *Becoming Divine: Toward a Feminist Philosophy of Religion* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999).

[112] Jantzen, *Becoming Divine* 255.

Co-suffering, understood as the participation of the divine in the suffering of the world, is an important element in Christian theology, particularly within process thought, and it also intersects with the practice of Bible Journaling.[113]

Bible Journalers frequently respond to events in the wider world by engaging in live journaling sessions together, creating artwork that reflects on current realities, and sharing reflections that resonate with themes emerging in these moments.[114] This poetic reflection and response highlights the role of creative practice in shaping perspectives and sensibilities, fostering a sense of hope both individually and among online Bible Journaling communities. Shared artworks often prompt others to reflect on current issues and to respond through their own journaling. In recent years, many Journalers have created and shared work focused on

[113] For an Old Testament perspective on the theme of divine suffering, see Terence E. Fretheim, *The Suffering of God: An Old Testament Perspective*, Overtures to Biblical Theology (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984).

[114] **Example 1:** @paintingwithbev, "ps91handsandmaskaroundtheworld," *The New Illuminators*, accessed November 27, 2024, https://nisar.omeka.net/items/show/1757. In this Bible Journaling artwork, an interpretation of Psalm 91, the journaler has depicted two arms emerging from the bottom edge of the page, the hands in an open gesture pointing upwards. A globe is suspended just above the hands, with a mask wrapped around it. Together, both the hands and the mask are protecting the world. Handwritten in black text it reads, "no evil shall befall you, no plague come near your tent." This artwork considers the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the world; God's assurance and protection during a time of crisis and uncertainty. See Appendix A, Fig. A18

Example 2: @jenn_journals90, "ps46sunflowersukraine," *The New Illuminators*, accessed November 27, 2024, https://nisar.omeka.net/items/show/1084. In this Bible Journaling artwork, an interpretation of Psalm 46, the journaler has brought in themes of God's strength, presence and trust when reflecting on the war in Ukraine. The colours of the flag of Ukraine is incorporated along with flowers, a heart and a new growth. See Appendix A, Fig. A19

Example 3: @marnellevdmerwe4, "mark13trustgodinthestorm," *The New Illuminators*, accessed October 28, 2024, https://nisar.omeka.net/items/show/502. In this Bible Journaling artwork, an interpretation of Mark 13: 7-9, the journaler has depicted a visual prayer for those affected by war in Turkey and Syria. Featuring various photographs including, those affected by war, a scene of destruction with rescue workers sifting through rubble. There are also two flags visible, that of Turkey and Syria. See Appendix A, Fig. A20

Example 4: @Cora_biblejournaling Instagram, "ps8&9compareandcontrast," *The New Illuminators*, accessed October 28, 2024, https://nisar.omeka.net/items/show/239. In this Bible Journaling artwork, an interpretation of Psalm 8 and 9, the journaler has created two separate journal entries. Both creations were uploaded together in order to compare and contrast how time and perspective can influence biblical interpretation. They were painted at different moments in time. The recto page was created during the war in Ukraine, the verso page a few years previous. See Appendix A, Fig. A21

Example 5: Reidun LaFleur, "ps33carryingthem," *The New Illuminators*, accessed February 21, 2025, https://nisar.omeka.net/admin/items/show/2099. In this Bible Journaling artwork, an interpretation of Psalm 33: 20-21, the journaler has reflected on the news that the youngest Israeli hostages and their mother were dead. She had spent two years praying for their safety and now she will carry their memory for the rest of her life. They deceased were names as Kfir, Ariel and Shiri. See Appendix A, Fig. A22

weather-related catastrophes, wars, political conflicts, and other global events, inviting further reflection and participation within communities. In this way, Bible Journaling becomes a site where reflection, solidarity and response to the suffering of the world can take shape.

In Figure 2.3, the Journaler appears to respond creatively to the suffering and realities of the world, even though she does not explicitly name the event or situation that has prompted her reflection. This sense of being called to respond raises deeper questions about how such a call is experienced and interpreted. Caputo addresses the notion of God's communication by posing what he calls theopoetic questions of *insistence*. Through the examination of these questions in conjunction with Figure 2.3 we see how the Journaler's response to the biblical text emerges within the relation between God and world. Caputo asks,

> Is it God who calls? Might it not be the world?
> Is it God calling from beyond the world –
> or is it the world calling under the name of God?
> Does God call through the world –
> or does the world call through God, through the name of God?
> Is the insistence of the world the insistence of God –
> or is the insistence of God the insistence of the world,
> of something happening in the world under the name of God?[115]

Read alongside the artwork, Caputo's questions do not simply concern the origin of the call, but open onto a deeper and more complex entanglement of God and world. What emerges within the artwork is participation in *becoming* itself, where the brokenness of the world is taken up into imaginative response, opened toward solidarity, and gathered into the ongoing life of God.

To conclude, this section has explored the theme of *becoming* and transformation as an important point of contact between Bible Journaling and theopoetics. In conversation with Whitehead's understanding of God as a *God-of-becoming* and read alongside Keller's reflections on divine becoming and relational creativity, this perspective suggested that each new act of *making* within Bible Journaling participates in an ongoing process of growth and self-discovery, while also being taken up into the unfolding life of God. Each artwork

[115] Caputo, *The Insistence of God,* 171.

therefore opens the possibility of new insights about God, inviting an ongoing relational encounter between the Journaler and the divine that remains dynamic and unfinished. Drawing on the reflections of the poet Rainer Maria Rilke as a key interlocutor, the discussion considered how his work explores the idea of God's *becoming* as intimately connected to creative practice, showing that transformation is not confined to the individual but unfolds within a wider relational horizon. Bringing these insights into conversation with feminist theological perspectives, particularly the work of Grace M. Janzen, the section highlighted how *becoming divine* may be understood as a movement toward solidarity with human suffering and compassionate action in the world. Within the practice of Bible Journaling, this outward movement is often visible in the ways Journalers respond creatively to personal and global events, nurturing hope and reflection within their Bible Journaling communities.

2.9: Conclusion

This chapter explored a framework called process theopoetics to develop a deeper understanding of Bible Journaling as a theopoetic practice. By tracing the origins of theopoetics back to the Greek term *poiesis* and exploring this concept in the context of process thought, new insights into the connections between theopoetics and Bible Journaling emerge. The creative *poiesis* inherent in Bible Journaling emphasises the reciprocity between God and world as encapsulated in Whitehead's process thought. Bible Journaling thus becomes a *meeting point* where a creative human *response* participates in the ongoing relational exchange between God and world, contributing to divine *becoming* as God engages the world through creative expression. The ongoing creative process that unfolds in the personal appropriation of biblical texts participates in God's *becoming,* as human expression is gathered within the mutual *becoming* of God and world. Whitehead's depiction of God as *Poet of the World* provides a lens through which to examine how Bible Journaling reflects the continual creative engagement between God and humanity, adding depth to its exploration within this framework.

The connection between process theopoetics and the practice of Bible Journaling is further strengthened when considering two overlapping aspects of inquiry, *the lure and desire for God,* and *becoming and transformation.* Firstly, the *lure* of the divine *poet* is intricately connected to the Bible Journaler's *response* to the biblical text, as the call of God awakens a creative impulse within the individual. Through the creative *poiesis* Journalers are able to

access a well of personal experience, opening space to reflect on life's events in creative and expressive ways. In this way, the framework allows theological understanding to be viewed not solely as an intellectual exercise but also a *lived* and *embodied* experience. This dimension will be explored further in the next chapter. Secondly, by examining the concept of *becoming and transformation* within the context of Whitehead's sixth antithesis, we see how each new act of *making* within Bible Journaling becomes part of an ongoing process of growth and self-discovery for the Journaler, while also reflecting a Whiteheadian perspective in which the *consequent* nature of God participates in the creative becoming of the world. Within this relational process, God is not distant from creative activity but is constantly evolving or *becoming* within a creative *poiesis*. Keller's reflections on *making, materialising and doing God* further illuminate this dynamic. She suggests that creative *poiesis* is a path to transformation that is intertwined with all actions, doings and makings in life. In this sense, God's *becoming* is encountered through the creative practices that shape daily life, as acts of *making* create ripples that extend outward into the world through the imaginative and relational possibilities they generate. Overall, in this chapter, I have explored how a process theopoetic framework deepens our understanding of the practice of Bible Journaling as creative space where the divine *lure*, human response, and processes of becoming and transformation meet.

The chapter that follows turns to the embodied dimensions of Bible Journaling. This practice is embodied because it involves direct, tactile engagement with the biblical text itself. Working with art materials such as paint, pens and printed images is integral to how Journalers relate to the text: it is *experienced* as much as it is thought-through, drawing together physical, emotional and imaginative dimensions in a rich and layered way. An embodied understanding of Bible Journaling also draws attention to imagery of the body. Journalers frequently depict bodies to express elements of their faith, allowing the female body in particular *to speak* visually on the page. Attention to images of the body therefore becomes central, as theological reflection is grounded in the body as a site where divine encounter may be felt and experienced. This can be understood as an embodied mode of *knowing* and opens up several dimensions of what it means to speak of embodiment within the context of Bible Journaling. As embodiment also pervades theopoetics and is central to theopoetic expression, it becomes an important area to explore in the chapter that follows.

Chapter 3: Embodiment

Introduction

The previous chapters have explored how Bible journaling can be approached as a theopoetic practice and as a fruitful conversation partner for the field of theopoetics. Drawing particularly on process-oriented theopoetic thinkers, the discussion has examined how the creative *poiesis* inherent within Bible Journaling artworks participate in an ongoing relational dynamic between God and the world. Within this process theopoetic framework, acts of *making* are situated within a wider process of *becoming* that involves both human creativity and divine relationality.

Employing a process theopoetic framework raises certain methodological challenges that have not been addressed in detail but become important at this opening section of the chapter. Within theopoetic scholarship, the creative works of poets, writers, and artists, are often left to *speak for themselves* largely on their own terms, accompanied by little theoretical analysis. This reflects the intrinsic subjectivity of theopoetic expressions, a deeply personal form of *poiesis* through which individuals connect with and interpret divine presence in their lives.[1] At the same time, such meaning-making unfolds within a wider relational and interpretive context, extending beyond individual experience alone. While a creative practice like Bible Journaling arises from particular lives and perspectives, one of the tasks of this study is to consider how these experiences are expressed in ways that allow them to be engaged as forms of theological reflection. This involves approaching theology more broadly than a purely intellectual activity, recognising how other modes of engagement can sit alongside discursive and conceptual forms of theology without replacing them. For this reason, this chapter approaches Bible Journaling through the lens of *embodiment*.

In considering *embodiment* and Bible Journaling, there are two key aspects to consider. Firstly, Bible Journaling constitutes a tactile engagement with the Bible as Journalers use various art materials to physically manipulate and craft new expressions. This hands-on interpretation moves beyond an intellectual encounter with the text and towards a physical

[1] This idea of letting works *speak for themselves* has been demonstrated in Keefe-Perry's previously mentioned theopoetic primer, wherein theopoetic works of various writers stand on their own but are placed side-by-side with scholarly discourse. Keefe-Perry, *Way to Water,* 10.

connection with the Bible that involves using the body in a tangible way. It is a holistic engagement thus rendering Bible Journaling an embodied practice. Secondly, the concept of *embodiment* invites further exploration particularly because Bible Journalers frequently depict representations of bodies to convey elements of their faith or connections with others and God. Often, they create space in their Bibles to explore their physical and bodily experiences in the world in order to make theological connections for themselves. The depicted body becomes imbued with meaning and significance highlighting the link between human experiences and the body's connection with the divine. Both aspects will be discussed throughout the chapter.

The turn to *embodiment* also resonates with the process-relational framework outlined in the previous chapters. In the thought of Whitehead, experience, as lived and embodied engagement with the world, is relational and participatory. Humans both respond to and shape the influences around them. Bible Journalers bring their own lived experiences to the page where personal encounters inform their interaction with the biblical text. In this way, the relational process becomes visible within their journaling Bibles as the creative *poiesis* draws on lived experience while also participating in shaping what may yet emerge.

3.1: Embodiment in Theological and Phenomenological Perspectives

To understand the connection between embodied approaches in Bible Journaling and theopoetics, it is necessary to first consider the concept of *embodiment* itself, a central theme across a variety of philosophical and theological perspectives. It is unrealistic to provide a comprehensive overview of this expansive area of study given the extensive breadth of work; however, it is possible to present contrasting standpoints on *the body* while acknowledging the value of both perspectives in situating my own research within this discourse. Therefore, this section brings theological traditions of embodiment into conversation with phenomenological accounts of lived experience, recognising the significance of both before progressing this discussion towards *embodiment* within theopoetic discourse.

Firstly, it is important to acknowledge Paul's significant contributions when considering *the body* from a biblical and historical theological perspective. His writings provide one of the foundational frameworks for understanding the body within Christian thought, deeply

influencing later theological discourse.[2] At the same time, the relationship between body and soul has remained a point of tension within the tradition.[3] While Paul affirms the body – most notably in his emphasis on the resurrection of the body and embodied life in Christ – later Christian thought developed within a wider intellectual context shaped in part by Greek philosophy. Thinkers such as Plato and Aristotle,[4] with their reflections on the immortality of the soul and the transient nature of the body, contributed to the emergence of a more dualistic framework and greatly shaped the early Christians' understanding of human nature and the relationship between the physical and spiritual aspects of existence.[5]

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[2] It is important to recognise *the body* in Paul's theology as it represents Paul's distinctive contribution to the life of the Church. Through his writings, Paul emphasises that for the Christian, the human body belongs to the Lord functioning as a vessel and representation of human actions (1 Cor. 6:19-20, 1 Cor.15:38-44). There is also a strong connection between *the body*, the Incarnation and the Cross, and the identification of the human body and Christ's death. The Christian is united as part of Christ's body so that all that happened in and through Christ's body in the flesh can be repeated in and through Christ now (Rom 6:10-11, Rom 7:4). Additionally, Paul uses the term *body* as a metaphor for a group of individuals, symbolising Christ's body in an expression of a single Christology (1 Cor 12:27). See, John A.T. Robinson, *The Body: A Study in Pauline Theology*, Studies in Biblical Theology; No. 5 (London: SCM Press, 1966), 47. The sources of Paul's vision of the Church as a *body* have been long debated with the predominant view that he drew on Greek philosophical reflections on the body politic as being the most plausible; See, Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 245; Also, Raymond E. Brown, *The Churches the Apostles Left Behind (*New York: Paulist Press, 1984), 47–74.

[3] Some interesting and diverse scholarship on the complex relationship between body and soul. See, C. Stephen Evans and Brandon L. Rickabaugh, 'What Does It Mean to Be a Bodily Soul?', *Philosophia Christi* 17, no. 2 (2015): 315–30; Karen K. Abrahamson, 'The Creation of The Soul, The Creation of The Body: Dual Creations in Christian Tradition', *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 49, no. 1 (2011): 9; James Porter Moreland and Scott B. Rae, *Body & Soul: Human Nature & the Crisis in Ethics* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009); John W. Cooper, 'Biblical Anthropology and the Body-Soul Problem' In *Soul, Body, and Survival: Essays on the Metaphysics of Human Persons* ed. by Kevin J. Corcoran, 218-228 (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001).

[4] Plato (428 – 347BC) and Aristotle (384 – 322BC) both philosophers lived in ancient Greece. Plato, 'The Republic' trans. by Benjamin Jowett (Minneapolis: First Avenue Editions, 2015). See the allegory of the cave in Book VI of 'The Republic:' "The visible realm should be likened to the prison dwelling, and the light of the fire inside it to the power of the sun. And if you interpret the upward journey and the study of things above as the upward journey of the soul to the intelligible realm, you'll grasp what I hope to convey" in John M Cooper, and D. S Hutchinson, *Complete Works* (Indianapolis, Ind: Hackett Pub, 1997), 514–17." Soul/body dualism also found a firm advocate in another work by Plato called 'Phaedo' Meno *and Phaedo* ed. by David Sedley and Alex Long, *Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). One of Aristotle's key works where he deals with body/soul dualism, Ronald M. Polansky, *Aristotle's De Anima* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

[5] Augustine of Hippo (354 – 430) often addressed the relationship and tensions that arise between the body and his soul in his writings. Augustine and E.B. Pusey, *The Confessions of St. Augustine,* 1st ed (London: The Floating Press, 1921); Tertullian (155 – 240 AD) wrote extensively on various theological topics including the distinction between body and soul emphasising the soul's immortality and its distinction from the perishable body. See, *Church Fathers: A Treatise on the Soul* accessed via New Advent https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0310.htm; Eliezer Gonzalez, 'Anthropologies of Continuity: The Body and Soul in Tertullian, Perpetua, and Early Christianity', *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 21, no. 4 (2013): 479–502, https://doi.org/10.1353/earl.2013.0041; Clement of Alexandria (150 – 215AD) highlighted the importance of the soul's connection to God and the nature of the relationship to the body. See, Clement of Alexandria – 'Stromata' Book IV Chapter VIII accessed online: https://www.searchearlychristianwritings.online/read?volume=2&caption=6.4.4.7.0; Peter Robert Lamont.

Within this developing tradition, Christians were often encouraged to cultivate a spiritual focus while living within their physical bodies, at times resulting in forms of detachment from the material world. Dualistic tendencies continued to shape aspects of Christian thought. In some strands of the tradition, greater value was placed on what was understood as spiritual or eternal, contributing to a hierarchical way of thinking about the relationship between God, spirit and the material world. These hierarchies were not without consequence. In certain theological and cultural contexts, rationality and spirituality were elevated as markers of what was most fully human, while the body – and its particular association with flesh – was devalued. Within this framework, man was claimed to be superior in rationality and spirituality, qualities seen as more divine. When compared to the physical realm of matter and flesh, woman was consistently undervalued, pushed down to inferior positions.[6] The feminisation of flesh has a long and complex history, playing a crucial role in shaping both theological interpretation and wider societal perspectives.[7]

Christian theology presents *the body* as integral to its understanding of human life and faith. This is seen most clearly in the Christian imagination, particularly through the doctrines of

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Brown and American Council of Learned Societies., *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity,* Lectures on the History of Religions; New Ser., No. 13 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988); Mikael C. Parsons, *Body and Character in Luke and Acts: The Subversion of Physiognomy in Early Christianity* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2011)

[6] This consideration naturally led feminist theologians to broach the topic as to how this hierarchical soul/body dualism has shaped the Western view of women, "This drastic dualism is vulnerable to criticism from many different directions; feminist critics begin with the observation that in Western culture and throughout its history, we can observe a tendency to identify women with the nature, the physical, the bodily. Nature is personified as a female, a 'mother'; women are portrayed as more closely linked to nature, less completely integrated into civilization and the cultural order, than men. Men are rational agents, makers of order and measure, controllers of history; women are emotional vessels, subjects or orders and measures, passive observers of history." Eve Browning, *Philosophy and Feminist Criticism: An Introduction* (Paragon House, 1993), 64–65. For a discussion on this, see Joan D. Chittister, *Heart of Flesh: A Feminist Spirituality for Women and Men* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), 23.

[7] Lisa Isherwood and Elizabeth Stuart, *Introducing Body Theology*, *Introductions in Feminist Theology*; 2 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998)16. One interesting and noteworthy development in this regard is the term *Thealogy,* used to refer to the process and content of reflection upon the divine in female terms, coined by Jewish feminist Naomi Goldenberg in her book 'Changing of the Gods: Feminism and the End of Traditional Religions' published in 1979. *Thealogy* affirms the use of female imagery in religious expression and maintains that patriarchy de-sacralised and demonized women's bodies, "in Thealogy a woman's embodied finitude is holy in that it belongs to the intramundane processes of divine creativity." Melissa Raphael, Thealogy and Embodiment: The Post-Patriarchal Reconstruction of Female Sacrality (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996). A central claim of *Thealogy* is that women image the divine in the embodied reality of their daily lives including the bodily changes and processes that patriarchal religion has found so difficult to deal with – menstruation, birth, sexual activity, menopause, ageing and death. Many women have found this identification between their embodied reality and the divine empowering and healing. Ruth Mantin, "Theaological Reflections on Embodiment," *Feminist Theology* 12, no. 2 (2004): 212, https://doi.org/10.1177/096673500401200208.

incarnation, resurrection and sacramentality, all of which point to the divine being encountered in and through the world.[8] The incarnation, in which God becomes flesh, resists any division between body and spirit showing that the material world is not separate from God but is a place where God is present. Likewise, the resurrection affirms the transformation of the body and its being brought into new life. Building on this, the body is not just present in doctrine but is also central to Christian life and practice. Acts such as prayer, fasting, anointing, kneeling, singing, pilgrimage, participation in the sacraments and communal worship all take place through the body and involve movement and repetition. These practices have long been part of Christian life. Faith is lived out through the body and becomes the means through which belief is expressed and sustained over the course of time in one's life. The body is not separate from faith but integral to how it takes shape in the world.[9]

Secondly, a phenomenological perspective shifts attention toward lived, embodied experience. Rather than treating the body as an object of reflection, phenomenology considers how the body is experienced from within and how it shapes our engagement with God, the world and others.[10] It seeks to understand what it means to be embodied and how this shapes a person's sense of self, relationships and understanding of the world, recognising the body as the way through which we make sense of life.[11] A phenomenological approach highlights that faith is not encountered in abstraction, not just on what people *do*, but in how those actions are lived and felt in practice, a dynamic that can be seen clearly in embodied practices such as Bible Journaling. While phenomenology itself does not make theological claims, it helps us see how faith is experienced in the textures of everyday life. Bringing these perspectives

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[8] Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011).

[9] Alexander Schmemann, *For the Life of the World. Sacraments and Orthodoxy* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1988).

[10] Ola Sigurdson, "How to Speak of the Body? Embodiment between Phenomenology and Theology," *Studia Theologica* 62, no. 1 (2008): 25–43, https://doi.org/10.1080/00393380802015579.

[11] For more on this perspective, Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, Second Book: Studies in the Phenomenology of Constitution* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1990), 60–94. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* trans. Donald A. Landes *(*Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), 67–206, https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203720714. Judith Butler et al., *Sexual Ideology and Phenomenological Description* (Oxford University Press Oxford, 2022). Dalia Judovitz, *Culture of the Body: Genealogies of Modernity* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2011). Susan Hekman, "Material Bodies" in *Body and Flesh: A Philosophical Reader* ed. Donn Welton *(*Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1998).

together, it becomes important to hold theological accounts of the body in conversation with phenomenological insights into lived experience. In doing so, greater attention is given to the role of the body in Bible Journaling, recognising that all experience is embodied and that this shapes how Journalers respond to biblical texts.

3.2: Embodiment: Bible Journaling and Theopoetics

As outlined above, the practice of Bible Journaling places particular emphasis on *embodiment*. This is reflected not only in the tactile action of engaging with the Bible through the use of various art materials, but also in the way Bible Journalers establish a meaningful connection between their human/bodily experiences and visual interpretations. *Embodiment* also pervades theopoetics and is considered an essential component of theopoetic output. To explore the relationship between embodiment and theopoetics, I turn to a creative, collaborative online platform designed to identify, articulate and explore theopoetics. Arts, Religion and Culture (ARC) is a unique platform founded in 1962 by some of the generative leaders of the theopoetics conversation.[12] Through conferences, publications and collaborative projects, ARC fosters a space for scholars, artists and thinkers to explore theopoetics as a means of rediscovering and reimagining the sacred in the modern world. As stated on ARC's website, their objective is to provide a space that brings together various forms of artistic expression, serving as a catalyst for innovative ideas and the creation of original artistic works. Embedded within this hybrid sphere, one of the primary focal points of the work of ARC is the emphasis on *embodiment* and the value of embodied experiences within theopoetic creations. Previous executive director of ARC, Keefe-Perry writes,

> When ARC uses the term 'theopoetics' we say that it has four major pieces. It is '(1) an emphasis, style, and positive concern for the intersection of religious reflection and spirituality with the imagination, aesthetics, and the arts, especially as (2) it takes shape in ways that grow community, (3) focus on material change, and (4) *affirm the importance of embodiment.* When I am in less technical conversation with folks about

[12] The founding team of ARC included Alfred Barr, founder of the Museum of Modern Art in New York; Paul Tillich, theologian; Stanley Hopper, early leader of the Theology and Literature movement in the US; and Amos Wilder, biblical scholar and author of *Theopoetic: Theology and the Religious Imagination*. Prior to 1962, theopoetics was not attached to academic discourse. The forerunner of ARC, *The Society for Art, Religion and Contemporary Culture* (SARCC) began to recognise those whose work advanced dialogue between the arts, religion and culture. SARCC became ARC in 1999. Their work and mission filled the void by illuminating the contemporary landscape. Today, ARC's work lives in a space called 'para-academic.' ARC's members are an increasingly diverse and interfaith mix of academics, clergy, artists, and activists drawn together to "cultivate embodied and just ways of knowing and being through creative and spiritual practices". L. Callid Keefe-Perry, 'Alvesian Theopoetics, the Academy, and What May Come', *Literature and Theology* 33, no. 3 (2019): 321–35, https://doi.org/10.1093/litthe/frz022.

> what it is that 'theopoetics' is I increasingly use the word as a kind of verbal signal flare to call attention to those who want to prioritise *the importance of embodiment and the action of bodies—especially creative practice—as sites of religious reflection.*[13]

ARC, through its commitment to *embodiment* in theopoetic expressions, wishes to highlight the holistic nature of the human person, particularly in relation to creativity. Theopoetics, expressed through creative practices of *making*, is not confined to purely intellectual reflection but opens up new ways of engaging meaning through the body. In doing so, it moves away from dualistic approaches that separate body and mind, instead emphasising their interconnectedness.

This perspective is particularly relevant to Bible Journaling as it draws attention to how a Journaler's physical engagement is intertwined with their study of the biblical text. Journalers often do not separate the study of the text from their hands-on engagement with it; rather each informs and shapes the other. Some of the art materials used include printable images, stickers, stamps, washi tape; and, utilising various techniques including watercolour or acrylic paint, tracing images, pencil sketches, printed and handwritten text. As the art materials are manipulated and transformed, Journalers are simultaneously interpreting the biblical text while creating something new. For example, the fluidity of watercolour might bring a sense of the dynamic interplay between God and the Journaler; the act of tracing images might empower the Journaler to re-enact and animate biblical scenes or establish connections with biblical figures; using printed or handwritten text, usually comprising a select section from the biblical text, can allow for a more intimate connection with the written Word itself. Therefore, the interplay between the biblical text and its appropriation is not only a *mental* exercise but an *embodied* one, *experienced* as much as it is *thought*-through. It is holistic in that it goes beyond intellectual reflection; Journaler's do not simply analyse the text but also immerse themselves in it both physically and emotionally, allowing for a rich and multi-dimensional experience of the Bible.[14]

[13] Keefe-Perry, "Alvesian Theopoetics, the Academy, and What May Come," 324. Italics added for emphasis

[14] Dillon, "Bible Journaling as a Spiritual Aid in Addiction Recovery." *Religions* 12, no. 11 (2021): 965, doi:10.3390/rel12110965.

At a recent online Bible Art Journaling retreat *Encounters in Colour,*[15] held in May 2024 and led by UK based Bible Journaler Jenna Burne, much of the discussion and exploration centred on experiencing faith through creative expression. Retreat leaders spoke about how the immersive encounter with the text went beyond intellectual contemplation.[16] Retreat leader Casey Turner shared her own insights on the creative *poiesis*. She said,

> As I start with collaging with no rhyme or reason, it is a loosening up process... my letting go of control and surrendering myself as I tear papers and glue things down. I'm allowing the natural release to happen.... My prayer comes towards the end of my journaling experience, towards the end of my creative process. I'm dumping to the Lord and grabbing and doing things without a lot of thought and then after that process, the Lord opens my heart to something. My prayer is the final layer.

During the second day of the retreat, facilitator Emily Henderson emphasised that Bible Journaling involves more than just a mental reflection on a biblical text but an experiential and holistic journey into spiritual exploration. In her opening video she says,

> So often I start in a place of tiredness and weariness, the process of journaling and giving that all to God. God takes it and gently replaces it with hope and reminder of his goodness. And gives me all the things I need. It's refreshing for my soul, body and mind. I have found it so transformative for my faith and life with God.

On Day 6, Marjolaine Walker, an artist, author and an expressive art and inner healing facilitator who helps women heal through art in her programme, *Art that Heals* says,

> I discovered my identity through creativity. Discovering who God says I am. Making art for the "I am" statements from God's Word. These pages comes to mind when I'm struggling with self-worth. A catalyst for believing that God loves me.

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[15] https://www.jennaburne.com/encounters Introductory live Zoom Q & A session (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NRuvwH8dRDE). While many people engage in Bible Journaling by creating art in the margins of their Bibles, the retreat leader Jenna Burne describes her practice as a distinct medium. It is important to note that many Bible Journalers incorporate mixed-media techniques into their artwork, and such practices are not only limited to Bible Art Journaling. The creative approaches evident in both Bible Journaling and Bible Art Journaling are often closely aligned. In this instance, the retreat distinguishes itself through the use of plain paper as a canvas and the integration of Bible passages directly into the artwork for reflection. While Jenna presents Bible Art Journaling as a distinct practice, it may be more accurately understood as closely related to, and continuous with the wider practice of Bible Journaling.

[16] Retreat leaders included Jenna Burne, Natasha Lee, Emily Henderson, Aiko from Papercut Prayers, Jen Alward, Casey Turner and Marjolaine Walker.

Taken together, these examples highlight that Bible Journaling is an embodied practice in which meaning is formed through the physical act of *making*. The Bible Journalers here do not stand at a distance from the text but engage with it holistically.

This embodied engagement opens up further areas of exploration, particularly in relation to how *the body* itself is represented within the practice. An embodied understanding of Bible Journaling invites closer attention to imagery of *the body* as a site of power and agency. How the body is depicted is not incidental but carries significance in how meaning is constructed and how Journalers locate their own lived experiences within the biblical narrative. This kind of creative work can become a way of expressing aspects of life that might be difficult to put into words, allowing them to work through what has been lived via depictions of the body. To further explore this, the following section introduces two contemporary theopoetic writers who emphasise the centrality of *the body* within theological reflection in ways that resonate with Bible Journaling. This is followed by an analysis of four Bible Journaling images through the lens of these insights to show how women find and express meaning through depictions of *the body* beyond words.

3.3: 'Poetics of the Flesh' and 'A Body Knows – A Theopoetics of Life and Death'

Two important works that explore embodiment with theopoetic reflection are *Poetics of the Flesh* by Mayra Rivera, and *A Body Knows – A Theopoetics of Life and Death* by Melanie Duguid-May.[17] Both texts acknowledge the role of the body in the human experience recognising it as a source of knowledge, wisdom, and connection with the divine.

Looking firstly at Duguid-May's work, her writing traces a personal evolution from traditional theological discourse to a theopoetic perspective, influenced by personal battles with cancer and loss, and the search for healing and growth amid adversity.[18] Her book differs from the style of the systematic theologian by foregrounding *poiesis* as the process *of making and remaking without ceasing* embracing a fluid and dynamic approach to her writing. For Duguid-May, theopoetics is not simply a matter of writing, but is driven by deeper impulse –

[17] Melanie A. May, *A Body Knows: A Theopoetics of Death and Resurrection* (New York: Continuum, 1995); Mayra Rivera, *Poetics of the Flesh* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015).

[18] This is reminiscent of Rubem Alves, for whom the birth of his child marked a methodological shift in his work toward a more creative and experiential approach to theology. Keefe-Perry, *Way to Water,* 57.

a desire to engage theology through increased mystery, imagination, grace, play and creative energy. This desire reflects a deep longing for God and an attentiveness to God's desire.

For the present chapter, what is most interesting is that Duguid-May writes about how her most formative theological insights have originated from her body, understood as *knower.* Such knowing is rooted in the *flesh*, in an embodied and experiential mode of understanding. Knowledge, she argues, is not only a product of the mind or a mental process, but also a result of the experiences dealt with bodily.[19] By paying attention to her body as *knower*, Duguid-May suggests a rethinking of the foundations of epistemology. Women, by tuning into the *knowingness* in their bodies, can create a space to explore the depths of their physical experiences and forge theological connections for themselves.[20] The body becomes both the site and recipient of revelation.[21] As Duguid-May, drawing on Naomi Goldenberg, suggests:

> As women speak more and more in public settings... Hermeneutics might then discover the original text, that is, the human body. In the beginning was definitely not the Word... It is the flesh that makes the words.[22]

Scott Holland regards Duguid-May's style as incarnational theopoetics, articulated with a Hebrew rather than a Greek accent.[23] Speaking with a Hebrew accent, Duguid-May prioritises storytelling and personal experiences, an approach influenced by Semitic thinking and often characterised by a focus on narratives, imagery and a relationship with God. In contrast, if she were to speak with a Greek accent she may emphasise logic and reason in her theological understanding. This Greek-influenced perspective would likely involve a more analytical, abstract and systematic approach to her work. As Holland writes, "This is

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[19] Duguid-May, *A Body Knows,* 102. Isherwood and Stuart, *Introducing Body Theology,* 15–32.

[20] Megan Clay, "Abundant Body Narratives: Re-Visioning the Theological Embodiment of Women through Feminist Theology and Art as a Way of Flourishing," *Feminist Theology* 25, no. 3 (2017): 248–56, https://doi.org/10.1177/0966735017693969.

[21] Keefe-Perry, *Way to Water* 54–55.

[22] Duguid-May, *A Body Knows,* 23. Naomi R. Goldenberg and Jane Flax, "Returning Words to Flesh: Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and the Resurrection of the Body," *Hypatia* 7, no. 1 (1992): 188.

[23] Scott Holland, Professor Emeritus of Theology and Culture at Bethany Theological Seminary, is known for his work in the area of theopoetics. He was instrumental in establishing the seminary's Certificate in *Theopoetics and Theological Imagination* and in developing its *Master of Arts in Theopoetics and Writing.*

important for both good art and good theology, for the Creator God of Genesis is both poet and potter. God created with both word and hand."[24]

Turning to the work of Mayra Rivera, she writes of the significance of *the body* as an object of inquiry. The human body, as the physical aspect of human existence, is always expressing and producing ideas that emerge from and contribute to the flesh of the world, something she calls a "labyrinth of incarnations"[25] She believes that imaginative or creative works move us beyond the limits of our earthly bodies without ever separating us from them. She writes,

> All our knowledge – of self, others, of the world – is embodied and interlaced in the world of which it is part. I am of this world. The movements of my body, seeing and touching, speaking and thinking, constitute my body and contribute to the flesh of the world. The world is a labyrinth of incarnations. To be a body is to be tied to the world, not beyond the specificities of our bodies, but through them.[26]

She refers to the *body* as the discernible, visible aspect of human existence, encountered as a particular and located presence within the world. In contrast, *flesh* names the more expansive, relational field in which bodies are always already entangled. It is not fixed but dynamic and constantly changing, crossing the boundaries between the individual body and the world. This distinction is not between two separate realities, but the *body* as a located presence and *flesh* as the wider network of relations in which that presence is formed and sustained. She does not replace the *body* with *flesh* but focuses on how they constitute each other, such that one cannot encounter *flesh* without a *body.*[27]

Flesh is always *becoming*. It is relational in that we consume the flesh of plants and animals, our skin continually sheds cells, and we are fundamentally interconnected to our surroundings. *Flesh* is a means of connection with the world, a constant flow of elements in

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[24] Scott Holland, "A Theopoetics of Seeking," in *Seeking Cultures of Peace: A Peace Church Conversation*, ed. Fernando Enns, Scott Holland, and Ann Riggs (Telford, PA: Cascadia Publishing House, 2004)

[25] Rivera, *Poetics of the Flesh*, 112.

[26] Rivera, *Poetics of the Flesh*, 155–56.

[27] The emphasis on the mutual constitution of body and flesh resonates with the work of Kearney on carnal imagination and embodied relationality. See, Richard Kearney, 'What Is Carnal Hermeneutics?', *New Literary History* (Baltimore) 46, no. 1 (2015) 99–124, https://doi.org/10.1353/nlh.2015.0009. Also, Catherine Keller's account of entanglement and relational becoming, both of which resist any strict separation between the body and its wider relational field. See, Catherine Keller, *Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming* (London: Routledge, 2003).

and out of bodies, reminding us that the boundaries between individual bodies and the world are porous, temporary and elusive. She writes,

> Flesh is always becoming. Air, water, food, sunlight and even societies of microorganisms enter our bodies to weave the delicate tissue of our flesh. Imperceptibly to the naked eye, cell by cell, day after day, the world constitutes your body and mine. And our bodies enter into the constitution of the world. They are intimately our own, singular and irreplaceable, and yet formed by and given to the world.[28]

The flesh of the body and the flesh of the world are shaped and changed by many factors, including new technologies, wars and global conflicts, economic activities, politics, environmental dynamics, art, relationships, and belief systems. In her writing, Rivera seeks to reclaim the value of the body and elements of human experience that have been dismissed as irrelevant for theological reflection because they were deemed carnal rather than spiritual,

> Flesh weaves bodies and the world. Flesh twists and turns, constituting realities that never exhaust it. Flesh is constitutive of my body and of the world. Yet it does not belong to me and it does not belong to you. It is an element – like water or air – on which we all depend and to which we all contribute. Because the elemental web that gives rise to and sustains my body precedes and exceeds my life, because the flesh of my body interlaces with the flesh of the world, I cannot fully represent it. Yet each of our bodies has its history, rhythms and textures – its own way of encountering and incarnating the flesh of the world.[29]

Rivera is significant here as her work helps to name what is taking place in Bible Journaling, where embodiment is not fixed, but relational and always in process. The distinction between *body* and *flesh* is important, and will be developed further below, as it offers a more expansive account of how meaning is formed, where the body is always already entangled within a wider field of relations. For Rivera, poetics is more than a style of writing; it is a mode of knowing and being in the world that resists totalising forms of thought and remains open to what is not easily said, as well as to what is experienced as fragmented in one's life. She writes, "the world's poetic force creates itself as *relation*."[30] This is what we begin to see in Bible Journaling where modes of knowing are made visible even when not explicitly

[28] Rivera, *Poetics of the Flesh*, 2.

[29] Rivera, *Poetics of the Flesh*, 85.

[30] Rivera, *Poetics of the Flesh*, 3.

named, bringing to life an interconnected web of relations that includes the wider world and the contexts that shape lived experience.

I now turn to four Bible Journaling images, interpreting them through a theopoetic framework informed by the work of both Rivera and Duguid-May. There are four interrelated areas to explore. Through these four areas the body becomes a site of meaning, where interpretation is worked out through how it is depicted as a site of knowing and reflection. These areas of focus are:

1. The images draw on visual motifs that convey meaning rather than conceal it, focusing on the experience of being a body *in the world*, rather than abstraction or objectification.
2. The images portray the female body not just as a physical form, but also as a *knower*, implying that the body is a source of wisdom, knowledge and understanding.
3. The images depict the transformative process of human *becoming,* which is always a bodily *becoming* (Keller), and emphasise the inherent physicality of such a process.
4. The images show that the body serves as a vessel for divine communication and is both the site and recipient of revelation.

In the following analysis of the four selected images, I will observe a consistent structure. I will begin by providing a *thick description*, drawing upon the terminology used in art criticism. I will then present an overview of the art materials used and then offer a descriptive account of what the artwork presents to the viewer. Following this, focus will shift towards the biblical text that has been appropriated, in particular the historical, theological implications and contextual significance. I will then explore how the artwork interacts with the biblical text and discuss the artist's interpretation, examining the themes it conveys. Lastly, I will relate the artwork to theopoetics, exploring the four interconnected areas discussed above.

3.4: *Becoming* Flesh

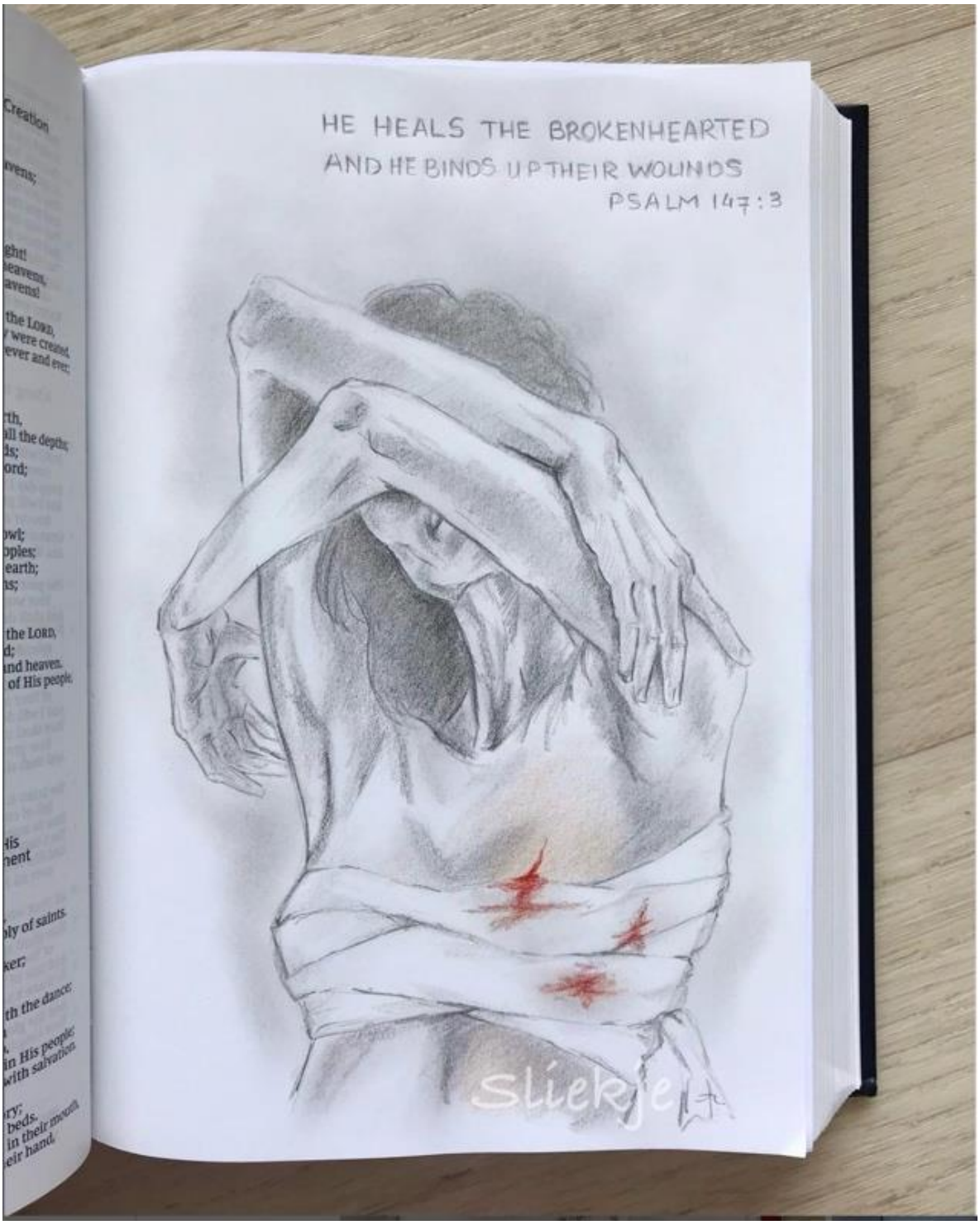


Figure 3.1 Bible Journaling artwork focusing on Psalm 147:3.[31]

[31] Sliekje (Instagram: @sliekjesart) uploaded 4th June 2023 https://nisar.omeka.net/items/show/408. The Bible used is ESV, Crossway

In Figure 3.1, a woman is depicted in a graphite pencil sketch on the blank interleaved page of a Bible. Her face is mostly hidden as her raised arms cover it. Rather than her hands, it is her arms that conceal her face. She appears exposed and vulnerable with her neck, chest, and upper torso exposed. Her head is tilted back, away from the wounds, and the muscles in her neck look strained and tight. Wrapped around her is a white bandage-like cloth that is clearly marked with three red stains that resemble piercings on her left breast. The red marks are the sole colour feature in the entire artwork making them stand out prominently and distinctly. Although barely perceptible, there is a subtle shading in a soft tan or beige hue underneath the red markings. The accompanying biblical text is handwritten in block text also in graphite pencil. It reads "He heals the brokenhearted and he binds up their wounds" (Psalm 147:3). The photograph of the artwork does not clearly show the section of the Bible from which the artwork was drawn, however from the visible section we can see that the artwork has been depicted opposite Psalm 147.

The juxtaposition of the illustrated portrayal of the woman and the selected biblical passage from Psalm 147 warrants further exploration. Before considering an analysis or interpretation of this artwork, I would like to consider Psalm 147:3 in a broader historical and theological framework to understand its context and meaning. Following this, I will consider some thematic points of contact with the crucifixion of Christ.

Figure 3.1 Focus on Psalm 147:3

Psalm 147 is a psalm of praise and thanksgiving and fits the regular structure of a praise psalm.[32] It combines calls to praise in verses 1, 7 and 12 with the explanations and context prompting such praise in verses 2-6, 8-11, 13-20.[33] The psalm is composed of three sections, each introduced and ending with the resounding invocation *Praise the Lord*.[34] It celebrates

[32] William P. Brown, *The Oxford Handbook of the Psalms*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). Although not all of them have the same structure and there are many variations on the following basic form, a number have the following threefold structure: 1. Introduced call to praise, 2. The main part of the psalm: motivation for the praise 3. Final repetition of the call to praise. The psalms of praise and thanksgiving are often grouped together and predominate more in the second half of the Psalter, just as laments are more frequently found in the first half. The climatic note of the Psalter is therefore one of praise. John Day, *Psalms*, Old Testament Guides 14 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990) 39-40

[33] Goldingay writes that vv. 2-6, 8-11 and 13-20 form a separate psalm, and it might be of separate origin, but it fits well enough in MT, and the inclusion "Praise Yah" makes clear that MT does see this as one psalm.

[34] This also happens in other psalms. Psalm 147 forms part of the group of psalms 146-150 that uses this invocation.

God's continuous acts and presence in creation, rather than specific events, although the focus is on Jerusalem throughout. Though likely used in worship, the specific setting is unknown.[35]

In the arena of Bible Journaling, Psalm 147, specifically verse 3, holds an appeal and relevance among Journalers.[36] The verse states, "He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds." The imagery of binding wounds in this verse portrays God as a healer who offers repair and comfort to those who are hurting. This healing mends brokenness and provides much-needed relief. For contemporary interpreters like Bible Journalers, it serves as a reminder of God's love and ability to bring wholeness and renewal to those who are suffering. There is solace in the idea that emotional wounds can find healing in the same way that physical wounds can mend given enough time and care.[37]

When considering the significance of Psalm 147:3 for Bible Journalers, it prompts us to consider this verse within the larger context of the entire psalm, especially considering the verse immediately preceding verse 3: "The Lord builds up Jerusalem; he gathers the outcasts of Israel" (Psalm 147:2). While verses 2 and 3 may be perceived as quite separate statements, it is important to consider the contextual background of verse 2 in order to

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[35] John Goldingay, *Psalms* vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006). 965

[36] The appeal of Psalm 147:3 becomes clear, as its imagery of binding wounds and healing the brokenhearted lends itself to visual expressions of pain, healing and care**.** For further examples see,

Example 1: @thisdaughtersjourney "ps147brokenheartedarehealed," *The New Illuminators*, accessed April 5, 2026, https://nisar.omeka.net/items/show/312. See Appendix B, Fig. B1

Example 2: @chelsies_bible, "ps147godhealsall," *The New Illuminators*, accessed April 5, 2026, https://nisar.omeka.net/admin/items/show/495See Appendix B, Fig. B2

Example 3: @lori_p123, "ps147godheals," *The New Illuminators*, accessed April 5, 2026, https://nisar.omeka.net/admin/items/show/498. See Appendix B, Fig. B3

Example 4: @fromfaith, "ps147kintsugi," *The New Illuminators*, accessed April 5, 2026, https://nisar.omeka.net/admin/items/show/617. See Appendix B, Fig. B4

[37] See examples from the NISAR database:
Example 1: Christina Giordano, "lam3iwillloveyouforever," *The New Illuminators*, accessed April 5, 2026, https://nisar.omeka.net/items/show/1963 See Appendix B, Fig. B5

Example 2: @shejournalswisdom, "mic7thelordwillbemylight," *The New Illuminators*, accessed April 5, 2026, https://nisar.omeka.net/items/show/2017. See Appendix B, Fig. B6

understand the significance of verse 3.[38] Prinsloo writes that verse 2 likely pertains to the time of Nehemiah, post-445BC, thereby connecting it to salvation history, and specifically to the Babylonian exile.[39] Following this period of devastation, the people rebuilt the ruins of Jerusalem and allowed the exiles to return to their homeland. Despite this physical restoration, they had been broken in spirit and suffering from the hurt inflicted on them by the exile. God not only builds up the city through drawing people back to it but also responds to the hurt people by healing their pain. Using the metaphor of a compassionate physician to describe God's loving treatment of the wounded people during the exile,[40] the psalmist conveys a steadfast belief in God's reliability, especially to those hurt, traumatised or grieving.[41] Considering how verse 3 might connect with contemporary Bible Journalers interpreting this for their own lives, it is relevant to note that the terms *hurt* and *grief* are synonymous with what historians and psychologists define as *trauma*. [42] As Klän notes, the Greek origin of the word *trauma* literally means *wound*, a term still used in the medical field today.[43] Personal experiences of woundedness connects with the real and metaphorical experience described in Psalm 147:2-3 and opens up the Bible as a text that reflects wisdom and healing.[44] The psalms often address themes of hardship and deliverance, and they provide

[38] This is also the view of Goldingay. However, Goldingay writes that the collocation of brokenness of spirit and the building up of Jerusalem also appears in Ps 51:17-18 (19-20). This collocation of verses 2 and 3 in Psalm 147 suggests some mutual nuancing.

[39] Willem S Prinsloo, "Psalms" in *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible: Psalms* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2019). 374

[40] Prinsloo. 374

[41] Goldingay, *Psalms*, vol. 3. the combination of brokenness of spirit and binding up also parallels Isa 61:1 there and here, the way one treats bodily hurts (a broken limb or wound) becomes an image for the way God treats hurts in people's morale and hearts. "Broken" usually refers to the physical and "hurt" to the emotional' the verb "hurt" applies to Zion in Isa 54:6.

[42] In the United States, according to the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) 8% of Americans have been diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) at some point in their lives. Other related mental health conditions are a more significant public health concern, with millions of adults experiencing mental health disorders each year. For example, in 2022 it was reported that approximately 51.5 million adults experienced mental illness in the previous year (21.5% of the adult population). It is reported that 1 in 5 adults in the U.S suffer from mental illness. From, National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH). https://www.nimh.niv.gov

[43] Derived from this meaning we find a variety of definitions in the field of psychology and in historical science. Werner R. A. Klän, "'He Heals the Brokenhearted and Binds up Their Wounds' (Ps 147:3): Perspectives on Pastoral Care," *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies*74, no. 4 (2018): 5, https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v74i4.5116.

[44] Christina Landman, "Healing the Wounded: The Psalms and Therapy," *Old Testament Essays* 33, no. 3 (2020): 663–73.

comfort to those who experience various forms of suffering.[45] In this sense, Psalm 147:3 brings a contemporary perspective towards the process of healing for *wounded* individuals. Importantly, Psalms is also the only book of the Bible that is about human dialogue and prayers addressed directly to God, rather than an account of God's action in the world, making them a particularly poignant scriptural resource for the practice of Bible Journaling.

Figure 3.1 Let the Body Speak: Artist's Interpretation

Moving on to the artwork itself, it is important to consider why the artist might put this image next to the Old Testament text and if she is drawing parallels with Christ's crucifixion. It is a common approach in the Christian tradition to read the Old Testament in light of Jesus and the New Testament, and one which runs the risk of supersessionism.[46] The rationale underlying the artist's choice of positioning the artwork in its current location instead of using a Gospel text's location remains unknown. Regardless of this ambiguity, I would like to consider three aspects of correlation between the woman depicted in the artwork and the crucifixion of Christ. Firstly, a parallel can be drawn in the portrayal of physical suffering. Secondly, the use of a cloth to wrap around the body. Lastly, the display of wounds on the body.[47] I will explore this last point in greater depth and connect it with my research framework.

Considering the portrayal of physical suffering, it is noteworthy that while the stance and gesture of the woman diverge from the traditional portrayal of Jesus on the cross,[48] she is not

[45] Walter Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary,* Augsburg Old Testament Studies (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1984). James L. Crenshaw, *The Psalms: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2001).

[46] Replacement theology, also known as superssionism, is the theological belief that the Church has replaced Israel as God's chosen people. The belief holds that the promises given to Israel in the Old Testament now apply to the Church instead. This affects how Christians understand salvation history and how certain key biblical texts are interpreted. For more on this, see Terence L. Donaldson, "Supersessionism and Early Christian Self-Definition" *Journal of the Jesus Movement in Its Jewish Setting* 3 (2016): 1–32. Also, Ralph J. Korner, "Post-Supersessionism: Introduction, Terminology, Theology," *Religions* 13, no. 12 (2022), 1195.

[47] Relating the suffering and death of Christ to individual present experience has always been an essential part of understanding the depth of sacrifice and compassion that lies at the core of the Christian faith. The Christian doctrine of atonement teaches that the crucifixion of Christ has universal significance, offering relevance for the human condition. By viewing the death of Jesus as written in human flesh and history, believers are able to see their own pain in new light. The past event of the crucifixion has a creative power upon the present, grasping the imagination of individuals towards the presence of the living God. For more, Paul S. Fiddes, *Past Events and Present Salvation: The Christian Idea of Atonement* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1989), 220.

[48] The moment of Jesus being nailed to the cross in each of the four Gospels: See, Matthew 27:35, Mark 15:24, Luke 23:33, John 19:18.

depicted as being constrained, and her anguish and pain are conveyed through the powerful positioning of her body.[49] Her face is concealed by her arms, her head is tilted back and there is tension in her strained neck. Research suggests that body posture can play a crucial role in conveying the experience of pain and the artwork demonstrating the capacity for the body to communicate pain non-verbally,

> It seems that certain actions, most notably hand movements towards injury sites..... holding the arms close to the body, are frequently present in postures that communicate pain. These actions may be the key cues we look for when identifying pain in others.[50]

In the crucifixion narratives the experience of physical suffering was accompanied by overwhelming feelings of forsakenness.[51] In Luke's interpretation, the last cry of Jesus was a pivotal moment in a place of uncertainty showing how, amidst agony and impending death, what was required was vulnerable surrender or an opening of the human-self to God in trust. This trusting committal of his Spirit to God revealed the nature with which Jesus approached the dark valley of death.[52] There is a link here with the depiction of the woman in the artwork. Despite the pain and anguish present in the woman's body, the accompanying Psalm 147:3 expresses a sense of unwavering trust in God and instils the artwork with a sense of hope that God will respond compassionately. The exact severity of the woman's suffering is unknown, however the same trusting commitment to God is present through her use of the biblical verse to accompany the artwork.

The second point of correlation is the usage of cloth to envelop both the body of Jesus and the depicted woman. According to the Gospels, the body of Jesus was wrapped in cloth following

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[49] Joseph Walsh et al., "Pain Communication through Body Posture: The Development and Validation of a Stimulus Set," *PAIN*® 155, no. 11 (2014): 2282–90, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pain.2014.08.019. This research examines how body posture may convey sensations of pain within the body. Other studies have been conducted on the correlation between facial expressions and communication of pain, but this particular research investigated the role of the body within this context.

[50] See, *Pain communication through body posture: The many postures of pain* from the International Association for the Study of Pain (IASP) https://www.iasp-pain.org/publications/relief-news/article/pain-communication-body-posture/

[51] Matthew 27:46, Mark 15:34, John 19:28, Luke 23:46.

[52] Fiddes, *Past Events and Present Salvation,* 58.

his crucifixion and removal from the cross.[53] In contrast, the cloth surrounding the depicted woman appears within a different context, as she is shown in a state of suffering rather than death, and the circumstances of its presence remain unclear. It is uncertain how it came to be there or what purpose it serves. One possibility could be its use in tending to the three wounds present on her left breast, perhaps to stem the blood flow and help in the process of healing and care. Similarly, the linen cloth used to wrap Jesus is associated with burial practices, serving to cover and prepare the body following death, and to preserve a sense of dignity.[54] While it may be understood in practical terms, some scholars, in particular Wong and Lee, suggest that the linen cloth is regarded as conveying more than simply the finality of death. Instead, it can be read symbolically, pointing towards transformation from death to life where the cloth comes to signify new life and the achievement of triumph and glory.[55]

Lastly, the display of wounds on the artwork in the form of three red markings and their link to the crucifixion narrative stand out as a significant feature. The depicted woman does not have markings on her hands or side, but her wounds are more localised over her heart on the left breast.[56] This suggests a personal connection and significance distinct from the traditional wounds of Jesus and yet the depiction of wounds and blood alludes to her common humanity in Christ, emphasising the shared experience of suffering.[57] Lee writes, "The wounds are a

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[53] **Luke 23:52-53** "This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then he took it down, wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid it in rock-hewn tomb where no one had ever been laid" **John 19:40 -** "They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews." **Matthew 27:60** - "So Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock." **Mark 15:46** – "The Joseph brought a linen cloth, and taking down the body, wrapped it in the linen cloth, and laid it in the tomb that had been hewn out of the rock." (NRSV)

[54] Paul L. Redditt, "Between Text & Sermon: John 19:38-42," *Interpretation* 61, no. 1 (2007): 68.

[55] Edward Wong, "From Wounds to Scars: The Embodiment of a Forwarded Past through the Body Marks of Jesus in John 20," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* (London, England) 46, no. 2 (2023): 193–215, https://doi.org/10.1177/0142064X231208763. Scholars have drawn comparisons between the act of binding the wounds of Jesus with linen cloth to restrict the flow of blood and water, and the processes associated with childbirth and new life. The process of childbirth brings with it the *breaking of the waters* or the rupture of the amniotic sac that surrounds the fetus in the womb, providing a barrier until the moment of birth. Drawing a parallel to this concept, the flowing of blood and water from the side of Jesus, is akin to the release of amniotic fluids released during maternal delivery. Historical accounts depict childbirth in ancient times as dangerous and often fatal to the mother and child, but the marks of labour and the pain endured including scarring and damage to the pelvic floor, stretch marks on the body etc, are visible reminders of the gift of life that has triumphed over death.

[56] The wounds of Jesus are believed to have been on his feet, hands and side. See, John 20:25-27, Luke 24:39-40, John 19: 34.

[57] For a related account, see Isherwood and Stuart, *Introducing Body Theology* where incarnation is understood as the redeeming presence of the divine in and between bodies and the natural world. This incarnational nature of reality is revealed most fully in the person of Jesus.

kind of text writ large on the body of Jesus for future readers, to read and be transformed by these memorial inscriptions."[58]

It is unknown to the viewer whether the depicted wounds represent personal trauma or symbolise a hidden past experience that has left a lasting mark on the life of the artist. Three piercings bleeding through a bandage is reminiscent of a breast biopsy checking for cancer cells, for example. Perhaps, too, the wounds suggest a larger societal injustice or event that has shaped the artist's perspective. The wounds could have many layers of meaning embedded within them; the artist's intention is not explicitly revealed. A similar point is made by Duguid-May who writes,

> Language itself is limited and limiting. But believing my body has a history – and that history is interpretation of experience, is meaning making – I tell the story of my body as the location of God's revelation in my life.[59]

In the post-crucifixion description, the wounds of Jesus assume significance where they are a key factor in affirming his identity as the resurrected Christ.[60] In John's Gospel, Jesus, having risen, appears still bearing his wounds, which serve as markers to persuade wavering and doubtful disciples.[61] The wounds forge a bond between past and present, death and life.[62] By considering both the wounds on the depicted woman and the significance of the wounds on the resurrected Jesus, it reminds us that our bodies hold memories of our past and are often

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[58] Dorothy A. Lee, "The Significance of the Wounds of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel," *Review and Expositor* 120, nos 1–2 (2023), 125, https://doi.org/10.1177/00346373231196609.

[59] May, *A Body Knows*, 103.

[60] The recognition accounts of the risen Christ appears a number of times in the Gospels, example John 20.11–18; 21.1–14; Luke 24.13–15

[61] Since the Gospel never uses the word *wound,* but speaks only of the *mark* of the nails and sword (τύπος), which in our context constitutes *wounds.* The noun for *wound* in the New Testament is either τραῦμα (Luke 10:34) or πλήγη (Acts 16:33; Rev 13:3, 12); also μώλωψ (1 Pet 2:24 [Isa 53:5 LXX]). Lee, 'The Significance of the Wounds of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel,' 115. For further on the contextual nature of biblical linguistics, see James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), 107–205.

[62] Lee, 'The Significance of the Wounds of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel'. Sarah Coakley notes that the recognition accounts of the risen Christ in the gospels often have a *progressive nature* that guides the readers along a path of transformation. Not all characters, even among the faithful, express the same response to the resurrected Jesus. However, as the narrative unfolds, recognition takes place as some characters develop an awakened *spiritual sense,* as Coakley argues, which allows them "the possibility of seeing differently" as their physical senses are deepened and accompanied by moral insights. Sarah Coakley, *Powers and Submissions: Spirituality, Philosophy and Gender.*, Challenges in Contemporary Theology (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002). 135 - 147

visibly etched with traces of our personal experiences; scars from injuries, wrinkles from aging, or even tattoos that can represent meaningful life events. Our bodies are a tangible representation of how we have lived and interacted with the world and a vessel that carries the stories of who we are.[63]

Many Bible Journalers allow the female body "to speak"[64] visually on the page, where they tune into the wisdom of their embodied experiences, "that rich source of inner knowledge that has been dormant and now awakens and rises to the subject's consciousness."[65] This corresponds with Rivera's statement that "this is theology through the body, not about the body."[66] The creative *poiesis* opens up a space where women can understand their incarnational value and where personal stories can be *spoken* and heard through their artwork. Given space to *speak*, the woman depicted in figure 3.1 raises important theological questions. By portraying the wounds and suffering that echo and evoke the crucifixion through a female image, it challenges traditional masculine representations of Christ's crucifixion. Valuing a woman's body and her experience in the light of Christ's body carries significant meaning. This portrayal blurs the boundaries between Christ's humanity and our own, particularly in how women mirror Christ.

Figure 3.1 The Body Knows: Through a Theopoetics Lens

I now bring this artwork and the themes outlined above into conversation with theopoetics, shifting from the concept of *the body* to the more nuanced notion of *the flesh*. This distinction offers a way of understanding embodiment in Bible Journaling that moves beyond physicality to focus more on its relational and dynamic dimensions including vulnerability, lived experiences, interconnectedness with others and the wider world. *Flesh* draws attention to the

[63] Paul Ricouer insists that "flesh is my wound, my natal pact, my umbilical memory, my vulnerability." Richard Kearney writes that "it is my flesh that inserts me into the flesh of the world. It reveals my radical interdependency as a being who feels both ways – as an embodied consciousness projecting meaning onto others while simultaneously receiving meaning from them." Richard Kearney, "What Is Carnal Hermeneutics?" *New Literary History* 46, no. 1 (2015): 110, https://doi.org/10.1353/nlh.2015.0009.

[64] This term is used by Megan Clay in relation to her account of how art enables the female body *to "speak."* See, "Abundant Body Narratives: Re-Visioning the Theological Embodiment of Women through Feminist Theology and Art as a Way of Flourishing," *Feminist Theology* 25, no. 3 (1 May 2017): 248–56, https://doi.org/10.1177/0966735017693969, Clay describes how visual art becomes a means of expressing embodied experience and of articulating a theological voice grounded in that experience, drawing in part on the writings of Lisa Isherwood.

[65] Clay, "Abundant Body Narratives," 251.

[66] Rivera, *Poetics of the Flesh*.

depth and complexity of embodied existence. While the distinction between *body* and *flesh* remains important, they are not separate in lived experience and will at times be used with some flexibility. Moving forward, what is intended is to encapsulate the intricate and relational dimensions of human existence, encompassing emotions, lived experiences and interpersonal connections.

Turning again to Figure 3.1, the depiction of the wounds on the body not only alludes to past experiences or events, as discussed above, it is a vital aspect in exploring the ongoing process of *becoming,* as outlined in Chapter Two. Process theopoetics understands this process of *becoming flesh* as a kind of rebirth, a cyclical nature of growth that is rooted in the experiences of joy and suffering that are inherent in the human condition.[67] As Richard Kearney writes, "Tangible flesh is constantly a medium of transition and transmission."[68] Wong suggests that the crucifixion wounds of Jesus undergo a transformation and become tangible scars, where the formation of these scars signifies a process of *working through* the trauma and violence of the cross.[69] He writes that the suffering is acknowledged while also allowing for movement forward, with the scars functioning as a form of healing or a coming to terms with past woundedness.[70]

Duguid-May's theopoetic exploration is also anchored in the memories held in her body and "her experience of new life in the face of the crying of the flesh,"[71] allowing *knowing* to grow from within lived experience.[72] It is through the complexities of life that individuals navigate and experience moments that shape their understanding of self, God and the world around

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[67] Catherine Keller, *Intercarnations: Exercises in Theological Possibility* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), 2.

[68] Kearney, "What Is Carnal Hermeneutics?" 103. Kearney also writes that in touching the world, we are constantly prefiguring, refiguring and configuring our experience. But if touch is something we do to the world, it is always something the world does to us. It works both ways. Flesh is open-hearted; it is where we experience our greatest vulnerability. It is the site where we are most keenly attentive to wounds and scars. With this comes a deep sense of fragility and insecurity.

[69] Wong, "From Wounds to Scars" 196.

[70] Kearney, 2016: 77-90; and Kearney, 2003: 103-105

[71] Keefe-Perry, *Way to Water,* 58.

[72] This aligns with conceptual frameworks regarding the body established by renowned scholars such as Edmund Husserl, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Michael Foucault, Judith Butler, and Martin Heidegger. These scholars have made efforts to reclaim the body as the primary site of knowledge. In particular, see Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "The Body as Expression and Speech," *The Phenomenology of Perception*, 1945, 174–99.

them thus giving rise to new forms of connection and becoming.[73] Within this framework, the woman depicted in Figure 3.1 is released into the process of *becoming* during the creative *poiesis* opening up the possibility of spiritual renewal and growth. She moves forward with her wounds, as her own experiences become a source of knowing and transformation. The juxtaposition of the image of the wounded woman in the artwork and the biblical text suggests that instead of continuing to conceal her face or hide her wounds, the body, as an active *knower*, will move more intentionally and emphatically into the world despite the visible hurts. However, we cannot state this definitively through the image itself; rather it is the possibility that exists – the artist, through the creative *poiesis* also moves into a space of *becoming*. As Keller states, "what matters theologically is nothing apart from what we materialise in the world in the midst of our fragile complexity."[74] In this way, the artwork brings together woundedness and *becoming* as part of an ongoing embodied process of *knowing*. Read in this light, the significance of the artwork does not lie solely in what it represents, but in how it is taken up and lived out beyond the page.

Considering Keller's writing in light of the depicted woman suggests that the core meaning or intrinsic quality of the artwork is realised when it is connected to actions, doings and makings that extend beyond reflections on the Bible itself. It implies that the artwork is more fully understood when seen within the broader context of how it shapes and connects with other aspects of one's life. By bringing biblical interpretation into relation with lived experiences,

[73] An important interlocuter here is Maurice Merleau-Ponty, whose work on embodiment offers key insights for my framework. Although not a process philosopher his thought shares strong affinities with process traditions, particularly on its emphasis on the body as dynamic, relational and shaped through engagement with the world. See, Andrew Kirkpatrick, 'Merleau-Ponty's Reading of Whitehead: A Romantic and Invisible Influence', *Process Studies* 47, nos 1–2 (2018): 62–82, https://doi.org/10.5406/processstudies.47.1-2.0062. Merleau-Ponty's influential work on *phenomenology of perception* was an investigation of embodied engagements with the world. Merleau-Ponty's work in *The Visible and the Invisible* develops an account of embodied perception in which the body is not separate from the world but already entangled within it. See *The Visible and the Invisible* ed. Claude Lefort, trans. by Alphonso Lingis, Northwestern University Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy (Evanston IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968). His account of embodiment as dynamic and ever-changing, emphasises that human knowing is always situated, arising through the body's ongoing interaction with its environment. In this sense, the body is not a fixed object but a mode of being-in-the world, continually formed through its relations. Our knowledge of the world is embodied knowledge and inseparably linked to the world we inhabit. Knowledge is shaped by the body's interaction with its environment, constantly engaging with and becoming a part of its surroundings. He says that to be a body is "to be tied to a certain world" moving toward the world and creating connections. This leads us to an understanding of the body as ever emerging from relational processes.

[74] Catherine Keller, *Intercarnations: Exercises in Theological Possibility*, 134.

deeply interconnected with the practicalities of everyday life, Bible Journalers offer a theopoetic articulation to theological meaning.

The second image I explore opens up another dimension of embodiment in Bible Journaling; that is, the inseparability of thoughts and emotions, and how these are interconnected with lived experience. Catherine Keller uses the term *intercarnations* to describe this rich network of connections between different aspects of the world that make up the *flesh of the world.* In this sense, the body is not separated from the world or its physical environment. Before turning to this image, it is important to note that the study of emotions is a relatively new field of research in Biblical Studies;[75] however, in the context of Bible Journaling, particularly through engagement with the Psalms, there exists an opportunity to explore this aspect of interpretation.

> Ancient writers and modern readers share many common emotions. This is why we can still read ancient literature and find it engaging with our feelings and many of our human concerns. This is true of Scripture and nowhere more so than in the book of Psalms, which touches the full range of human emotion in all its heights and depths, its joys and sorrows.[76]

The psalms often resonate with the innermost thoughts and emotions of the contemporary Bible Journaler due to the rich, expressive language conveyed in the text. In this way, emotions and deep human experiences can be evoked and expressed theopoetically, in a more vivid and multidimensional way through Bible Journaling.[77] It is to this aspect of embodiment I would now like to explore in the second image.

[75] Paul A. Kruger, 'On Emotions and the Expression of Emotions in the Old Testament: A Few Introductory Remarks', *Biblische Zeitschrift* 48, no. 2 (2004): 213–28, https://doi.org/10.30965/25890468-048-02-90000004.

[76] Geoffrey W. Grogan, *Psalms: The Two Horizons Old Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2008), 142; H. Kent, 'Psalm 34' Interpretation 40 (1986), 175-180.

[77] Sigrid Eder, 'Broken Hearted' and 'Crushed in Spirit': Metaphors and Emotions in Psalm 34, 19', *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 30, no. 1 (2016): 1–15.

3.5: A Body Tied to the World

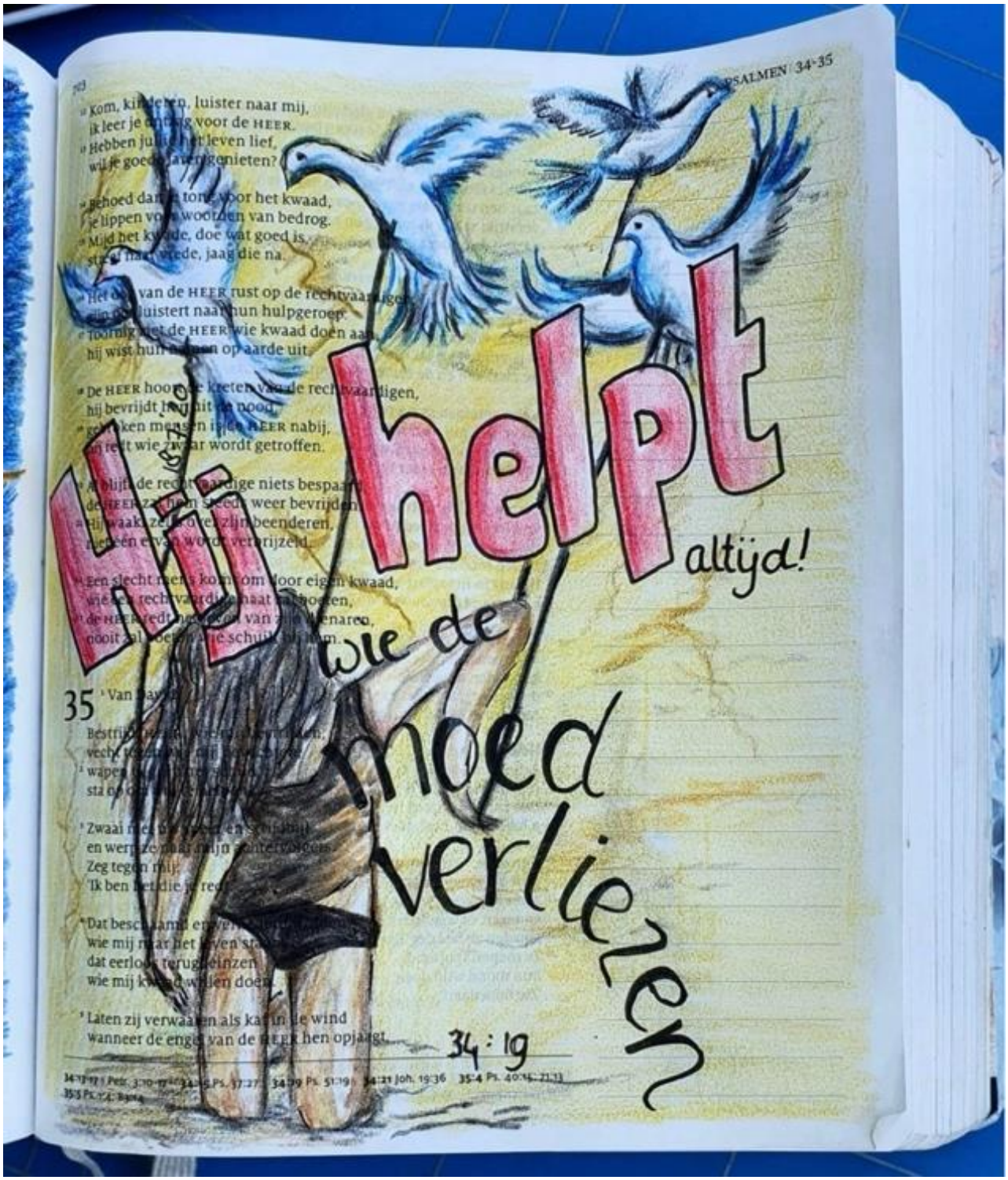


Figure 3.2 Bible Journaling artwork focusing on Psalm 34:19.[78]

[78] Ireens Bible Adventure (Instagram: @ireens_bible_adventure) uploaded 8th July 2020 https://nisar.omeka.net/items/show/467

The artwork has been created with pencil crayon and black ink artwork. The background has a transparent yellow-hued block section across the entire page likely rendered using a colouring pencil or crayon medium. The main visual motif is of a woman on her knees with her head hanging low and her face covered by her hair. She is scantily clothed in dark shades of black, grey, and brown. The ground where she is kneeling is shaded in a darker colour showing that she is kneeling on solid ground although the viewer has no sense where this scene might be taking place. One of her arms is raised higher than the other as there are thick ropes tied to both her arms and her hands. Her body looks limp and weak. The ropes are connected to four flying birds, similar to doves, who are in various positions of flight. In contrast to the woman's darker hues, the doves shine in bright white and blue. It is unclear to the viewer whether the woman is conscious or whether she is too weak to respond to these birds. There are a variety of textual features on the page, all written in the Dutch language. Two words, *Hij Helpt (He Helps)*, are written in block red colour with a black outline which ensures emphasis and prominence; other text is written smaller in black ink, the word *verliezen* curving to mirror the position of the woman's bent arm. The top line of text reads, *Hij Helpt Altiyd* (He Always Helps).[79] The second section of text reads, *wie de moed verliezen* (who lose courage).[80] The Bible Journaler also includes the Dutch translation of Psalm 34:19 in the accompanying text of the social media upload: *Gebroken mensen is de heer nabij, hij redt wie zwaar wordt getroffen.*[81] The English translation of this verse reads, "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord rescues them from them all."

Figure 3.2 Focus on Psalm 34:19

Before considering the various elements of the artwork worthy of further exploration, I will consider the specific biblical text that is being appropriated and its rhetorical and literary significance.

[79] Translation from Dutch: *he helps always*

[80] Translation from Dutch: *who lose courage*

[81] Accompanying the social media upload, the Bible Journaler also included the following text, ""Psalm 34:19 "Gebroken mensen is de HEER nabij, hij redt wie zwaar wordt getroffen. Soms verliezen we de moed, zijn we gebroken. Opstaan lukt niet meer op eigen kracht. Gelukkig hebben wij God. Hij helpt. Blijf daarop vertrouwen!" **Translation**: Psalm 34:19 "The Lord is near to broken people, he saves those who are badly hurt." Sometimes we lose heart, we are broken. It is no longer possible to get up on your own. Fortunately we have God. He helps. Keep trusting that!

The text of Psalm 34, in its structure and content, is attributed to King David with an overall theme of thanksgiving and praise for God's goodness, faithfulness and protection; conveying confidence in God's care for those who trust.[82] Connecting authorship with David is problematic as tradition has placed this psalm during a turbulent period in the life of David when he was in hiding and fleeing from King Saul.[83] However, regardless of the complexity concerning its authorship, the psalm clearly offers a voice of hope for the broken and crushed. In the psalm, the psalmist begins by expressing devotion to God by giving thanks and seeking comfort from God in verses 2-5. In verses 3, 5 and 7, the author confidently testifies to God answering their prayers, drawing upon this personal experience to motivate and inspire others to do the same. The latter part of the psalm, beginning with verse 12, features an apostrophic section where the speaker makes an address to an unknown entity, becoming a mentor on living a life close to God. The psalmist imparts wisdom in verses 13-17 assuring the readiness of God's protection for everyone.[84] Verses 18-19 stand out for their strong emotionality, "The Lord is near to *the broken hearted,* and saves *the crushed in spirit."* (NRSV) The two italicised segments are noted for their emotional quality. On Psalm 34:18, Eder writes,

> Both images [*broken hearted* and *crushed in spirit*] refer to those whose inner life and whose centre of life was broken, like you break bones into pieces, reveals the meaning of complete discouragement and brutal destruction. Further emotional effects are those of sadness, darkness, hopelessness and further destruction of vitality triggered by these interactions.[85]

The image of *crushing* evokes an imagery of bones while the image of a *broken-heart* evokes emotional pain. Eder argues that these are negative images, however, the subsequent verse 19 gives the reader the sense that God takes care of the holistic well-being of the individual. The

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[82] The psalms *attributed* to David are Psalms 3-9; 11-32; 34-41; 51-65; 68-70; 86; 101; 103; 108 – 110; 122; 124; 131; 133; and 138-145, approximately half of the Psalter. J Day asserts that it is a "bold scholar" who could claim any particular psalms to be *by* David, as often it is an event in David's life as the occasion for the psalm in question - psalm 34 included. This psalm is referring to episodes known from the books of Samuel and allotted to the individual thanksgiving genre. Day, *Psalms*, 115.

[83] For context, in 1 Samuel 27 we read of David's distress: "David said in his heart, "I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul; there is nothing better for me than to escape to the land of the Philistines; then Saul will despair of seeking me any longer within the borders of Israel, and I shall escape out of his hand." 1 Samuel 27 (NRSV)

[84] Vivian L. Johnson, *David in Distress: His Portrait through the Historical Psalms*, 1st ed., Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies; 505 (New York: T & T Clark International, 2009), 69–81.

[85] Eder, "Broken Hearted" and "Crushed in Spirit," 13.

negative imagery is followed quickly with a positive and hopeful image. In verse 19, the text says that those who experience suffering are assured of the promise of God's closeness and assurance of deliverance. It is the closeness of God embracing the suffering that negates the destructive aspects of the images. A *promise* of healing and salvation from a life full of sadness, pain and darkness.

Figure 3.2 The Bent Body, Lifted by Birds: Artist's Interpretation

I now turn to consider how the artwork engages with the biblical text, exploring the artist's interpretation of Psalm 34:19. According to Eder, it is worth nothing that in verse 19 the cry to God is *not* mentioned, as those who are broken-hearted and crushed in spirit may be so overwhelmed that they cannot speak or ask.[86] Within the context of the depicted woman in Figure 3.2, this can be seen as fitting. She appears vulnerable and exposed, positioned on her knees with a limp and almost lifeless demeanour suggesting her presence in a sombre and challenging place, whether mentally, emotionally, physically, or spiritually. Unlike Figure 3.1 which showcased more visible wounds the woman does not display such markings. However, her weakened body may point to a deeper narrative of past events or traumas – pain or fatigue that remains unknown to the viewer. Rivera expresses how our connections with the world leave a lasting imprint on our bodies: "words mark, wound, elevate, or shatter bodies."[87] The ropes that are attached to the woman's wrists are an interesting feature as they are both constricting and helping her, a reminder that our strength and fragility arise from our ties to the world, as these are held and expressed in the *flesh.*

Another significant aspect of the artwork worth considering is the presence of four birds hovering above the woman. The birds are either trying to lift her up and help her stand on her feet again or controlling her movements similar to how a puppet is manoeuvred. This aspect prompts inquiry into the rationale behind the inclusion of four birds and the significance they may hold to the artist's interpretation of the psalm. The birds depicted resemble white doves, a species frequently referenced in biblical narratives.[88] While no specific biblical account

[86] Eder, "Broken Hearted" and "Crushed in Spirit," 10.

[87] Rivera, *Poetics of the Flesh*, 2.

[88] The imagery of the dove in the Bible is rich and shows familiarity with the bird. It is perhaps the most important symbolic bird, since it is mentioned in the Bible with several meanings. For example, in the Song of Solomon, the frequency of the image of the dove shows that the dove was a symbol of love as it is in modern poetry – See, Song of Solomon 2:14, 5:2, 6:9. It is mentioned as a sacrificial bird, particularly as the offering of the poor and for purification from ritual uncleanness – See, Leviticus 1:14, 5:7, 12:6, 8: 14:22, 30, 15:14. In the

mentions four white doves appearing together, the ancient biblical writers often associated doves with various symbolic meanings observing their characteristics and behaviours.[89] Throughout the life and ministry of Jesus, the birds are mentioned in diverse contexts, including sacrificial offerings and symbolic representations of the Holy Spirit.[90] For instance, in accounts of the Baptism of Jesus, the spirit of God descends like a dove,[91] and similarly, the dove is present at the events of the Transfiguration and Pentecost.[92] In two parables, Luke 8: 5-12 and Matthew 13:32, Jesus uses birds as symbols. Indeed, Matthew 6:26 is widely appropriated in Bible Journaling, as are many *white* birds.[93] In her article *Birds: Metaphor of*

NT the dove was sold in the temple of courts for sacrificial purposes, a practice to which Jesus objected vigorously – See, Matthew 21:12, Mark 11:15, John 2:14,16, and also the visible symbol of the Spirit in the baptism of Jesus – See, Matthew 3:16, Mark 1;10, Luke 3:22, John 1:32. In a more general sense, doves can represent the Church, the Christian soul, the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, or the twelve Apostles. They are very common in catacombs and on early Christian sarcophagi. John L. McKenzie, *Dictionary of the Bible* (London: Chapman, 1972), 203. Peter Murray and Linda Murray, *The Oxford Companion to Christian Art and Architecture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 144.

[89] Doves illustrated **Swiftness**: Psalm 55:6 "And I say, 'O that I had wings like a dove! I would fly and be at rest." **Beauty**: Psalm 68:13 "the wings of a dove covered with silver, its pinions with green gold." **Innocence:** Matthew 10:16 "so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves" **Simplicity:** Hosea 7:11 "Ephraim has become like a dove, silly and without sense; they call upon Egypt, they go to Assyria" **Loving nature:** Song of Solomon 1:15: "Ah, you are beautiful, my love; ah you are beautiful; your eyes are doves." **Mournfulness**: Isaiah 38:14 "like a swallow or a crane I clamour, I moan like a dove. My eyes are weary with looking upwards. O Lord, I am oppressed; be my security!" (NRSV)

[90] Luke 2:24 "and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons" (NRSV)

[91] John 1:32: "and John testified, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him." Mark 1:10: "and just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him." Luke 3:22: "and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven 'You are my Son, my beloved, with you I am well pleased." Matthew 3:16 "and when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him."

[92] The expression "like a dove" (ὡς περιστεράν) in Mark 1.10 can modify either the noun τὸ πνεῦμα (the Spirit) that precedes it or the participle καταβαῖνον (descending) that follows it. Therefore, one can understand the Spirit either looking like a dove or descending like a dove. How do the other Gospels understand this? Matthew does not remove the ambiguity: "Suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him" (Matt 3.16 NRSV). Luke makes it more explicit that the Spirit appears in the form of a dove: "and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove" (Luke 3.22 NRSV). John adds that the Spirit remains on Jesus: "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him" (John 1.32 NRSV). See Alexey Somov, 'The Dove in the Story of Jesus' Baptism: Early Christian Interpretation of a Jewish Image,' *The Bible Translator* 69, no. 2 (2018): 240–51, https://doi.org/10.1177/2051677018778740.

[93] See examples from the NISAR database. Here, the recurring motif of birds can be seen across different depictions and interpretations:

Example 1: Charlotte Hey, "matt6girlandbirds," *The New Illuminators*, accessed April 5, 2026, https://nisar.omeka.net/items/show/1106. See Appendix B, Fig. B7
Example 2: Judt Jacques, "matt6hecaresaboutus," *The New Illuminators*, accessed April 5, 2026, https://nisar.omeka.net/items/show/1132 See Appendix B, Fig. B8

the Soul, Maria-Angels Roque writes about *augural* birds, referring to birds that were believed to bring signs or messages from God. These birds were often seen as omens or indicators of the future. Augural birds serve as messengers or symbols of divine guidance. She writes, "Birds are the messengers of gods; at a symbolic level, this gives them the capacity to predict, with their very presence, beneficial or harmful future events." [94] The Bible mentions several specific types of birds in this context, such as ravens and doves, which were believed to carry symbolic meanings.[95] In the story of Noah's ark,[96] a dove is sent out by Noah to find dry land and it returns with an olive branch, symbolising the end of the flood and the covenant between God and Noah.[97]

In a piece exploring *The Bible and Iconography* Albert C. Labriola focuses on representative objects from the Old and New Testaments.[98] He surveys much religious iconography emphasising medieval illuminations from the 10th – 16th centuries, the seedbed of religious imagery. Within this, he considers the depiction of doves in artistic representations cited from illuminated manuscripts and other iconography of creation. Among these depictions are references to the Tree of Jesse and the symbolism of seven and twelve doves, representing the Holy Spirit. Notably the stained-glass windows of Chartres Cathedral whose windows were greatly influenced by illuminated manuscripts. Called 'Vitrail de l'Arbre Jesse' this 13th

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Example 3: Jen Alward, "matt6birdsandflowers," *The New Illuminators*, accessed April 5, 2026, https://nisar.omeka.net/items/show/1098 See Appendix B, Fig. B9

Example 4: Jenny Pollett, "matt6feederofbirds," *The New Illuminators*, accessed April 5, 2026, https://nisar.omeka.net/items/show/1349 See Appendix B, Fig. B10

White birds, in particular, appear across multiple biblical texts and have become a familiar motif within Bible Journaling:
Example 5: Elaine Needham, "john14iam," *The New Illuminators*, accessed April 5, 2026, https://nisar.omeka.net/items/show/1114 See Appendix B, Fig. B11
Example 6: Casey Turner, "ps89soulcare," *The New Illuminators*, accessed April 5, 2026, https://nisar.omeka.net/items/show/1099 See Appendix B, Fig. B12
Example 7: Karen Thoms, "artistwriterdreamer," *The New Illuminators*, accessed April 5, 2026, https://nisar.omeka.net/items/show/1110. See Appendix B, Fig. B13

[94] Maria-Àngels Roque, "Birds: Metaphor of the Soul," *Quaderns de La Mediterrània* 12 (2010): 96–108.

[95] R. W. L. Moberly, "Why did Noah send out a Raven?" *Vetus Testamentum* 50, no. 3 (2000): 345–56,

[96] See, Genesis 8:8-11

[97] Roque, "Birds: Metaphor of the Soul."

[98] Albert C. Labriola, "The Bible and Iconography," *The Oxford Handbook of the Reception History of the Bible*, 2011.

century-stained glass window features one dove in headlong descent toward Jesus, who is enthroned at the summit of the tree. Thus, overshadowing Jesus, the dove initiates multiples contact because its downward bill touches the top of Christ's head. This same design portrays the other six doves, three at the left and three at the right, surrounding Jesus from top to bottom. Variations of the more traditional depictions of the Tree of Jesse occasionally feature Mary in the tree, but without Jesus or any of his ancestors. As the doves within this context represent the ancestors of Jesus, might the artist too be suggesting the depicted doves in Figure 3.2 reflect the woman's ancestors, those sent to look after and guide her? This notion may be a stretch without some suggestion in the artist's own commentary indicating this interpretation. Whatever the intention of the artist might be, the depicted figure seems unaware of the presence of the doves yet the birds continue to remain close by seeming to possess the strength and knowledge needed to protect and at the same time, to uplift her:

> Birds are very alert creatures constantly on the move and watch for their enemies, such as larger birds, animals and man.[99]

This leads us to consider both the biblical text and the artist's appropriation through a theopoetic lens, by asking: if this artwork is approached as a theopoetic work, what unique perspective does it offer within a theopoetic way of knowing? As mentioned previously, theopoetic outputs are rooted in embodied and lived experiences. This artwork, therefore, offers a distinctive perspective on the human experience and the body's connection to the divine, as the portrayed body, the ropes and the birds are imbued with layers of meaning. A theopoetic lens allows these elements to be explored as sites of transformation. This will be explored in the following section.

Figure 3.2 Entangled in Relation: Through a Theopoetic Lens

This artwork reflects what Merleau-Ponty describes as being *a body tied to the world,* highlighting the complicated connection between our physical presence and the world we inhabit.[100] The artwork does this by incorporating visual elements such as ropes – symbolising human constraints, limitations, vulnerabilities and boundaries; and a spiritual connection to God through the flying birds – a connection that empowers and uplifts in times

[99] Dale Z. Kirby, '"The Way of an Eagle": Birds in the Scriptures', *Religious Educator: Perspectives on the Restored Gospel* 7, no. 2 (2006): 102.

[100] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Donald A. Landes (London: Routledge, 2012).

of need.[101] Lisa Isherwood writes of how the human experience of embodiment is complex, ambiguous and diverse, intertwining physical and spiritual elements into an intricate and interconnected web of existence.[102] As noted above, Catherine Keller coins the term *intercarnations* to illustrate the intricate web of relationships that make up the *flesh of the world.* She highlights the interwoven nature and interdependence within the interconnected web of life emphasising that it forms part of a greater whole. Keller underscores that our actions and relationships resonate echoing the interconnected essence of existence. The concept of *intercarnations* emphasises how all entities in the cosmos are mutually entangled. *Relationality* in its understanding in process thought does not detach itself from the world. Considering the artwork within this light, we could argue that we do not experience in a vacuum, our individual experiences are not separate or isolated from the world. It implies that our experiences are interconnected, formed through our relations with others and the world rather than existing in isolation. Therefore, the pain of the person in the image is not detached from the pain of the world.

Considering the depiction of pain in Figure 3.2, this artwork emphasises an attentive response to brokenness and suffering. Duguid-May highlights the importance of recognizing pain as an inherent aspect of human existence, a means through which we understand God's divine presence and workings. There is an inherent challenge in being *a body tied to the world* as we navigate the things that tie us down, hold us back and restrain our movements: the challenges of relationships or health, or the pursuit of hope and meaning. Bible Journalers often grapple with these intricate processes, seeking to harmonise the world's complexities in light of their own lives and faith, and what they understand to be the timeless wisdom of the Bible. Richard Kearney notes that *flesh* is the membrane that both connects and separates; while we can close our eyes, ears, nostrils and lips, we are always touching and being touched. He says that to live fully is to be constantly exposed to the elements, to being, to life, to others: it is to be forever attentive and attuned, from head to foot, to pain and pleasure, to happiness and

[101] In the Celtic world the bird is, in general terms, the messenger of the assistant of God and of the 'other world', whether it is the swan in Ireland, the crane or heron in Gaul, the goose in Great Britain, the raven for the Germans. Harry Potter uses an owl as a messenger in his imaginative cultural pastiche. Also, the symbolic equivalent in Christianity in which Angels, with swan wings, are often the intermediary between God and the world. The angel, as a messenger, always carries good news for the soul. See Roque, "Birds: Metaphor of the Soul," 98.

[102] Isherwood and Stuart, *Introducing Body Theology*, 51.

grief, to good and ill. “Being in touch with flesh means being at risk. And without risk there is no life worth living.”[103]

Duguid-May also writes about the promise of resurrection, or a rebirth, based on the transformative experience of *new* life. This is worth considering in light of Figure 3.2. In this image, the Bible Journaler has created a space that pulls the individual out into the *open*, depicting her as alone and solitary despite the birds flying overhead. The physical space emphasises the sense of aloneness and isolation that may be reflected in her mental, physical or spiritual state. Although the physical space evokes a feeling of isolation, it also creates the potential for *new* life to emerge and flow from the divine. While the woman’s response to the divine messengers has not yet been decided and will remain unknown, the birds have focused their attention on her, anticipating a reciprocal response. The birds are flapping vigorously and their movements take up the entire top section of the page. They are dynamic and active and seem very intent on preventing the woman’s collapse. The woman’s struggles are acknowledged in their attempt to guide her towards a fresh start or a resurrection moment. This resonates with a theopoetic standpoint that emphasises the importance of responsiveness to the divine poet. As Mike Guynn writes, the theopoetic response “is not about a thing; it *is* a thing.”[104] This image depicts a scene that the woman is participating *in,* an embodied engagement about one’s own path in the context of a larger biblical narrative.

To close this section, Figure 3.2 presents a body that is vulnerable, yet held, where relation, pain, constraint and possibility exist together. Read theopoetically, the artwork shows how the experiences that shape us can become a site of engagement with God where transformation can emerge. The body, in its bent and burdened state, becomes the site of encounter, a relational space where God’s presence is received and *new life* is made known.

The idea of *new life* leads us to a third Bible Journaling artwork, which further explores the close connection between *the body, the flesh, the world* and *new life* through a theopoetic lens. I begin by considering what is being presented to the viewer followed by an outline of

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[103] Kearney, “What Is Carnal Hermeneutics?” 107.

[104] Scott Cairns, "Image unto Likeness: The Body Breathing Again," *Image: A Journal of the Arts and Religion,* no. 22 (Winter/Spring 1999): 63. Taken from Matt Guynn, “Theopoetics: That the Dead May Become Gardeners Again,” *CrossCurrents* 56, no. 1 (2006): 98–109. 102

the biblical text. I then explore how the artwork engages the text and consider the artist's interpretation through the themes it brings forward.

3.6: New Life

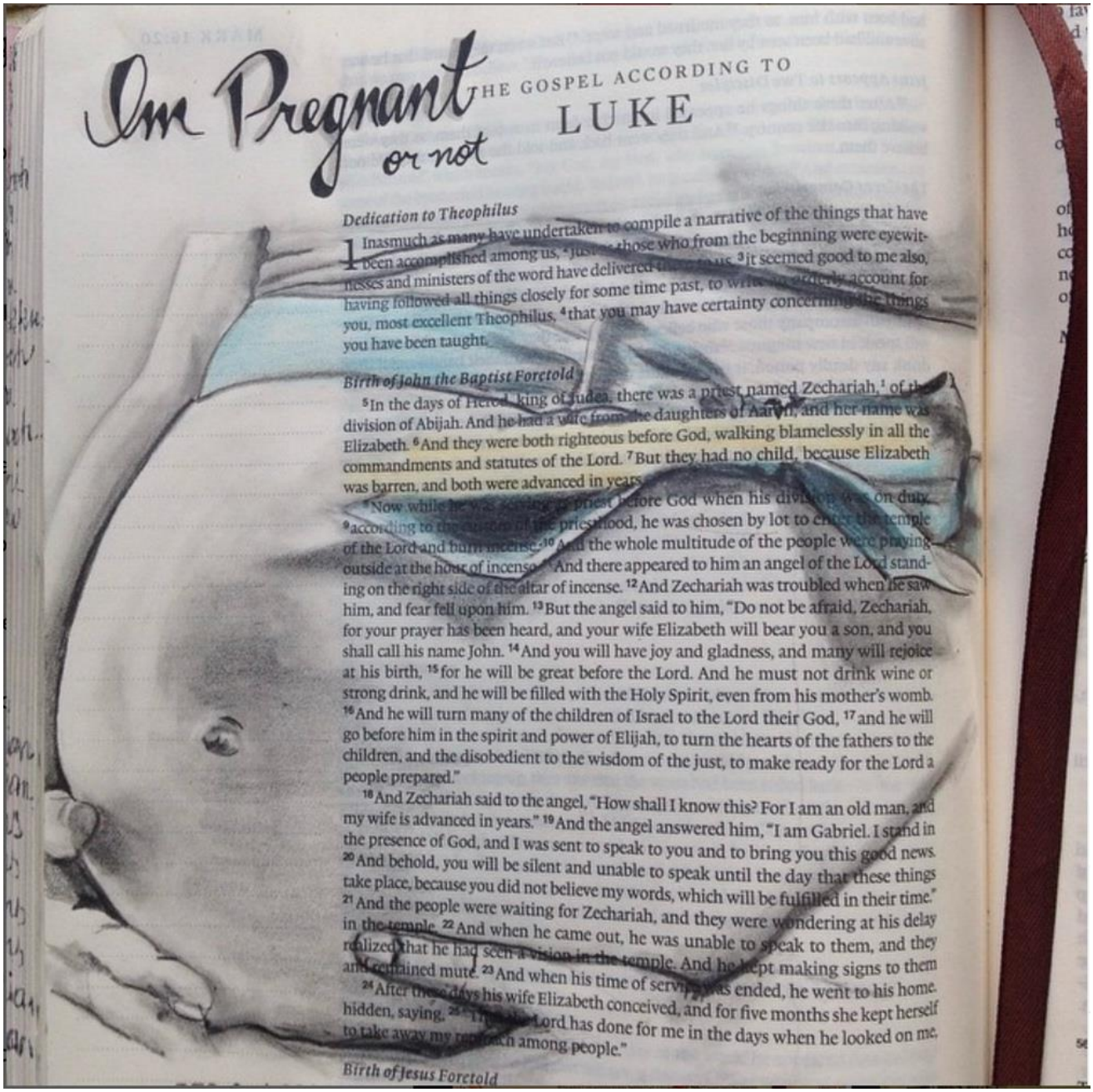


Figure 3.3 Bible Journaling artwork focusing on Luke 1:6-7.[105]

[105] Lisa Rutherford Montgomery (Instagram: @ibtough) created 1st December 2014, uploaded 3rd December 2014 https://nisar.omeka.net/admin/items/show/138. The Bible used is ESV, Crossway

The image covers the entire page of the Bible, completely covering the biblical text. It is a graphite pencil sketch portraying a pregnant woman with darker shading along the outer edges of her belly. A section is shaded with a blue colouring pencil. The rounded belly appears advanced in pregnancy, with two hands cradling the underside in a supportive or comforting gesture towards the growing baby. A ribbon is tied around the top of the bump, similar to how one would decorate a gift. There is one section of handwritten text, scripted in cursive calligraphy style that reads, *I'm Pregnant or not*. The first two words are written more prominently than the last two words. These words are shaded with graphite pencil. The relevant biblical text is highlighted in yellow, which reads:

> And they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord. But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years. (Luke 1: 6-7, ESV)

Figure 3.3 Focus on Luke 1: 6-7

The artwork focuses around two verses from the opening section of Luke's Gospel, just after the prologue. Luke is the only evangelist who gives a preface to his Gospel, so the situatedness of verses 6-7 is important.[106] The opening section Luke 1:5, 4:13 is considered an extended prologue that first recounts events surrounding Jesus' birth that bear witness to his divine origin and mission.[107] Here Luke sets the scene or paints a backdrop, thus establishing the setting necessary to understand the motive which enthused him to write an *orderly account* of things to his friend, Theophilus. Luke immediately immerses the reader in the world of the ancient Israel through the use of language, characters and settings, drawing readers into its story and giving the Gospel roots in Israel's history.

> The atmosphere is charged; the events – and the inspired words that interpret them – carry expectancy and hope, as ancient promises are recalled and renewed and as new promises are made. The beginning of this story inaugurates the era of salvation, long hoped for by God's people. [108]

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[106] Beth Kreitzer, *Luke: New Testament Volume 3* (Westmont: InterVarsity Press, 2015).

[107] Brian Schmisek, 'Luke as the Master Architect of "God's Plan": An Analysis of a Distinctive Lucan Concept', *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 50, no. 4 (2020): 227–35, https://doi.org/10.1177/0146107920959001. François Bovon, Helmut Koester, and Christine M Thomas, *Luke 1: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 1: 1-9: 50* (Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2002).

[108] John T. Carroll and Jennifer K. Cox, *Luke: A Commentary* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012). 23

Luke becomes a third-person narrator who will tell the story until the end *speaking in his own voice*.[109] The story, however, does not begin with John, whose prophetic task will be to make a people ready for the Messiah; it begins rather with his parents. Luke introduces his first characters, Zechariah and Elizabeth, an *embodiment of faithful Israel.* Their life circumstances - *husband and wife, both of priestly lineage, righteous, yet childless* - evoke memories of Abraham and Sarah, the first parents of the nation; and of Hannah the mother of Samuel.[110] Zechariah and Elizabeth are both notable for their strong devotion to the Torah, an important character trait that shows their faithfulness to God and to all of the law's teachings. The status markers are contradictory as they hold a respected priestly history and fidelity to the Torah, yet the absence of a child brings concern for this family's future. Although nothing is disclosed of their inner life, nor does the narrator offer any interpretation of their situation, they bear *the ancient stigma that accompanies childlessness.*[111]

> Whatever the story of Zechariah and Elizabeth may be, it will unfold within the twin context of Israel's biblical past and the religious life of the people now. Whatever their future may be, it will touch the very public future of the whole multitude of the people.[112]

Figure 3.3 The Pregnant Body: Artist's Interpretation

I now turn to the artwork considering how it engages the biblical text and reflects the Bible Journaler's interpretation. How does the artist respond to the verses in response to Elizabeth's infertility? Pregnancy is a frequently represented motif in Bible Journaling, often shown through depictions of an expectant belly. Some artworks show a transparent belly with a baby inside the womb, connected by the umbilical cord to its mother. Other images include flowers surrounding the womb and baby, or garden scenes symbolising new life and growth. Others reference Mary's pregnancy and often offer prayers for expectant daughters or family

[109] Carroll and Cox, *Luke: A Commentary*

[110] 1 Samuel 1:2 – 2:21. Carroll and Cox, *Luke: A Commentary,* 24

[111] Carroll and Cox, *Luke: A Commentary,* 26. As Elizabeth puts it, her lack of children has been a source of deep reproach. Elizabeth's situation recalls that that of several women in the Old Testament notably Rachel Genesis 29:31; 30:1, Hannah 1 Samuel 1:2, 5–7, and Sarah Genesis 17:17; 18:11, who like Elizabeth was both childless and too old to bear children (both Elizabeth and her husband are old; the word "both" unites them in advanced age as in faithfulness vv. 6–7).

[112] Mark Coleridge, *The Birth of the Lukan Narrative: Narrative as Christology in Luke 1-2,* Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 88 (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1993).

members.[113] The visual depiction above merits particular attention as its focus is solely on the pregnant abdomen without showing the rest of the woman's body or face. There is an obvious emphasis on the growing baby and the physical transformation of the expectant mother. A noteworthy feature is the handwritten text that questions the subject's pregnancy status, *I'm pregnant or not,* particularly in light of the artwork's unambiguous representation of pregnancy – the woman's condition is very obvious. So why use the words *or not*? This particular opening section of Luke's Gospel distinctly mentions *childlessness*. Coleridge writes that this reference can evoke recollections among readers of divine interventions on behalf of childless couples in the Old Testament, including Abraham and Sarah, as well as Hannah.[114] Their circumstances creates a sense of anticipation for the unforeseen outcomes that may happen, an expectation of the unexpected.

In the text that accompanied the social media upload, the artist explains that she is envisioning Elizabeth's pregnancy. She writes "I couldn't believe this is what spoke to me when doing one of the You Version Advent Bible plans. I focused on the pregnancy part for some crazy reason. Day 1 was about Elizabeth." The Journaler in the creative *poiesis* finds resonance between the story of Elizabeth and people in similar situations today, particularly those who are hoping to conceive a child. [115] The addition of the blue bow is also worthy of exploration. The colour blue is commonly associated with boys and masculinity, a connection

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[113] https://nisar.omeka.net/collections/show/5 collection on 'Pregnancy.' A range of images demonstrate how pregnancy is depicted in Bible Journaling:

Example 1: @colors_of_faith, "joel2midwifethefuture," *The New Illuminators*, accessed April 5, 2026, https://nisar.omeka.net/items/show/2593. See Appendix B, Fig. B14

Example 2: @biblejournaling_marjan_l, "isa7expectant," *The New Illuminators*, accessed April 5, 2026, https://nisar.omeka.net/items/show/2632 See Appendix B, Fig. B15

Example 3: Lisa Bloom Owen, "ps31pregnancyloss," *The New Illuminators*, accessed April 5, 2026, https://nisar.omeka.net/items/show/1012 See Appendix B, Fig. B16

[114] Coleridge, *The Birth of the Lukan Narrative: Narrative as Christology in Luke 1-2.* See, Genesis 11:30, 15:2-3, 16:1 (Abraham and Sarah). See 1 Samuel 1:2 (Hannah).

[115] The Bible Journaler writes in the accompanying text, "Elizabeth was married to a priest, Zacharias. Both were "perfect" Christians yet they couldn't get pregnant. I know many people in this category today. They wait and wait and question God. Some get angry because infertility wasn't part of their plan. Some have a hard time even considering adoption because the child is not biological and they question if they could love someone else's like their own? I simply took away how much FAITH Elizabeth continued to have and look how the Lord blessed them. Sure, they were able to eventually conceive but the Lord can bless parents and child from any start in life. "They were both righteous in the sight of God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord. But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both advanced in years. (Luke 1:6-7 NASB)"

reinforced through societal expectations and traditions.[116] By linking the colour blue with an image of pregnancy, it may suggest prior knowledge of the baby's gender, often determined through early scans. The inclusion of the colour blue can be read as a quiet foretelling of Elizabeth's pregnancy, as the artist already knows that Elizabeth will give birth to a boy.[117] The artist is laying the groundwork for what lies ahead. Pregnancy is a time of anticipation; here, the artist is contemplating and foreseeing what is to come for Elizabeth and for those in her own life who desire to conceive. Luke is setting the scene for what is to come, making the placement of the artwork in the opening of the Gospel significant.

Figure 3.3 Emerging Life: Through a Theopoetic Lens

What emerges when this artwork is read through theopoetics is a shift in how pregnancy is understood. Rather than a period of passive waiting, it appears as a lived, embodied process – dynamic, unfolding and oriented toward what is not yet, filled with anticipation as a *new* phase is on the horizon. Within Bible Journaling, such depictions are significant because they draw on lived experience as a site of theological reflection. Read theopoetically, pregnancy is not marked by stillness but as embodied participation in *becoming*, where the body is drawn into an ongoing process of relation and response.

The journey of pregnancy commences with notable changes in the physical body as a woman starts to perceive her body as both familiar and somewhat alien. The artwork above shows an advanced stage of pregnancy due to the obvious bump, likely beyond the 20-week point.[118] This transformation involves a merging of the woman's sense of self with the inner sensations of her body and the developing baby within, blurring the boundaries that distinguish self from other. Deep within the womb, there exists a complex fusion of blood, bodily tissue, and the absorption of fetal cells into the mother's own body. Iris Young, in her exploration of the pregnant experience, writes of the intricate nuances of this phenomenon. She describes how pregnancy disrupts the conventional sense of bodily boundaries, introducing a fluidity in the distinction between what is within, myself and what is outside, separate. Reflecting on her

[116] Jo Barraclough Paoletti, *Pink and Blue: Telling the Boys from the Girls in America* (Indiana University Press, 2012).

[117] Luke 1:24-25 "After those days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she remained in seclusion. She said, "this is what the Lord has done for me when he looked favourably on me and took away the disgrace I have endured among my people."

[118] https://www.webmd.com/baby/when-do-pregnant-women-start-showing

pregnancy, she articulates the sensation of her body being claimed by another, whilst still being her own:

> I experience my insides as the space of another, yet my own body... the boundaries of my body are in flux. In pregnancy, I lose the sense of where my body ends and the world begins."[119]

She echoes the writings of Merleau-Ponty when he writes that:

> The world is at the heart of our flesh... once a body-world relationship is recognised, there is a ramification of my body and a ramification of the world and a correspondence between its inside and my outside and my inside and its outside.[120]

The pregnant woman experiences herself as an active participant in the creative process, where her body undergoes changes each day, signifying growth and progress. Though the mother does not plan or direct it, this change does not merely wash over her; rather she *is* the process. There is a constant sense of growth, of progress and of time. The womb, a dark middle space in which the process of new life is co-mingled, is where the intricate process of *new life* unfolds and intertwines.[121]

The depiction of pregnancy in Figure 3.3 shifts our focus from the portrayal of a process of suffering leading to transformation that is highlighted in the previous two images, to the theme of birth and *new* life. Birth is the basis of every person's existence and is therefore always already material, embodied and connected with other human beings and the world. Natality is a fundamental human condition.[122] We come into this world through the body of another inheriting their characteristics within our own. Similarly, when we bring new life into the world, our bodies are passed on through our children. Just as we derive from the bodies in which we originate, our whole lives are intertwined with and dependant on the presence of others. Here, Keller's concept of *intercarnations* becomes relevant - the interdependent and

[119] Iris Marion Young, "Pregnant Embodiment: Subjectivity and Alienation," *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy* 9, no. 1 (1984): 49.

[120] Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible,* 136.

[121] Jantzen, *Becoming Divine,* 150.

[122] Jantzen, *Becoming Divine,* 141.

interconnected nature of human life within its environment, how all things are intertwined in a web of existence, constantly influencing and being influenced.

This artwork prompts reflection on the possibility of new beginnings that are immanent but *not yet* fully realised. These beginnings and the potential they hold, serve as a reminder that they emerge from and take place within our bodily existence, a reminder of our rootedness in the physical and material world. The focus on birth draws attention to *this* world, to our connection with all others who have been born, and to finding our home within the world and within the bodies that inhabit it.[123] Within this context, exploring a theopoetic piece of writing through a scholarly lens, presented in the form of a journal article, is also worthwhile. *A Theopoetics of the Body: Birth, Ecstasy, Emptying, Place and Death*[124] written by Patty Christiena Willis embraces a theopoetic style in exploring the concept of *new life*. Her writing captures the idea of *not yet* and considers the anticipation that comes from the imminent birth of a child. She reflects on birth, not from the perspective of giving birth herself, but through the lens of her mother birthing her. Describing the unfolding events and how she felt as she was brought to the hospital and finally entered the world, she considers this from her own point of view as a person emerging from the womb. She writes,

> She prayed hard for my safety and perfection, feeling the contractions in her marrow. Her hands on her swollen stomach almost stretched to breaking, she felt my insistence to be released. Her hands firm above me, she prayed.... a crescendo and decrescendo of prayer. When my mother closed her eyes between contractions, the anaesthesia deliciously dulling the pain, her hands above me, still enclosed in her womb but travelling out, she blessed me and prayed. Amniotic fluid in my ears, did I hear her unspoken words and with them, underneath them, around them as whales hear each other thousands of miles away, was there a faint chanting, drums drumming, voices urging elephants to keep circling the ground? Did the sea transmit, carry, sound waves from the other side of the earth? Could I hear like I heard the sea later, my ear to the wide lip of a conch? [125]

The boundaries between the small unborn child and the mother blur in this moment. While she writes about them as separate bodies the undeniable fusion between them is described.

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[123] Jantzen, *Becoming Divine*, 141.

[124] Patty Christiena Willis, "A Theopoetics of the Body: Birth, Ecstasy, Emptying, Place, and Death," *CrossCurrents* 60, no. 1 (2010): 115–24.

[125] Willis, "A Theopoetics of the Body," 115–16.

Willis' theopoetic writing seamlessly weaves together the boundaries of pregnancy, birth, life and death. They are deeply interconnected to all aspects of her life and expressed in her writing, flowing effortlessly into one other. Throughout her writing she maintains a theopoetic perspective with God's presence evident in her moments of transformation.[126] She depicts a life that is interconnected and rooted in her bodily experiences of being *flesh in the world*, where emotions and longings are deeply felt and connected to her experience of God. She concludes,

> In the ending, there is a beginning. Is there baptism in death and a walk or swim or boat ride to the other side? I do not know for sure what happens, but I know that there is movement. We are here and then we are there. We are in pieces and then we are whole.[127]

Read alongside Elizabeth's pregnancy, this account draws attention to what is taking place, not as a narrative moment or an isolated event but as an unfolding process of life, where pregnancy is understood within a wider movement that holds birth, transformation and endings together.

To bring this section to a close, reading Figure 3.3 through a theopoetic lens shows how it moves beyond a literal rendering of Elizabeth's pregnancy. Even a direct and recognisable depiction such as a pregnant belly can deepen in meaning when placed alongside lived experience. This is reflected in the Journaler's own words, where Elizabeth's story is held alongside infertility, waiting, and the question of whether one could love a child who is not biologically their own,

> I know many people in this category today. They wait and wait and question God. Some get angry because infertility wasn't part of their plan. Some have a hard time even considering adoption because the child is not biological and they question if they could love someone else's like their own?[128]

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[126] She writes, "many times, people, sometimes complete strangers, have handed me the currency I needed to move ahead. Only weeks ago, after experiencing a personal tragedy that tore my world to pieces again, I sat with a Quaker healer. In his gentle presence, I released my grief and when he asked me for a word to describe my present state, I said, "transformation." Willis, 'A Theopoetics of the Body: Birth, Ecstasy, Emptying, Place, and Death', 124

[127] Willis, "A Theopoetics of the Body," 124.

[128] Lisa Rutherford Montgomery, "luke1pregnant," *The New Illuminators*, accessed April 3, 2026, https://nisar.omeka.net/admin/items/show/138.

In this context, pregnancy itself becomes significant as the baby is not experienced as completely separate, but in relation to the body. It reveals how life and belonging are formed through lived, embodied relation, where *becoming* is felt within the body rather than understood in abstract terms. When placed alongside lived experience, the image becomes a space where questions such as those raised by the Journaler can be held and lived rather than resolved. Theopoetics matters here because it allows theology to remain with this lived dilemma rather than closing it down with answers.

From this sense of anticipation and new life, the question of how such life is lived and responded to begins to emerge. I now turn to the question of *response,* and how an *active* response to the divine poet is central to a theopoetic perspective because it is through *response* that lived experience is taken up and given form. Amos Wilder explains why this *active response* within theopoetics is important:

> We speak about a theopoetic because the theme of divinity requires a dynamic and dramatic speech. Divinity has to do with the glory of God and the creature's participation in it. But this means participation in his life and activity and this is something other than passive mystical illumination or epiphanies of the sacred.[129]

To explore this idea, I consider how Bible Journalers frequently portray movement and dance in their interpretation of the biblical text shaped by the capabilities of their bodies. Their *response* to the text is expressed physically, capturing a sense of dynamic movement that brings our focus to both the glory of God and their own active participation in it.

[129] Wilder, *Theopoetic,* 12.

3.7: An Active Response to the Divine Poet



Figure 3.4 Bible Journaling artwork focusing on Psalm 30: 11-12.[130]

[130] Christina Giordano, created 21st June 2019 and uploaded 22nd June 2019
https://nisar.omeka.net/items/show/739 The Bible used is the Illustrating Bible CSB, DaySpring

This is a watercolour and graphite pencil artwork, with a background subtly washed in grey or blue shades. The central motif is a ballet dancer in an *arabesque penche* pose,[131] with one leg extended vertically, her head tilted upward and her arms reaching towards the raised foot. She is dressed in a pink dress and ballet pumps, positioned with her back to the central biblical text and attention is drawn to the text being explicitly addressed by framing it in the same pink tone. Washi tape runs along the top and bottom edges of the page. At the top, a strip of gold ornamented paper, resembling a gold doily, is placed while a slim strip of blue-toned washi tape lines the bottom. Alongside the biblical text, handwritten in black cursive ink, are the words, "It's not about waiting for the storm to pass... It's about learning to dance in the rain. June 21, 2019." This artwork is a visual interpretation and personal appropriation of Psalm 30:11-12 which reads, "You turned my lament into dancing; you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness, so that I can sing to you and not be silent. Lord my God, I will praise you forever." (CSB)

Figure 3.4 Focus on Psalm 30: 11-12

Psalm 30 is an individual psalm of praise and thanksgiving.[132] Throughout, recurring themes of praise and gratitude emerge making it a clear example of this genre. This central theme underscores its opening and closing lines: "I will extol you, O Lord, for you have drawn me up" (30: 1 NRSV), and "O Lord my God I will give thanks to you forever" (30:12 NRSV).

Although it is typically read as a thanksgiving psalm, Benjamin D. Sommer presents Psalm 30 as a prime example of the adaptability of psalms, highlighting how they can speak into diverse situations and the complexity in determining the form and use of a biblical psalm.[133] He suggests that the psalm blends elements of thanksgiving, praise and *plea* thus reflecting the range of literary forms present in the Psalter. While Sommer reads the psalm as a song of thanksgiving arising after a particular crisis, he suggests that it could also be viewed as being narrated by someone currently in crisis, someone who has overcome a crisis, or even by

[131] Debra Craine and Judith Mackrell, *The Oxford Dictionary of Dance* 2nd ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of Dance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 96.

[132] Prinsloo, *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible: Psalms*, 135.

[133] Benjamin D Sommer, "Form and Flexibility: A Commentary on Psalm 30," *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society*, 2022, 150–80.

someone not facing crisis at all. This highlights the adaptability of Psalm 30, as different points of emphasis within the text shape the reader's perspective.

With this in mind, two key aspects should be considered before turning to the artist's interpretation. First, the challenges faced by the petitioner; and second, the movement within the psalm from *plea* to a positive change. It is not unusual for a psalm to hold together *crisis*, thanksgiving and praise. The portrayal of the *crisis* is likened to sickness and death in verse 2 - "and you have healed me" – raising the question of whether this language is literal or metaphorical, expressing the depth of psalmist's despair.[134] Loader explores this as a *crisis of faith,* tracing how the psalmist's prayer unfolds in stages. It begins with a confessional-style narrative addressed to God about a past downturn in fortune (vvs 7-8), followed by a questioning of God in (vvs 9-11.[135] The Psalmist finds themselves falling into a deep, dark pit, recognising in that place that only God can rescue them.[136] After the *crisis* aspect to the psalm is recited while in distress, the psalm turns towards an account of God's intervention and rescue, providing the grounds for praise and thanksgiving.[137] The earlier *crisis* is now contrasted with the image of being clothed in joy. The emphasis is on God's transformative power as expressed in the words, "you have turned my mourning into dancing; you have taken off my sackcloth and clothed me with joy" (Ps. 30:11). The *sackcloth* refers to clothes of mourning, typically made from coarse, dark material and worn in times of distress or as a sign of repentance for sins. God has now removed the *sackcloth;* the reversal of fortune has now taken place. Noteworthy is the personal connection emphasised as "my God" in verse 12, rather than simply "God," emphasising the enduring and relational quality of this encounter.[138] This last section speaks of the change brought about by God and of the gratitude of the saved.[139] The language used is strong: God *overturns* everything, which emphasises the

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[134] Prinsloo, *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible: Psalms*, 135.

[135] James Alfred Loader, "Psalm 30 Read Twice and Understood Two Times," *Old Testament Essays* 16, no. 2 (2003): 299.

[136] Sarah Dunlop, "30th June: 6th Sunday after Pentecost: Psalm 30; Mark 5.21–43," *Expository Times* 135, no. 8 (2024): 349, https://doi.org/10.1177/00145246241233878d.

[137] Sommer, "Form and Flexibility: A Commentary on Psalm 30," 150.

[138] "This indicates that the personal faith thus expressed is not an intellectual conviction of the existence of the God of Israel, but a deeply personal relationship." Loader, "Psalm 30 Read Twice and Understood Two Times," 294.

[139] We read about this in the contemporary literature as well, notably in the Books of the Maccabees. Also, Judas and his comrades lamented and 'shouted to heaven' on account of the desecration of the temple (1 Mcc 4:9), but

drastic nature of what has happened; the crisis and signs of distress are transformed into their opposites: a joyous *dance* emerges.[140]

Figure 3.4 From Crisis to Dance: Artist's Interpretation

When we explore how the artwork interacts with the biblical text, a number of themes emerge. The psalmist expresses a striking and abrupt shift in emotional tone, the impact of which is portrayed through the artist's depiction of the *dance*. The psalm moves from a language of pain into one of praise,[141] marking a profound change in mood. This range of emotion is reflected in the dynamic stance of the dancer in Figure 3.4, a response that captures the movement from sadness to vitality. The strength, control and precision executed in this precise moment is in sharp contrast to the darker moments of pain that precede this transformation. The *crisis* within the psalm is echoed in the handwritten text, *it's not about waiting for the storm to pass, it's about learning to dance in the rain.* In the Bible Journaler's appropriation of this psalm, they have reflected the shift of mood in which pain yields to praise, capturing the moment of transformation, the end point in this process that has led them through *the storm* or even in the midst of it.[142] This portrayal is reminiscent of how the ancient psalms captured glimpses of the divine through language, trying to articulate personal experiences with God that lead to moments of transformation. The Bible Journaler's

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after the re-consecration their spirits changed and we hear: "At the very season and on the very day that the gentiles had profaned it, it was dedicated with songs and harps and lutes and cymbals. All the people fell on their faces and worshiped and blessed Heaven, who had prospered them. So, they celebrated the dedication of the altar for eight days and joyfully offered burnt offerings; they offered a sacrifice of well-being and a thanksgiving offering." (1 Mcc 4:54-56) Loader, "Psalm 30 Read Twice and Understood Two Times," 307.

[140] At least thirteen words for dance capture the various movements of dance throughout the Old Testament. These Hebrew words each display a different characteristic of dance. The following bring to definition the movement of dance in the Old Testament: dancing, making merry, leaping with joy, having agility, whirling, dancing in a circle, encircling a sacred object, leaping or limping, limping, leaping as a deer, springing with both feet, rejoicing, and marching in procession. Each of these root words often have similar recurring contexts of dance that are associated with a specific movement or action. These forms of dance portray an emotional and contextual mood within the passage of scripture, often bringing out greater textual clarity, not only exegetically but also theologically. Throughout the Old Testament text, dance is tightly woven into the culture of the Israelite nation. The text portrays it as playing a lively and regular role in the Israelite world. Within this culture, dance emerges in the midst of praise, celebration, great victories and processions. See, Tabitha Marie Turpin, 'Dance within the Old Testament: An Exegetical and Theological Perspective of Hul and Pasah' (MA diss., Oral Roberts University, 2003), *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.* 238168520.

[141] Federico G. Villanueva, *The Uncertainty of a Hearing: A Study of the Sudden Change of Mood in the Psalms of Lament*, Supplements to the Vetus Testamentum v. 121 (Leiden; Brill, 2008), 270.

[142] An interesting article that discusses the two abrupt changes of mood in Psalm 30 and how it resembles the mood switches of affective disorder. Stein notes that only a writer who has had personal experience of such an abrupt change of mood, from a state of mourning (depression) to one of joy (elation), could describe it so well. George Stein, 'Did the Author of Psalm 30 Have Cyclothymia or Bipolar Disorder?' *British Journal of Psychiatry* 195, no. 6 (2009): 550–550, https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.195.6.550.

interpretation of this psalm shows that the remedy for pain is not denying its reality but instead joining with the psalmists in being transformed from *crisis* into praise.[143]

Many Bible Journalers depict moments of despair marked by a sense of God's absence,[144] but these often give way to an embrace of life renewed in joy and purpose as connection with God is restored.[145] This shift can be a sudden change in the Journaler's life that is then reflected in creating visual images of dance and movement where the encounter with the biblical text opens up the experience of God's reciprocal love.[146]

Figure 3.4 Flowing from Chaos: Through a Theopoetic Lens

This artwork opens a number of possibilities when read through a theopoetics lens. It reflects how Bible Journalers do not confine themselves to structured or purely reasoned theological processes, but instead allow space for imagination, desire, projection, and play; drawn by the persistent divine *lure* of God expressed in the biblical text. In contrast to earlier images that present the body as closed, broken, or vulnerable, or as carrying *new life*, this artwork offers a different posture. The body here is open, resilient and strong. Through the motif of *dance*, the Journaler's response takes on a dynamic and embodied form, one that engages with the divine through movement.

When considered poetically, *dance* signifies more than physical motion. It evokes expression, relation and transformation, bringing to mind vivid and shifting images. Nature itself can be

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[143] Robert L. Cole and Paul J. Kissling, eds., *The Psalms: Language for All Seasons of the Soul* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2013), 288.

[144] For further examples, see the NISAR database, including: https://nisar.omeka.net/admin/items/show/1271

[145] Other Bible Journaling images that depict psalm 30 and this oscillation between mourning and dancing:
Example 1: Daryl Banegas, "ps30joyafterweeping," *The New Illuminators*, accessed April 5, 2026, https://nisar.omeka.net/admin/items/show/1238. See Appendix B, Fig. B17

Example 2: @dalsbible, "ps30wailingintodancing," *The New Illuminators*, accessed April 5, 2026, https://nisar.omeka.net/admin/items/show/721 See Appendix B, Fig. B18

Example 3: Artistic Bible Journaling, "ps30dancingwoman," *The New Illuminators*, accessed April 5, 2026, https://nisar.omeka.net/admin/items/show/715 See Appendix B, Fig. B19

Example 4: Barbara Kirby Davis, "ps30joyfuldancing," *The New Illuminators*, accessed April 5, 2026, https://nisar.omeka.net/admin/items/show/738 See Appendix B, Fig. B20

[146] Sarah Dunlop, '30th June: 6th Sunday after Pentecost: Psalm 30; Mark 5.21–43', *Expository Times* 135, no. 8 (2024): 350, https://doi.org/10.1177/00145246241233878d.

described in these terms: waves move rhythmically, trees bend in the wind, and the earth responds in moments of upheaval such as earthquakes or volcanic eruptions. *Dance*, then, appears to capture more than simple movement. It conveys action and reaction, beauty, emotion, and communication. Within this framework, the image resonates with a vision of God not as static or unchanging, but as dynamic and relational. The dancer's movement reflects this sense of vitality suggesting a participation in an ongoing process of change, growth and renewal.[147] The dancer steps into a space of co-creativity, participating in the creative power of God, embracing openness, adaptability and response as she moves through the rain and the storm.

Although the movement is controlled and strong, it is also liberated and free, opening up new ways of relating to God and the world. Within this, the female body – so often constrained by cultural and traditional expectations – emerges as a site of expression, where autonomy can be reclaimed and inner life is expressed through art.[148] LJ Tessier, in her book *Dancing After the Whirlwind: Feminist Reflections on Sex, Denial and Spiritual Transformation* writes,

> The dance of wild things. This drumming lives in us. The erotic within is connected to all living things, the earth and the cosmos and will not be denied. We know this music, we human creatures… Still, most of us living in the world of industry and the individual have learned to fear this music, to dread the way it undoes our carefully packaged personalities. And we study to unlearn it, to un-feel it, to tone it down. We mute the mysterious and control the chaotic, all to deny the wild within…We may temporarily ignore the inconsistencies. We may freeze, like a rabbit in headlights, unwilling to change or grow for fear that all structures we have established will come apart. Because what we deny will eventually rise to the surface, because the vital power of our erotic energy will find a way to express itself, pressure builds up as the tension of contradiction increases. Eventually if we can no longer be what we are not and there is no cultural acceptable way to be ourselves, things come apart.[149]

Figure 3.4 brings a sense of freedom as the woman dances with ease and grace. As Tessier notes, repressing the energy or desires within the body will eventually surface, making it necessary to acknowledge and engage them in order to live more fully. Read in this way, the

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[147] Turpin, "Dance within the Old Testament"

[148] Roy F. Baumeister and Jean M. Twenge, 'Cultural Suppression of Female Sexuality', *Review of General Psychology* 6, no. 2 (2002), 166–203.

[149] L.J. Tessier, *Dancing After the Whirlwind: Feminist Reflections on Sex, Denial, and Spiritual Transformation.* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1998) 15–16.

dancer's movement can be understood as a release of what has been held, where transformation is not only expressed but worked through in the body itself. This resonates with developments in feminist theology and somatic approaches which emphasise the connection between bodily experience, movement and meaning.[150] Somatic psychology and movement therapies like *dance*, the Alexander Technique and Rolfing, highlight how the body can recover fluidity and openness allowing new forms of expression to emerge through visual art, dance, performance and writing in its different genres.[151] The dancer's movement in Figure 3.4 reflects this reorientation within the body, where what has been constrained gives way to freedom and where this transformation is lived rather than only described.

A key insight from the *Encounters in Colour Retreat* (May 2024) was the importance of nurturing creativity once it begins to emerge, allowing it to unfold rather than restricting its flow. This approach to nurturing creativity as it unfolds reflects an understanding of creativity as something that emerges from *chaos*, a central theme to the *Encounters in Colour retreat,*[152] resonates with Catherine Keller's feminist process theology. Drawing on Genesis 1:2, Keller engages the imagery of *Tohu Vabohu* and *Tehom* reclaiming the deep as a creative space from which new life emerges.[153] Keller's work demonstrates that female symbolic language is clear through ancient myths, and that women were once a significant part of this creative force of *chaos*, understood as good. She shows how *chaos,* often associated with the feminine, has been dismissed rather than recognised as a source of creativity and *becoming*. In this way, within this retreat and its various workshops it became clear how creativity is allowed to emerge from within, as expression unfolds through engagement with the biblical text, arising out of the chaos of the deep rather than being controlled or fixed.

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[150] Clay, "Abundant Body Narratives," 253.

[151] Joan Chodorow, *Dance Therapy & Depth Psychology: The Moving Imagination* (London: Routledge, 1991)

[152] See NISAR database: **Example 1:** Jenna Burne, "gen1creativityfromchaos," *The New Illuminators*, accessed April 5, 2026, https://nisar.omeka.net/items/show/1092. See Appendix B, Fig. B21

Example 2: Kelly Owen, "gen1lcreativityoutofchaos," *The New Illuminators*, accessed April 5, 2026, https://nisar.omeka.net/items/show/1107 See Appendix B, Fig. B22

Example 3: Sarah Lowry McGregor, "gen1chaos," *The New Illuminators*, accessed April 5, 2026, https://nisar.omeka.net/items/show/1108 See Appendix B, Fig. B23

Example 4: Liz Jones, "john10lifefromchaos," *The New Illuminators*, accessed April 5, 2026, https://nisar.omeka.net/items/show/1124 See Appendix B, Fig. B24

[153] Catherine Keller, *On the Mystery: Discerning Divinity in Process* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 3–4.

To close this section, Figure 3.4 brings together the movement from crisis to praise, embodied in the dancer's striking and controlled pose. This shift is not only described but lived, as the body becomes a site of response, where openness, fluidity and freedom emerge. In this movement, the dancer embodies a space of co-creativity, reflecting the Bible Journaler's participation in the creative process. In the cyclical nature of life – with its hurts and healings, creations and losses - God imparts love to the world, a divine act of creation that continuously unfolds. The creativity and the createdness of God loops interdependently through the creativity of the world.[154] In the vast collection of Bible Journaling images, there are many depictions that portray the body as graceful, strong, powerful and creative; the body depicted as a vessel for divine connection, dwelling within the potential of God. Bible Journaler's often draw sustenance from the inherent vitality present in life, viewing it as a divine gift to all living things. The connection to God is a source of continual transformation and new beginnings,

> The body... is the symbol, not of individuality, but of solidarity. It is that which binds every individual, divinely unique.... in escapable relatedness with the whole of nature and history and the totality of the cosmic order. It is the bond of continuity and unity between human beings and their environments, between individual and community, between generation and generation.[155]

3.8: Conclusion

In this chapter my aim was to show how embodiment functions as a mode of theological engagement, where the body is not simply present, but participates in the formation of theological meaning. Bible Journaling artworks offer a significant site for this exploration, as both a tactile, hands-on practice and a space in which the female body is repeatedly depicted and explored. This extends beyond the physical body as the depictions explored in this chapter also carry the weight of lived experience, where meaning is shaped through what has been felt, endured and expressed through the *flesh*.

Another aim of this chapter was to show how embodiment is central to theopoetic practice, and how Bible Journaling holds potential to develop and enrich the field of theopoetics by opening up a space for reflection between the two areas within this exploration of

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[154] Catherine Keller, *Intercarnations: Exercises in Theological Possibility*, 134.

[155] John A.T. Robinson, *In the End, God: A Study of the Christian Doctrine of the Last Things* (London: James Clark & Co., 2011), 86–87.

embodiment. This connection was established by exploring how Bible Journalers interpret the Bible through the lens of their own physical and emotional experiences, reflecting on biblical texts by way of what they already *know* via their own wounds and experiences of life. This embodied way of *knowing* not only influences how individuals perceive and relate to the Bible, God, self and others; but it is also central to theopoetic practice. Interpreting the Bible in this way enables the artist to *think* bodily without relying on abstract or inaccessible theological language. In other words, the body has *a voice* and wants to communicate and be listened to. Bible Journalers are trusting themselves to seek God through experiences dealt with in their bodies; their artwork expressing how the wisdom within the body tells its own story.

In theopoetic scholarship, much discourse has focused on poetry, prose and the written word. By bringing Bible Journaling into this conversation, the chapter highlights the significance of creative embodied practice as a form of theological reflection. Bible Journaling expresses a way of *knowing* through creative *poiesis*, making space for the female experience within theological discourse. The four artworks explored in this chapter go beyond conventional boundaries of text and image showing how engagement with the biblical text, shaped by lived experience, becomes a site of ongoing transformation

Chapter Four: Imagination

Introduction

The previous chapter examined the connections and intersections between Bible Journaling and theopoetics through the lens of *embodiment*. This does not simply offer one aspect of crossover but shows how theological meaning is lived and expressed. This chapter continues that exploration, seeking to deepen and extend the inquiry by turning to a second equally significant dimension: *imagination*. Considered here as a theological mode in its own right, it is examined in relation to its intersections with both Bible Journaling and theopoetics.

This chapter will explore how *imagination* functions within Bible Journaling and will focus on two distinct yet interrelated dimensions. The first concerns *imagination* as a personal and often private practice through which Bible Journalers draw on the full potential of their imaginative capacity and give creative shape to possibilities that might otherwise remain hidden or unknown. By engaging the text in this way new layers of meaning are opened up allowing fresh insights to emerge. Within this part of the chapter, I am particularly concerned with how imagination shapes the ways *God* is envisioned and experienced, how divine characteristics are depicted, felt and reimagined. I am less concerned with offering abstract definitions of imagination than with exploring how it works and what it *does,* what it makes possible and how it takes shape through the practice of Bible Journaling.

The second dimension involves the *imaginary* – a collective framework through which Bible Journalers make meaning *together*, not through direct collaboration, but by participating in a wider, networked community of practice that shapes how they interpret the text and understand their own experiences and world around them. This *togetherness* is less about physical proximity and more about a dynamic, unfolding process in which each Journaler's artwork builds upon and inspires others. I refer to this space as a *collective imaginary*, or more specifically, a *theopoetic imaginary* because it draws us directly into the living, creative heart of theopoetic expression.[1]

[1] I use the term *collective imaginary* to refer to the interconnected use of images, symbols, metaphors, and narratives that circulate within and shape a Bible Journaling community's theological imagination. *Collective imaginary* is grounded in a recognised scholarly tradition and is also used by contemporary scholars to describe the shared worlds of meaning that groups create and live by. My usage in this chapter is shaped by three key scholarly contributions: Firstly, Cornelius Castoriadis's concept of the social imaginary as the creative, instituting source of meaning in public life (Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*

At the core of theopoetics is a concern with the *flourishing* of humanity, both individually and collectively.[2] This concern goes beyond personal well-being or abstract ideals but calls us to live lives with depth and purpose, to make space for beauty, to seek justice and create meaning in ways that reflect the fullness of what it means to be human. It points toward a wider, shared vision of what it means to live fully – with ourselves, with others, with God and with the world around us. Theopoetics therefore offers a vision for shared transformation. In section two, I will consider how the *collective imaginary* expressed through Bible Journaling becomes a creative space where this kind of human *flourishing* can take place. It will explore Bible Journaling artworks as more than just personal individual expressions of *imagination* but will consider the *ripple outward* in contributing to a broader, shared theological imaginary. This matters because it shows how personal expression can become part of a larger conversation into communal meaning that shapes how faith is expressed, shared and lived.

Taken together, this chapter argues that Bible Journaling is a site of imaginative engagement – one that shapes personal faith while also participating in the creation of a wider collective theological imaginary. In line with a process theopoetic framework, and drawing on perspectives that challenge the notion of *imagination* as something isolated or detached, I adopt the view that "imagination is not merely *in the head*, but is intrinsically bound up with our interrelation with the world."[3]

(Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987). The focus here is not theological, but his work provides conceptual scaffolding for understanding how shared worlds of meaning are formed and sustained. Secondly, Charles Taylor's account of the social imaginary describes the shared understandings that make it possible for people to act together and see those actions as meaningful and legitimate. See Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004). Thirdly, Richard Kearney's framing of theopoetic imagination as a space of relational possibility and transformative encounter. See, Richard Kearney, *The Wake of Imagination* (London: Routledge, 2002). Kearney extends the framework into a theological register that allows me to understand the *collective imaginary* not just as a social phenomenon but as a site of divine-human meaning-making. While related terms such as *communal imaginary* or *shared imaginary* are used in other contexts, *collective imaginary* best captures the movement of Bible Journaling between personal creativity and public circulation into a wider, digitally networked sphere. In the context of this thesis, the *collective imaginary* is understood as a theopoetic space where individual acts of interpretation *ripple outward* into shared symbolic worlds, participating in the ongoing creation of communal theological meaning.

[2] The ARC collective as discussed in the previous chapter envisions theopoetics as a way for working toward a world where "creativity and spirituality work together to promote the *flourishing* of all creation." L. Callid Keefe-Perry, "Alvesian Theopoetics, the Academy, and What May Come," *Literature and Theology* 33, no. 3 (2019), 322, https://doi.org/10.1093/litthe/frz022.

[3] Warren Colman, "Imagination and the Imaginary," *Journal of Analytical Psychology* 51, no. 1 (2006), 26.

Chapter Four: Section One

Imagination: Bible Journaling and Theopoetics

Within the field of Bible Journaling *imagination* is a driving force. Journalers frequently see connections, draw parallels and reinterpret biblical texts through visual motifs inspired by the films they watch, the TV shows they enjoy, and the popular culture they engage with. Disney characters such as Winnie the Pooh, Inside Out, Toy Story, Up, Frozen and Moana become imaginative lenses through which themes of comfort, courage or hope are explored.[4] Likewise, familiar TV shows like The Office, The A-Team or Friends are used.[5] *Imagination* also shapes how Journalers respond to public events such as the coronation of King Charles or the anticipation of a new Pope.[6] *Imagination* makes it possible for Journalers to draw the biblical text into conversation with the world they inhabit opening space for new ways of encountering God within contemporary life.

Imagination also stands at the heart of theopoetics, where it is understood as a crucial mode through which individuals envision and respond to the divine. From the earliest work of Amos Wilder onward, theopoetic thinkers have highlighted the importance of attending to the symbolic and imaginative dimensions of human life within theological reflection, as explored in Chapter 1. Wilder, a prominent biblical scholar who spent a significant portion of his career teaching at Harvard Divinity School, is widely recognized as a pioneer in the development of theopoetics. His influential book *Theopoetic – Theology and the Religious*

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[4] **Winnie the Pooh:** Carrie Hensley, "1john4winnethepoohandchristopherrobin," *The New Illuminators*, accessed November 28, 2025, https://nisar.omeka.net/admin/items/show/2545 See Appendix C, Fig. C1
Inside Out: @cora_journalingbible, "pet2envyinsideout2," *The New Illuminators*, accessed November 28, 2025, https://nisar.omeka.net/admin/items/show/2261. See Appendix C, Fig. C2
Toy Story: Unknown, "john15woodyandbuzz," *The New Illuminators*, accessed November 28, 2025, https://nisar.omeka.net/items/show/46. See Appendix C, Fig. C3
Up: Unknown, "ps94mrpetersonshouse," *The New Illuminators*, accessed November 28, 2025, https://nisar.omeka.net/admin/items/show/851. See Appendix C, Fig. C4

[5] **The Office:** @annyscriptures (Instagram), "gal5theusoffice," *The New Illuminators*, accessed November 28, 2025, https://nisar.omeka.net/admin/items/show/148. See Appendix C, Fig. C5
The A-Team: @christinasalive, "prov8ipitythefoolbabaracas," *The New Illuminators*, accessed November 28, 2025, https://nisar.omeka.net/admin/items/show/2098. See Appendix C, Fig. C6
Friends: @Jesus.loves.coffee, "ps100friendsturkey," *The New Illuminators*, accessed November 28, 2025, https://nisar.omeka.net/admin/items/show/643. See Appendix C, Fig. C7

[6] **Coronation of King Charles:** Sharon Whitmarsh, "ps72charlescoronation," *The New Illuminators*, accessed November 28, 2025, https://nisar.omeka.net/admin/items/show/124. See Appendix C, Fig. C8
Conclave: @bibelnibilder, "matt16conclave," *The New Illuminators*, accessed November 28, 2025, https://nisar.omeka.net/admin/items/show/2361. See Appendix C, Fig. C9

Imagination, called for a renewal of deep religious *imagination* arguing that the full depths of biblical truth had not yet been adequately explored. He insisted that theology needed to draw more intentionally on the power of the *imagination* if it was to speak meaningfully within a changing world. He observed that his contemporary era, specifically the 1970s, showed signs of diminished imaginative capacity making it difficult for Christianity to respond to the rapid pace of societal change.[7] Responding effectively to such shifts, he argued, requires *imagination* and the freedom to "generate contemporary forms of communication."[8] Theopoetics, insofar as it cultivates renewed religious *imagination* offers a way forward for what he understood as a pressing theological challenge. He writes,

> My plea for a theopoetic means doing more justice to the role of the symbolic and the prerational in the way we deal with experience. We should recognise that human nature and societies are more deeply motivated by images and fabulations than by ideas. This is where power lies and the future is shaped.[9]

More recent work in theopoetics, as explored throughout this thesis, continues to highlight the central place of *imagination* within theological reflection. It is not decorative but an essential mode of meaning-making, a point developed in the following section. A number of theologians highlight this, and Gesa Thiesson is one useful voice in this conversation. In her article *Searching for God: Theology, Imagination, Beauty and the Arts* she argues that *imagination* opens the way for theology to engage with the arts on equal terms, and that imaginative renderings can disclose theological meaning as powerfully as formal doctrine.[10] The wider perspective echoes a longstanding insight within theopoetics: theology is always, in some sense, an act of *poiesis*, a creative making and re-making of language, images and symbols that helps us to orient our lives meaningfully before God. *Imagination* enables new metaphors of the divine to emerge and supports the ongoing construction of ways of thinking and speaking about God. Seen in this wider imaginative context, the arts expand theological insight, and Bible Journaling clearly participates in this same imaginative movement offering a space for new possibilities of meaning and encounter to come forward. I will now turn to consider how this takes shape within Bible Journaling.

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[7] Krabbe, *A Beautiful Bricolage: Theopoetics as God-Talk for Our Time*, 69.

[8] Wilder, *Theopoetic*, 3.

[9] Wilder, *Theopoetic,* 2.

[10] G.E. Thiessen, "Searching for God: Theology, Imagination, Beauty and the Arts," *Acta Theologica* 40, no. 2 2020, https://doi.org/10.38140/at.vi.4938.

4.2: God, Imagination and the Constructive work of Bible Journaling

This section explores how *God* is imaginatively depicted in Bible Journaling through two selected examples, examining how these visual responses both reflect and shape personal understandings of God. This exploration draws on the work of Gordon Kaufman and David Tracy, alongside a return to the process framework that guides this study, each emphasising the vital role of *imagination* in how we conceive of and speak about the divine. To frame this exploration, I turn to Gordan Kaufman's account of the theological imagination which offers a constructive framework.

Gordon Kaufman in his book *The Theological Imagination*, *Constructing the Concept of God* presents a perspective on how the symbol of *God* functions for individuals and religious communities.[11] Kaufmann emphasises that the Christian image or concept of God is an imaginative construct and that all language about God, and even our experience of the divine, is made possible through the creative capacities of the imagination.[12] For Kaufman, imagination lies at the very heart of theology. It is through imaginative creative engagement with inherited religious symbols, biblical motifs and narratives that have been passed down, interpreted and reimagined across time and context, that *God* becomes meaningful. This imaginative construction is historically and culturally embedded, the imaginative work of poets, prophets and theologians contributed to a rich symbolic landscape shaping how God is understood and experienced.[13]

Central to Kaufman's view is the idea that the Christian image of God has developed into a model of humane concern—a God defined by love, justice, mercy, and care, as opposed to distance or indifference. This God promotes human well-being and embodies humanity's highest virtues and aspirations.[14] It is an image that culminates in the self-sacrificing act of sending Christ for the salvation of a broken world. Deeply anthropomorphic, this portrayal reflects a profoundly human theology, one concerned with human *flourishing* and collective

[11] Gordon D. Kaufman, *The Theological Imagination: Constructing the Concept of God* (Philidelphia: Westminster Press, 1981).

[12] Kaufman, *The Theological Imagination: Constructing the Concept of God*, 22.

[13] Kaufman, *The Theological Imagination: Constructing the Concept of God*, 26.

[14] Kaufman, *The Theological Imagination: Constructing the Concept of God*, 39.

transformation. It suggests that imaginative engagement with God is not just about belief, but about how we live and relate to one another.[15]

Kaufman's work has significant implications for theopoetics and Bible journaling as he asks whether and how we should continue using biblical motifs today as we seek meaningful ways to speak of God.[16] Journalers are continually engaging creatively with the divine symbol, reconstructing it afresh in personal contexts through colour, text, image, and embodied reflection. If, as Kaufman argues, the idea of God is the "mind's supreme imaginative construct,"[17] then Bible Journaling becomes a meaningful theological practice, an act of creative participation in the tradition of meaning-making shaped by imagination and lived experience. For both Bible Journaling and theopoetics, his work affirms that *imagination* is essential to the ongoing shaping and expression of faith.

In the following two images, I consider how Bible Journalers imagine and render God. In the first image, God is presented as present among the wounded and those who suffer, revealing a divine presence that reaches beyond the boundaries of one's own immediate experience and embraces the pain of the world. The image widens the imaginative horizon of the divine, portraying a God not only encountered in personal nearness but in solidarity with the suffering and sharing in the world's pain – revealing the movement between the intimate and the outward, a God-*for* and a God-*with*, and a God of presence and descent. In this image, God's presence is imagined as entering into human suffering in an act of divine solidarity, thereby reshaping understandings of divine concern within a fractured world. This resonates with Kaufman's idea of the imaginative reconstruction of God as a model of humane concern shaped by love, mercy, justice and care.

The image situates God within present historical experience, revealing how divine presence is perceived amid ongoing global violence and humanitarian crisis. Here, the biblical text enters into a dialogue with the global context and, through *imagination*, becomes a means of discerning God's presence anew within it.

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[15] Kaufman, *The Theological Imagination: Constructing the Concept of God*, 48.

[16] Kaufman, *The Theological Imagination: Constructing the Concept of God*, 24.

[17] Kaufman, *The Theological Imagination: Constructing the Concept of God*, 22.

Figure 4.1: Divine Presence in the World



Figure 4.1 Bible Journaling artwork focusing on Psalm 71:7 and 1 Kings 8:27 [18]

[18] @bibelnibilder (Instagram), uploaded 6th May 2025, https://nisar.omeka.net/admin/items/show/2517 The Bible used is Bibel 2000, Svenska Bibelsällskapet

In this artwork, Psalm 71:7 and 1 Kings 8:27 are placed side by side with the image drawn over the latter.[19] These two texts are unconnected in the biblical canon, yet the Journaler has set them in dialogue. God is depicted in human form as a figure of a man, a motif long present in both biblical interpretation and Christian art. What is presented here is God as a companion, one who mirrors the posture of the young person seated beside. In this pairing, the Journaler offers a re-visioning of God's nearness as silent companionship, a God present without word or gesture, only the still presence who sits alongside another. This silent companionship is suggested through the posture of the two figures. They do not face one another in dialogue, nor does the older figure reach out. Instead, he simply sits beside the young person and they look outward rather than toward each other. The grandeur of the Cathedral spires is visible in the distance bringing to mind the devotional instinct to look upward in search of God, reflected in the way such spires rise toward the sky. Yet their placement in the background repositions this sense of the divine toward a nearer and quieter encounter. The handwritten text in the artwork reads, *vi byggde katedraler högt mot himlen men du gick hela tiden längre ner*, which means, *we built cathedrals high toward heaven, but you kept going further down.* Within the artwork, the colours red, green, black and white appear: the red cloth between the two figures, the young figure dressed in green, the dark silhouetted spires, and the pale grey-white figure of the man. The colour placement is understated and could easily be overlooked yet their use is deliberate. The Bible Journaler expands on this use of colour by sharing the following reflection,

> I've intentionally incorporated the Palestinian flag in both verses. Not to take a stand towards Israel but rather a stand for the children of Gaza and the Palestinian people. That God is with them at this time. For me doing bible journaling is a form of prayer and it reflects on the colours in the pictures. In this picture - the children of Gaza are not forgotten by the world - illustrated with the Cathedral of my hometown of Uppsala in Sweden.

In offering this reflection, the artist's depiction of God entering suffering rather than remaining apart from it becomes an act of solidarity for the Journaler. Moved by compassion for the suffering of the children in Gaza, the stirring of her own emotional response becomes

[19] "I cry aloud to God, aloud to God, that he may hear me." Psalm 77:1. "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Even heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, much less this house that I have built!" 1 Kings 8:27

the ground from which she imagines God's own compassion.[20] She participates in the revelation of God by showing a nearness perceived through her own felt awareness. In drawing the current pain of the world into conversation with the biblical text, the artwork becomes the very space where something of God is revealed in the creative *poiesis*. It is a site of encounter, an act of *imagination* that is at once creative and profoundly theological.

To explore this movement of imaginative solidarity as a locus of encounter, David Tracy's work offers a useful theological lens. In his book, *The Analogical Imagination* Tracy develops a dense and systematic account of how theology speaks about God in a pluralistic world. Yet its central insight remains clear, that the Christian imagination perceives God *in and through* the world. Tracy describes this imagination as *analogical* rather than *dialectical* - that is, perceiving *likeness-in-difference* between God and creation.[21] For Tracey, the *analogical imagination* is a way of seeing and thinking about God, world, self and others, that emphasises continuity and participation rather than separation. Within what he calls the analogical order, the relationships between self, others, world and God are clarified through a *primary analogue*, a central symbol or meaning that becomes the interpretative key. He writes,

> Analogy is a language of ordered relationships articulating similarity-in-difference.... A principal aim of all properly analogical languages is the production of some order at the limit, some harmony to the several analogues, the similarities-in-difference constituting the whole of reality... The order is developed by explicating the analogous relationships among various realities – self, others, world, God – by clarifying the relationship of each to the primary analogue, the meaning chosen as the primary focus for interpreting reality.[22]

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[20] At the time this artwork was created (May 2025), ongoing violence in Gaza had resulted in widespread civilian suffering, particularly among children. The Journaler's reference to "the children of Gaza" reflects this immediate historical context and her own empathetic engagement with those current events.

[21] This discussion draws primarily from Chapter 10 of David Tracy's *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism*, 1st edition (New York: Crossroad, 1981). In this chapter, Tracy outlines a vision for Christian theology that can speak about God within a pluralist world. He shows how theology can stay faithful to the Christian tradition while also engaging openly with culture and contemporary experience. This becomes a way of holding faith and the world together – keeping God's transcendence and nearness, mystery and meaning in creative balance. Tracy believes that there are symbolic and interpretative modes through which theology articulates meaning about God, world, and humanity. These *languages* are not linguistic systems but interpretative frameworks - ways of speaking about reality. These include the *language of order*, the *language of paradox*, and the *language of symbol and story*. The *analogical imagination* privileges the language of order, while the *dialectical imagination* privileges the language of paradox.

[22] Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism*, 408.

In figure 4.1, that interpretive key or *primary analogue* might be understood as empathy or compassion.[23] These feelings arising in the Journaler become the point of connection through which her experience and God are brought into relation. God and world meet within a single compassionate key. The imaginative descent of God into human suffering becomes the interpretive centre through which human experience, the world and God are held together. Such an analogical reading resists rigid distinctions between God and world, revealing God *in and through* the world, disclosed by analogy, by *likeness-in-difference*. The upward reach of the cathedral spires set against the descending figure of God expresses this analogical structure, revealing a divine movement that mirrors the empathy and compassion first felt by the artist herself.

Tracy's *analogical imagination* sits well within my process theopoetic approach. If offers a helpful hermeneutical companion for thinking about the co-creativity of God and the world and how this shapes the ongoing process of *becoming*. Both share the conviction that God is encountered *through the world*: process thought speaks of how God and the world are joined in a living co-creative relationship; while Tracy speaks at the level of interpretation, how we imaginatively perceive and name that relationship. One describes God's presence moving *with* the world, feeling its suffering and luring towards *becoming*, while the other describes how we come to see and understand that presence.[24] In what follows, I turn to a different way of imagining this same sense of divine nearness. Where Figure 4.1 imagines God alongside the suffering other, the following image turns inward, considering the nearness of God within the self. What comes into view here is a shift in register. Both the previous and the following image hold to a sense of God as present, relational and involved, even as they imagine that presence differently. Before doing so, the discussion returns more explicitly to the process theopoetic framework guiding this study.

At this point, the discussion is taken up again within the process theopoetic framework already outlined previously. Process thought provides the theological grounding for

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[23] Compassion comes from the Latin com-patior "to suffer with." Both empathy and compassion are closely related, but compassion carries deep theological weight as it names God's pathos, God's suffering with creation. See Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology,* trans.by R.A. Wilson and John Bowden (London*:* SCM Press, 1976), 222–56.

[24] David Tracy engages process theology as one constructive theological option, particularly in relation to the God-world relationship; see David Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology* (New York: Seabury Press, 1978). chaps. 7-8

understanding God as present within and responsive to the life of the world, a dimension that remains important within this chapter's constructive reimagining of God. Theopoetics, in turn, offers a distinct lens of reworking inherited images of God, here drawing attention to how such images may be unsettled, exposing them to disruption – understood here in a Derridean sense as *deconstruction* – and reshaping them in light of lived experience.[25] This disruptive dimension is central to strands of theopoetic thinking and is especially evident in the work of Caputo, one of the key voices in contemporary theopoetic thought, whose work draws on Derridean deconstruction.[26] For Caputo, theopoetics does not simply repeat inherited ideas of God, but unsettles them, opening them to be reshaped.[27] In what follows, I develop this dimension of theopoetics more explicitly, grounding it in process thought and bringing it into conversation with the work of Caputo and Keller, whose approaches converge at this point, even as they emerge from different theological trajectories.

Although process theology offers a distinctive reinterpretation of aspects of traditional Christian doctrine,[28] it also opens space for a more sustained engagement with what Keller

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[25] To use a Derridian term, *deconstruction,* this creates the *khôra,* the open space between and beyond, the empty centre that gives place and becomes the "receptacle – the nurse – of any birth," See, *'Circumfession.' Jacques Derrida* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981, 123). Deconstruction may well help to break apart damaging constructs of a coercive and idolatrous God, while theopoetics goes further by entering the debris to not only construct anew but also consider the possibilities of what *might* be. Theopoetics encourages others to imagine *becoming* again. See, Keefe-Perry, *Way to Water,* 106.

[26] John D. Caputo, *The Weakness of God: A Theology of the Event*, Indiana Series in the Philosophy of Religion (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006). Also, John D. Caputo, *A Radical God: Theopoetics, Phenomenology and the Future of Religion* (New York: Columbia University Press, forthcoming 2026).

[27] See also, John D. Caputo, *What to Believe? Twelve Brief Lessons in Radical Theology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2023).

[28] Process theology poses challenges to traditional Christian beliefs regarding the Trinity, infinite grace, Christology, and the concept of Christian hope. For example, Karl Barth was critical of process theology, arguing that it emphasises God's immanence at the expense of God's transcendence. Barth was primarily interested in the concrete grounding of faith, in more cultivated and richer complexes of theological symbols, in soteriological power, and in enabling in the community of faith communicability of the contexts of faith. As Michael Welker writes, "Barth did not refer, either critically or positively, to process theologians." Michael Welker, 'Barth's Theology and Process Theology' *Theology Today (Ephrata, Pa.)* (London, England) 43, no. 3 (1986): 383, https://doi.org/10.1177/004057368604300308. Concerns towards process theology question the theological richness and complexity cherished within Christianity. This new *God language* of process theology was seen as a dangerous limitation of the notion of God and was met with concerns regarding its impact on traditional Christian beliefs. Critics argued that it simplified and limited the understanding of God in four significant ways. Firstly, process theology was seen as reducing the doctrine of the Trinity which is a foundational concept in Christianity. This reductionism detracts from the complex nature of the Trinity, presenting God as a mere deep polarity. Secondly, the traditional Christian belief in infinite grace, which stems from the benevolence of God, is diminished in process theology. Instead, the creator is portrayed as always presupposing the world. This contradicts the Christian concept that God is the sole creator, bringing forth the world from nothing. Thirdly, process theology downplays the significance of Jesus as the ultimate revelation of God's redeeming love. While Christology emphasizes Jesus as the cause of salvation, process theology presents

and Caputo identify as the entanglement of theopoetics and theopolitics.[29] Recognising this relationship does not collapse theology into politics but it acknowledges that language about God is formed within cultural and social conditions that include patterns of authority and power. In this context, a process-theopoetic approach offers a space for reinterpretation, deconstruction, and construction, drawing attention to the tensions that underlie theological claims which may otherwise appear seamless. Bible Journaling may participate, often unintentionally, in such rearticulation. While Journalers' primary intention may centre on spending personal time in God's Word, the practice contributes to a reshaping of inherited theological language opening up possibilities for new understandings of God, world, self and others. In this respect, it resonates with recent work that draws attention to the ways particular constructions of gender and authority have contributed to cultures of silence, exclusion and in some cases abuse within ecclesial contexts.[30] Therefore, within this framework, theopoetics is not merely a descriptive term, but it potentially addresses the underlying agendas and hierarchies that shape the conversation by exposing and interrupting the theopolitical interests and the hidden assumptions of power that underlie them.

What this opens up can be developed further through process theology which offers a way of understanding divine action as persuasive and relational emerging through response and participation. Within this account, it foregrounds an understanding of God as a weak force that calls rather than compels, not only through new acts of imagination, but through a reworking of inherited images,.[31] What follows turns to a concrete example of how Bible Journaling gives expression to this rethinking of how God is understood. In depicting the *breath of God* as interior and intimate, the image presents divine power as relational and life-

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Jesus as a manifestation of God's universal love, present everywhere. Lastly, Christian hope has always centred around the final coming of the Kingdom of God. However, process theology reduces this hope to an infinite process of deferral tantamount with its non-realization. (Roland Faber lecture 'Process Theology as Theopoetics' from his 2006 talk from the Centre for Process Studies: https://youtu.be/pgIjSpvD5q4?si=mcc9oJWo-t7rwy4v

[29] Theopolitics refers to the ways in which religion intersects with political systems and structures. For more see, John D. Caputo and Catherine Keller, "Theopoetic/Theopolitic," *CrossCurrents* 56, no. 4 (2007): 105–11.

[30] Much has been written on this in recent years. In particularly. Sarah Stankorb, *Disobedient Women: How a Small Group of Faithful Women Exposed Abuse, Brought Down Powerful Pastors, and Ignited an Evangelical Reckoning* (New York: Worthy books, 2023). Aimee Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: How the Church Needs to Rediscover Her Purpose* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2020). Beth Allison Barr, *The Making of Biblical Womanhood: How the Subjugation of Women Became Gospel Truth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2021).

[31] Caputo and Keller, "Theopoetic/Theopolitic," 105–11. Caputo, *The Weakness of God: A Theology of the Event*. Chaps. 1-3.

giving. What is brought into view is not primarily God's commanding authority, but God's presence within the ordinary rhythm of one's body. This image does not introduce an entirely new understanding of God, nor does it introduce a new visual vocabulary, but re-emphasises a way of speaking about divine presence that has long existed within the Christian tradition. In doing so, it gently shifts attention away from more dominant images of God by subtly unsettling them rather than directly confronting structures of power. In doing so, the Journaler participates in the constructive work of theology, by thinking of God *otherwise*, and by creating *anew* in response.

Figure 4.2: The Breath of God is in Me

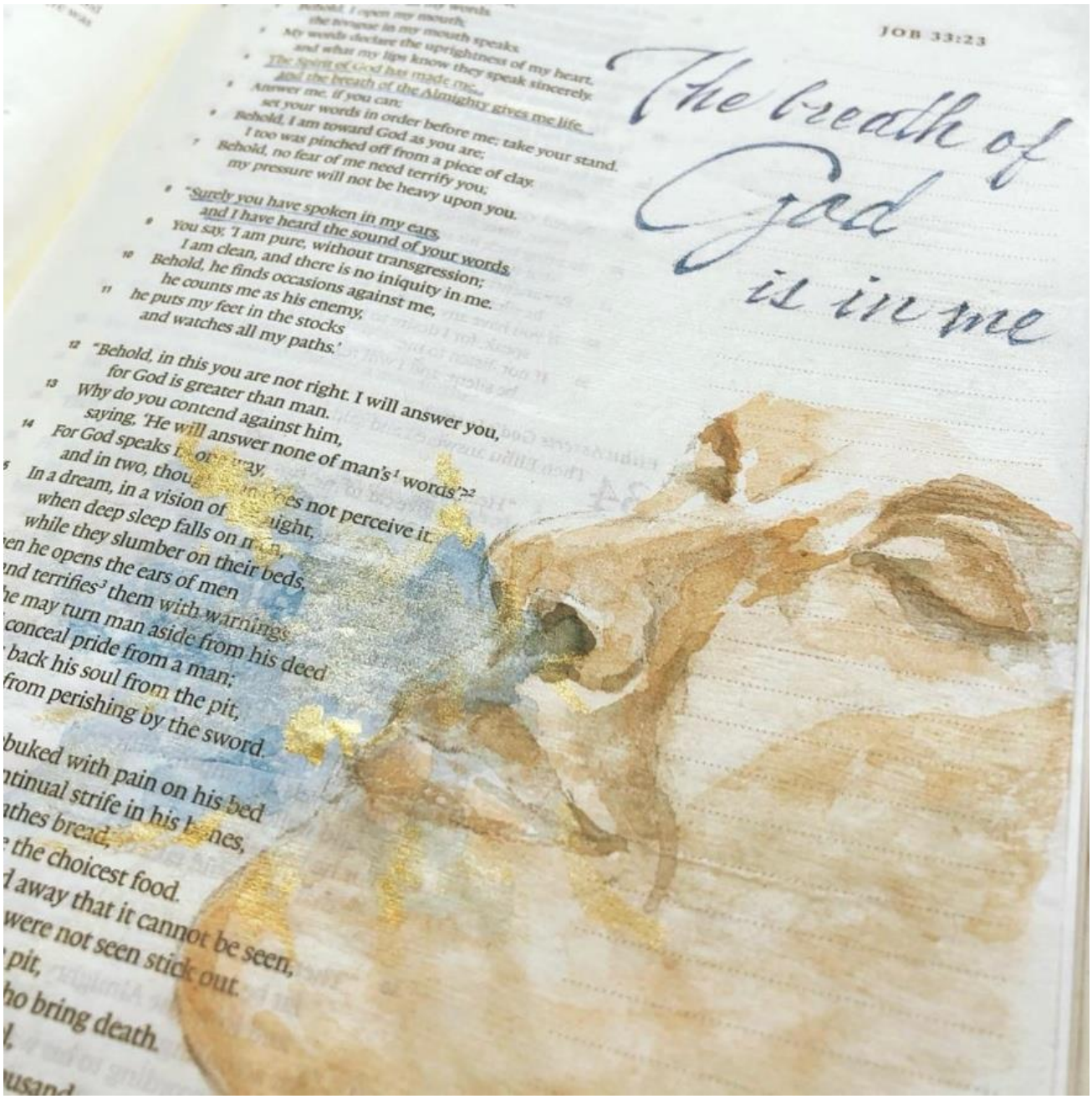


Figure 4.2 Bible Journaling artwork focusing on Job 33:4.[32]

Figure 4.2 uses a combination of watercolours in various tones of brown, gold and blue. On the recto page, there is a watercolour artwork featuring a face in close-up, tilted backwards with eyes closed. It is unclear as to the person's gender, and they may be asleep or

[32] @colors_of_faith, "job33breathofgod," *The New Illuminators*, uploaded 11th October 2018, https://nisar.omeka.net/admin/items/show/736. The Bible used in ESV, Crossway

meditating. The focus of the artwork is on the breath, depicted in gold and blue cloudlike shapes. A small gap in the lips suggests the inhaling and exhaling of air that extends onto the biblical text. Above the face on the top section of the page are the words, "The breath of God is in me." The artwork is an appropriation of Job 33:4 that reads, "The spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life."

The story of Job may initially appear straightforward on the surface – a devout man who faces struggles and seeks to find the reason for his suffering alongside his friends. When he encounters God, he experiences restoration. However, underneath the surface, the narrative also explores themes of divine justice and the nature of God's ways.[33] There is much to explore here, particularly with a focus on Job 33 in the context of Figure 4.2. Here we find a chapter reminding the reader how God communicates through various means and introducing the concept of a divine mediator bridging the gap between humanity and God. This mediator, Elihu, serves as a voice for God, addressing Job and his friends before God directly addresses them. Elihu speaks as a teacher calling for attention, addressing Job by name, citing him almost verbatim and refuting Job and his friends. Elihu claims that God communicates by different means, sometimes through dreams and nocturnal visions and at other times through bodily pain and suffering.[34] This chapter suggests that even in suffering, seeking understanding can lead to repentance and renewal.

Choon-Leong Seow notes that Elihu has not fared well among contemporary scholars, with many dismissing his speeches in Job 32-37 as secondary, likely being added later by a redactor or the author of the book at a much later date.[35] By contrast, medieval Jewish commentators firmly embraced Elihu seeing his theology as crucial to understanding the place of suffering in divine providence. A striking depiction of God and Elihu with similar appearances, each of them extending a right hand to Job as they address him, is found in a manuscript from the Monastery of St John in Patmos dated to the 8th or 9th century CE.[36]

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[33] Gary M. Burge and Andrew E. Hill, eds., *The Baker Illustrated Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012).

[34] John Barton and John Muddiman, eds., *The Oxford Bible Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 348.

[35] Choon-Leong Seow, "Elihu's Revelation," *Theology Today* 68, no. 3 (2011): 253–71, https://doi.org/10.1177/0040573611416537. 244

[36] Giulio Jacopi, "Miniature dei codici di Patmo," Clara Rhodos 6–7 (1932–33) fig. 109, pl. 21 b-c;

Later commentators, notably John Calvin held Elihu in the highest esteem. As Susan E. Schreiner observes, few biblical figures were more admired by Clavin than Elihu, whom he portrays as a conduit for divine revelation from both heaven and earth. In Calvin's view, what Elihu brings is not merely a human perspective; when he speaks, it is the Holy Spirit who speaks.[37]

In the Bible Journaler's interpretation in Figure 2.4, she uses verse 4 which illustrates Elihu's language of God's spirit and the breath (Hebrew *Ruah*). While much of the scholarship on Job focuses on the title character, it is Elihu's language of spirit and breath that appears to have drawn the Journaler's attention. Perhaps the Journaler has considered Elihu and applied his speeches to her own life, with the breath read as a representation of Elihu, and by extension, of God's voice. However, such an interpretation would be uncommon, and it is more likely that the imagery of the breath has captured the artist's attention. The closed eyes may allude to Job experiencing troubling dreams as described in 7:14, and waiting for the voice of God as promised in Job 33:14-15 through dreams and sleep. The Bible Journaler may also be implying that the person in the artwork, possibly herself, can also be a conduit for God in the world. Accompanying the social media upload, the Bible Journaler also included the following text,

> The breath of the Almighty is in me! How does that look like?
> How will it touch my every body cell?
> How will it reform my thoughts and emotions?
> How will it change my vocabularies and actions?
> How will it look like today?
> Oh Lord, permeate!

The artwork presents the closeness of God as intimate and essential as the act of breathing. The breath is depicted like exhaling on a cold day, where warm air meets the cold and becomes visible. This continuous movement of breath that continues throughout one's life offers a perspective on divine presence of God as ongoing and embodied. In the Bible

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see also fig. 117a-b; Stella Papadaki-Oekland, *Byzantine Illuminated Manuscripts of the Book of Job* (Athens: Academy of Athens; Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), fig. 205.

[37] Susan E. Schreiner, *Where Shall Wisdom Be Found? Calvin's Exegesis of Job from Medieval and Modern Perspectives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 131–35.

Journaler's accompanying text, she reflects on how the recognition of God's breath within her might shape her thoughts, emotions and actions, and invites this presence to permeate her inner life and the world around her. Read within a process theopoetic framework, the breath motif becomes a quiet theological shift. God is encountered as a relational presence that gives life and sustains without domination. Divine power is understood as indwelling and interdependent. The breath remains intimate, belonging to the intrinsic life of the world itself. In this sense, Bible Journaling becomes a site of constructive theological engagement by opening an imaginative space in which God is not fixed, captured or fully defined. As Rubem Alves writes, "theology is not a net woven to capture God in its meshes... for God is not a fish but Wind that no one can hold."[38]

To conclude this section, Figure 4.1 offers a distinct way of imagining the divine within the wider landscape of Bible Journaling. Rather than presenting a fixed representation of God, it forms part of an ongoing way in which the divine is seen, felt and imagined through creative *poiesis*. In drawing the suffering of the world into dialogue with the biblical text, the Journaler participates in an imaginative reconstruction of God, shaping a vision of divine presence marked by solidarity and compassionate descent. Here, God is not imagined as distant or contained within Cathedral architecture but present within the lived realities of the world. In this way, the image shows how Bible Journaling can be more than devotional expression but it can also be a genuine theological act of *imagination*. Figure 4.2 extends this by turning inward, locating divine presence within the rhythm of breath. Read within a process theopoetic framework, this shift draws attention to a relational understanding of God as lived and relational. Breath is invisible and transient, and the Journaler's questioning "*how will it..."* keeps meaning open, with no absolute claims in God-language. Together these images show how Bible Journaling re-emphasises ways of understanding divine presence that are not new but deeply rooted within the Christian tradition. At the same time, it creates space for diverse voices to draw on these traditions and to interpret and articulate their own understandings of God, self, world and others through their creative practice.

[38] Bruno Mattos Linhares Junior, "Nevertheless I Am Continually with You: A Cosmopolitan and Theopoetic Reframing of Pastoral Theology" (Ph.D., Princeton Theological Seminary, 2008), 237, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses, 304501323.

Chapter Four: Section Two

4.3: The Collective Imaginary

As section one explored, the creative *poiesis* opens a space for the Bible Journaler's *imagination* to take shape in relation to the text. Yet this imaginative work does not remain private. When Journalers share their artwork online, what might have been considered as finished on the page of the Bible begins to unfold again in the public space. As artworks circulate through platforms such as Facebook and Instagram it becomes part of a broader *collective imaginary* – a co-created online space in which Journaler's interpretations are received and carried forward.[39] This emerging *collective imaginary* appears to draw on the symbols and narratives of the Christian tradition, such as grace, hope, healing, lament, and restoration. Yet it also seems to be animated by a deeper human longing for wholeness, belonging, flourishing and recognition by others of one's experiences. In this sense, *imagination* is rooted in the individual Bible Journaler, while the *imaginary* refers to the communal symbolic world that belongs to the collective.[40] Bible Journaling exists at the intersection of individual *imagination* and *collective imaginary* making it particularly significant within a theopoetic framework concerned with human *flourishing*. In this section, I want to explore this idea of a *collective imaginary* more deeply. Why does it matter? What does it mean? And what difference does it make?

To address these questions, it is helpful to consider recent work on the idea of *the imaginary,* particularly how shared meaning is formed and sustained, and how *imagination* operates within a collective context. The following section offers a brief overview of four thinkers - Kathleen Lennon, Richard Rorty, Leila Dawney and Ruha Benjamin whose ideas, though emerging from different disciplines, together illuminate the relationship between individual *imagination* and *collective imaginary.* I am not seeking a single unified definition here but rather drawing from each to identify aspects that, when brought together, deepen a theological understanding of how meaning is created and shared.

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[39] For example, the hashtag #ipaintinmybible has been used in over 45,900 posts on Instagram, illustrating how individual artworks, when shared under this tag, move beyond private expression. They enter a space of visibility and participation that is collectively formed and continuously evolving.

[40] I use the term symbolic in a broad theological sense to describe the realm of meaning-making expressed through images, metaphors and narratives. This usage is not intended as an engagement with philosophical or theological debates on symbol theory.

To begin this discussion, I draw on Kathleen Lennon's work *Imagination and Imaginary* which offers insights as we approach these initial questions.[41] Lennon challenges the common assumption that *the imaginary* is synonymous with the unreal or illusory – for example, an *imaginary friend* popular in childhood.[42] Instead, she reclaims the term arguing that the imaginary is not opposed to the real but is bound up in how the real becomes meaningful. Drawing from phenomenology, particularly Merleau-Ponty, and Kant's notion of the productive imagination, Lennon argues that the imaginary is both discovered and created. It emerges through the embodied and relational interplay between the individual and their world, shaped by emotional, symbolic and cultural frameworks, yet always carrying the potential to reimagine and reshape them. *The imaginary*, therefore, is an evolving horizon of meaning in the process of *becoming.* She uses the term *gestalt* to suggest that our experiences are always already shaped by meaningful patterns or frameworks (*gestalts*) - emotionally charged and culturally embedded, that structure how we perceive and interpret the world. A *gestalt* is a structured whole, more than the sum of its parts, and while these patterns are deeply ingrained, they are not fixed but can be reconfigured through imaginative engagement, opening up the possibility of transformation.[43] This has significant implications for how we understand Bible Journaling not just as a private devotional act, but as a way of shaping meaning and opening imaginative possibilities for faith and practice.

Another interesting interlocuter here is Richard Rorty who sees *imagination* as valuable for its capacity to create shared meaning with a potential to transform. Rorty's work helps us understand how imaginative practices become theopoetically generative when they enter the world and transform how others perceive, experience and live their lives. In his book *Philosophy as Poetry* he writes that to be imaginative is to do something new, "We need to think of imagination not as the faculty that produces visual or auditory images, but as a combination of novelty and luck."[44] He shifts from a classical view of *imagination* as a

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[41] Kathleen Lennon, *Imagination and the Imaginary*, (London: Routledge, 2015).

[42] Amy Kind, 'Imagination and the Imaginary, by Kathleen Lennon', *Mind* 125, no. 500 (2016): 1244–51, https://doi.org/10.1093/mind/fzw033. For example, the theme of imaginary friends is a recurring motif in children's literature and popular culture; see A.F. Harrold's award-winning children's novel *The Imaginary* illustrated by Emily Gravett (London: Bloomsbury Children's Books, 2014).

[43] Lennon, *Imagination and the Imaginary*, 73.

[44] Richard Rorty, *Philosophy as Poetry* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2016). 4.

private and inner world that creates fantasies, to *imagination* having the capacity to do something new in a shared social world – something that resonates with others. He writes "to be imaginative... is to do something new and to be lucky enough to have that novelty be adopted by one's fellow humans." His insistence on *imagination* as social and relational helps clarify what is at stake in Bible Journaling as a theopoetic practice. These visual interpretations offer new ways of *seeing* that can potentially enter and reshape a broader fabric of meaning. In line with Rorty's view, the value of *imagination* and *the imaginary* lies in their uptake by others, when their significance captures the attention of a wider community and contributes to a collective world of meaning. He highlights the difference between private imaginative creativity and the kinds of *imagination* that gives shape to shared meaning, threads that are woven throughout the fabric of this chapter.

Leila Dawney, similar to Lennon, emphasises that imaginaries are not static but evolve through emotional and lived experiences, shaping the spaces we inhabit, especially those that feel in need of healing or therapeutic care.[45] She uses examples like therapeutic walking practices to show how individuals, especially in times of personal upheaval such as job loss, engage with certain imaginaries to create healing routines and self-reinvention.[46] For Dawney, spaces that support this kind of imaginative, embodied self-work are essential for transformation as they provide tools through which people form and re-form themselves. This is a dynamic and affective process in which one's imaginative capacities emerge from physical and sensory lives, not apart from them. As she writes,

> Practices of therapeutic self- transformation, in terms of specific relations to the self, emerge from historically situated but future-orientated scenarios of affect, sensation and imagination constituting therapeutic imaginaries. It is through these imaginaries, I

[45] Leila Dawney, "Social Imaginaries and Therapeutic Self-Work: The Ethics of the Embodied Imagination," *The Sociological Review* 59, no. 3 (2011): 535–52, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-954X.2011.02015.x.

[46] In her section *Bodies that Imagine*, Dawney explores how shared ways of imagining shape the spaces we inhabit especially when those spaces are needed for our healing. She describes "Tim" who, after redundancy walked over 600 miles as a way of reinventing himself. Dawney, "Social Imaginaries and Therapeutic Self-Work: The Ethics of the Embodied Imagination", 546. Through this journey, Tim transforms his walking path into a *therapeutic imaginary* where the space becomes healing by virtue of the stories and embodied intentions he brings to is. As Dawney notes, "the landscape formed through the assemblage of body and world is made therapeutic as imaginaries of positive self-transformation attach themselves to spaces and embodied practices, which, when performed, produce the experience of the therapeutic." 549. In other words, therapeutic spaces are enacted by embodied individuals who, through imagination, making them healing.

> suggest, that spaces are produced as therapeutic: the embodied imagination is central to this 'making-therapeutic.'[47]

Dawney offers a Spinozist account of the *imagination* that resists the traditional dualism of mind and body, or imaginary and real.[48] For her, imagining is not an abstract mental act but an embodied, relational process that emerges in shared lived experiences. *Imagination* is a part of how we live, heal and form meaning *in* the world. Imaginaries, in this view, are formed through the interaction of bodies, emotions and the spaces they inhabit. Applied to Bible Journaling, her work on *ethical self-work* is particularly resonant here, as it shows how *imagination* can enable people to reassess their agency, re-frame their relationship to their own history, and open up new ways of being. In Bible Journaling, such processes can become both a personal and shared journey, creating spaces where the act of interpretation becomes a way of healing, re-imagining who you are and finding new possibilities together.

In her 2024 book *Imagination: A Manifesto*, sociologist Ruha Benjamin invites us to recognise imagination not just as a personal creative activity but as a transformative force that helps us to see what kind of world we want to build. She shifts between the terms *imagination* and *imaginary*, with the latter referring to the shared visions and hopes communities hold around desirable and feasible futures. For Benjamin, the *collective imaginary* plays an important role in shaping futures rooted in justice, solidarity and care as it is via this shared imagining that we can begin to challenge what currently exists. She warns that many of the oppressive systems we navigate – such as racism, sexism and economic inequality – are sustained by dominant imaginaries: shared narratives and assumptions that dictate what is considered normal or inevitable. These imaginaries are not fixed, they are constructed and, therefore, can be deconstructed and reimagined. She highlights the importance of communities coming together to craft new stories and symbols that reflect shared values. Her work is full of theopoetic energy – drawing on dreams, stories and art to challenge harmful systems and spark more just and life-giving ways of being. One of her most powerful ideas is that to "imagine otherwise" we also have to "remember otherwise."[49]

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[47] Dawney, "Social Imaginaries and Therapeutic Self-Work: The Ethics of the Embodied Imagination," 537.

[48] Dawney draws on Spinoza's account of imagination as embodied and affective. Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics,* trans. and ed. by Edwin Curley, intro. by Stuart Hampshire (London: Penguin, 1996). Part II, Propositions 11-13, 17-18

[49] Ruha Benjamin, *Imagination: A Manifesto* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2024), 138.

From a theopoetic perspective, this is deeply resonant because it suggests that reconfiguring the past can open space for new, life-giving possibilities that imagine a better future. This process is not just dreaming but about actively working to bring a better future into being.

Taken together, the insights of Kathleen Lennon, Richard Rorty, Leila Dawney and Ruha Benjamin show that the *collective imaginary* is never static but continually reshaped through lived experience. Lennon highlights how the imaginary gives emotional and patterned shape to our experience of the world; Rorty reminds us that its transformative potential lies in its uptake within a wider community; Dawney grounds it in lived practice, ethical self-work that make spaces healing; and Benjamin insists on its power to dismantle dominant narratives and build more just futures. All four point to how shared ways of imagining can become sites of transformation and places where possibilities for *flourishing* emerge through collective meaning-making. It is with this understanding that I now turn to a specific case within Bible Journaling: the Instagram hashtag #revealyourteal which was created to foster a collective reimagining for survivors of sexual abuse, incest, assault and violence, and to imagine a future marked by dignity, healing and hope.

4.4: #revealyourteal

Before examining specific examples of Bible Journaling artworks that use this hashtag, it is important to do two things. First, to consider the origins, name and symbolism of the hashtag. Second, to position it within the wider context of theological engagement with trauma. While the hashtag was created to nurture a *flourishing* community, it is also deeply rooted in narratives of trauma and survival, an aspect that is central to this discussion and the section that follows.

The hashtag #revealyourteal emerged as part of a campaign initiated by Bible Journaler LaQuisha Hall (Instagram @confidentcanvas) to offer survivors of sexual abuse a space to creatively and courageously share their stories.[50] In her launch post, Hall paired her own artwork with a personal reflection inviting others to join her in using the hashtag, to "spread

[50] LaQuisha Hall is an entrepreneur, educator and artist behind *Confident Canvas*, a growing platform offering Bible Journaling classes, workshops, and retreats designed to build confidence and spiritual growth. Hall brings her experience in creative education and advocacy to a wider community of Bible Journalers. Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/confidentcanvas/ Website: https://confidentcanvas.com Recent Interview: https://canvasrebel.com/meet-laquisha-hall/

awareness of sexual violence and eradicate shame in our communities." The image and full post are shown below.

Tears Become Ground

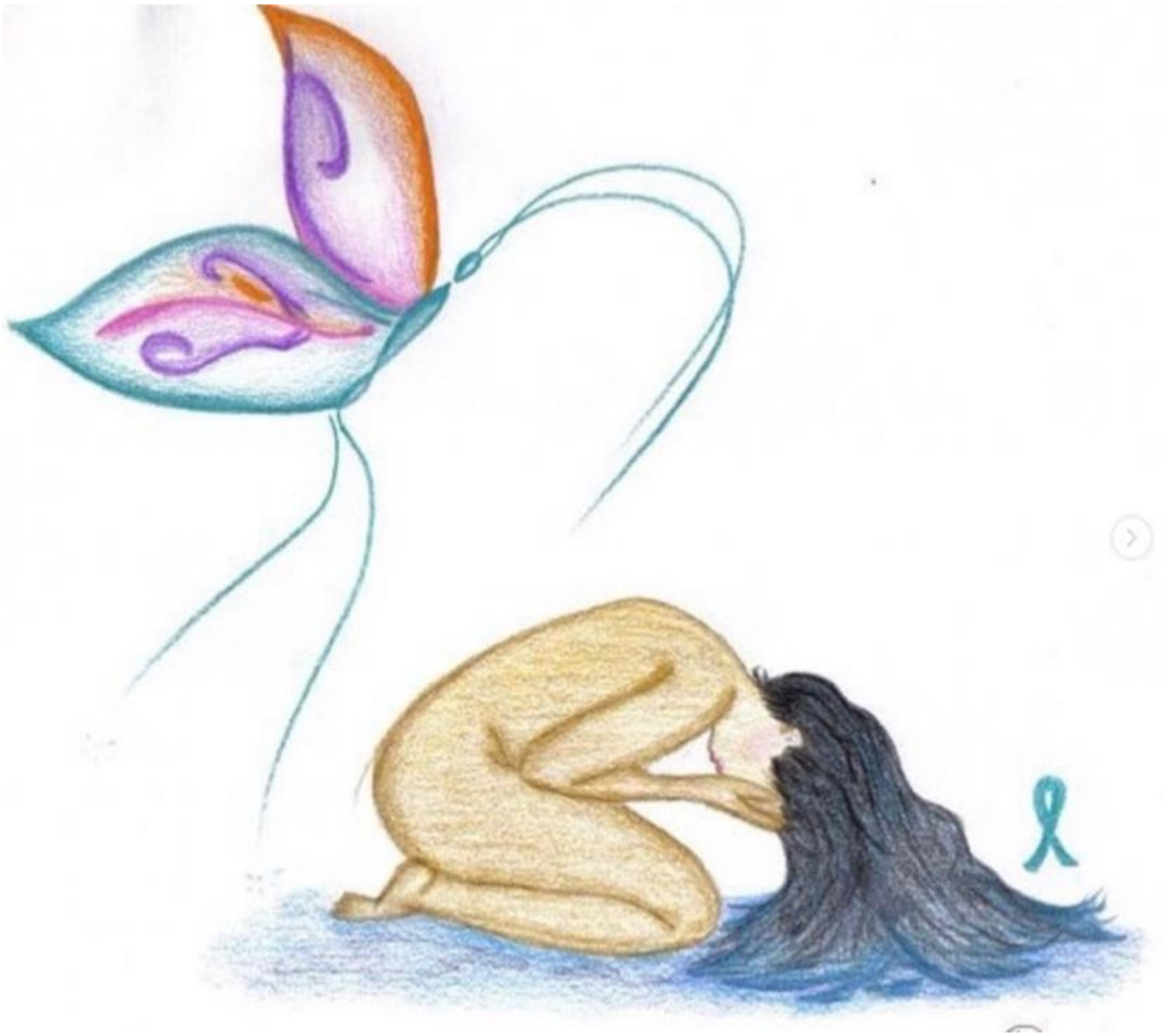


Figure 4.3 Bible Journaling artwork by Laquisha Hall [51]

[51] @confidentcanvas (Instagram) uploaded 2nd April 2021 https://nisar.omeka.net/items/show/2419. This image is not connected to a particular biblical text. The artwork was shared along with the short account of when and why it was created and the purpose of the campaign it formed part of

> This is one of the pictures I kept from my youth... created at a time that I wanted to give up on life, but I started learning that there were other people in the world who just like me: survivors. Since then, it has been one of my divine missions to encourage the hearts of people like me: survivors of sexual abuse, assault, incest and violence. While I am now in a space and place to help others, I wasn't always... I know the need for hearing an empowering word! I plan to continue use my creativity to further the mission and empower others that I haven't even met—but I need your help! Create with me? I am asking fellow creatives to create and share their work on social media using the hashtag #revealyourteal! Together we will spread awareness of sexual violence and eradicate shame in our communities. No purchase required and if you are a survivor do not feel pressured to say so (however, please know there is power in sharing your testimony!). If you will join me, comment below! I am so excited to join forces with you! If you can't or don't desire to, give us a comment or a like or 2 next month—you may not be a survivor but you absolutely know someone who is. Love you all! #confidentcanvas #metoo #saam #saam2020 #sherose

A defining feature of the #revealyourteal campaign is the colour teal, the official colour of Sexual Abuse Awareness Month in the United States.[52] In Bible Journaling artworks, teal functions as a unifying symbol and a visible marker of the campaign. Whether appearing as the hashtag written across the page, a teal ribbon, or the dominant palette of the artwork itself, the colour signals connection to a wider movement confronting trauma and painful past memories while also pointing toward survival, healing and dignity. Psychologically, teal combines the calming associations of blue with the renewing energy of green, evoking renewal and restoration which are vital qualities for creating safe and supportive spaces for survivors to share their stories.[53] This shared visual marker, seen through the lens of the *collective imaginary,* gathers individual artworks into a shared symbolic and theological space. It becomes more than an archive of individual expressions but enables a participatory space of meaning-making in which survivors re-narrate their identities, foster solidarity and envision new possibilities for human *flourishing*.

In creating #revealyourteal and sharing a deeply personal, raw artwork created from her own painful experience, Hall is not seeking to erase her past or allow it to define her future. Rather, she makes her story and testimony visible establishing a space where trauma is acknowledged and transformed into a source of strength. What she sets in motion is more

[52] https://www.nsvrc.org/saam

[53] https://octet.design/journal/teal-color-meaning/ This page explores teal's association with calmness, healing, renewal, emotional balance and trust

than an online campaign but a space in which survivors can imagine life beyond victimhood and reframe their identities in light of survival. This intention resonates with what Leila Dawney describes as the "making-therapeutic" of spaces, the ways in which embodied practices open new possibilities of *becoming*. Crucially, because this *collective imaginary* emerges directly from the lived realities of trauma, it cannot be fully understood apart from theological engagement with trauma. This grounding is important as it brings theology, and especially theopoetics, into conversation with the work of reimagining life after harm.

4.5: Theopoetics of Trauma

Because the *collective imaginary* expressed in #revealyourteal is rooted in trauma, it must be read in conversation with theological engagement with trauma. Rebecca Chopp's work on the *poetics of testimony* is a crucial starting point.[54] Chopp observes that marginalised communities increasingly turn to testimony to articulate experiences that cannot be fully expressed within the prevailing frameworks of rational discourse.[55] Testimony is a way of *imagining otherwise*, opening the world to be envisioned and lived differently. In this sense, these are not simply personal stories but theological acts that bear witness to God's presence and to paths toward renewed life. She writes,

> Poetics seeks not so much to argue as to refigure, to reimagine and refashion the world.... of imagining the world differently and how we can live together in it.[56]

Chopp uses the term *poetics* in a broad and inclusive sense—close to how it is employed in this thesis—as a discursive practice that reshapes the world through imaginative re-narration. Her vision of testimony as revelatory and capable of shaping theological meaning offers a framework for understanding how the #revealyourteal hashtag gathers survivors' voices into a shared, creative witness.

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[54] Rebecca S. Chopp, "Theology and the Poetics of Testimony" in *Converging on Culture: Theologians in Dialogue with Cultural Analysis and Criticism,* Delwin Brown, Sheila Greeve Davaney, and Kathryn Tanner, Eds. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 119-20.

[55] Here Chopp uses Shoshona Felman's definition of testimony: "Testimony is a discursive practice as opposed to pure theory. To testify – to vow to tell to promise and produce one's speech act, rather than to simple formulate a statement." Lawrence Normand, 'Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History', *The Review of English Studies* 46, no. 181 (1995): 5. Chopp asserts that the works of feminist, liberationist, queer, and post-Holocaust theologies belong to this greater genre of the *poetics of testimony.* Rebecca Chopp, 'Theology and the Poetics of Testimony,' 19–20.

[56] Chopp, "Theology and the Poetics of Testimony." 57

Shelley Rambo extends this conversation by calling for a *theopoetics of trauma* and insisting that theopoetics is a theological necessity precisely because it allows trauma to be honoured in ways that resonate with the lived, inner experience itself.[57] Trauma defies conventional forms of expression in that it is fragmented, often nonlinear, and resists neat storytelling or closure. She writes,

> The challenge is to bring the truths conveyed into view in such a way that they are not only given a hearing but they are understood as revelatory.... they must be received and heard by those who are attempting to reshape the social imaginary.... not to pay attention to experiences or to deem them important, but to engage experiences with corresponding forms that count as theology.[58]

Theopoetics, for her, creates a space for trauma to be heard on its own terms, recognising the power of creativity that can bear witness to what is fragmented or unspeakable. It is not about resolving trauma but about creating the space in which it can be attended to with honesty and care. Rambo's *theopoetics of trauma* makes a vital contribution to the work of reimagining a collective future marked by healing and human flourishing, by emphasising theological witness as a way of engaging the complexities of trauma; to attend to "what remains"[59] when the world as we knew it has been shattered. She writes that trauma is not the problem theology solves, but the lens through which theology must now be done.[60] Rambo's language of *the middle*, the unresolved place where trauma is held rather than solved highlights the space between life and death, a space that gestures towards *flourishing* even in the wake of what cannot be undone. She writes, "the theopoet holds a space without pre-determining what happens there. It hopes that suffering will not go un-held, untouched."[61] She writes that instead of a distant, disembodied God, transcendence is seen in the transformation of

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[57] Shelly Rambo, "Theopoetics of Trauma" in *Trauma and Transcendence: Suffering and the Limits of Theory,* ed. by Eric Boynton and Peter Capretto (New York: Fordham University Press, 2018), 223.

[58] Rambo, "Theopoetics of Trauma," 226.

[59] Shelly Rambo, "Spirit and Trauma", *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 69, no. 1 (2015): 14, https://doi.org/10.1177/0020964314552625.

[60] Rambo, "Spirit and Trauma," 16–17. A considerable body of recent theological and biblical scholarship attends to the intersection of trauma and theology, reflecting a broader turn toward trauma-aware approaches within both disciplines. In particular, see L. Juliana M. Claassens, *Writing and Reading to Survive: Biblical and Contemporary Trauma Narratives in Conversation*, The Bible in the Modern World; 74 (Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2020). Also, Elizabeth Boase and Christopher G. Frechette, *Bible through the Lens of Trauma*, 1st ed., Semeia Studies; Number 86 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016).

[61] Rambo, "Theopoetics of Trauma," 236.

suffering into witness, immanent and intimate. It is located “close to the skin” through attention, receptivity and care.

In light of Chopp’s *poetics of testimony* and Rambo’s insistence that theopoetics is a theological necessity for engaging trauma, the #revealyourteal hashtag can be understood as a participatory space that bears witness to pain while also *imagining otherwise*, a space woven through with creativity, solidarity and sacred presence. Following this trajectory, I too seek to hold the unresolved with honesty and care, approaching these artworks not merely as creative expressions but as visual testimonies. They resist closure yet contribute to a *collective imaginary* of healing, a space where wounds are honoured and stories are shared beyond the shadow of harm.

In the following analysis of the three selected images, I will follow a consistent structure. It begins with a thick description, drawing on terminology used in art criticism, before considering the art materials used and offering an objective account of its visual composition. Attention then turns to the biblical text that is being interpreted, considering its historical, theological and contextual significance. The analysis then examines how the artwork interacts with the biblical text, exploring the artist’s interpretation and the themes that emerge. Finally, the discussion brings these observations into conversation with theopoetics, with particular attention to the concept of a *collective imaginary*.

4.6: Women's Bodies and the Cross



Figure 4.3 Bible Journaling artwork focusing on Hebrews 12:2 [62]

[62] @lillyintheriver (Instagram) uploaded 17th April 2021 https://nisar.omeka.net/items/show/2383. The Bible used is ESV, Crossway

Figure 4.3 shows an artwork on the blank page of the Bible. A green or aqua-coloured wash covers the page with cross-like patterns on top in a deeper shade of a similar hue. In the centre and spanning the entire page, is a cross-shape made up of thirteen faceless women figures shown from head to shoulders. The face of one woman is shown on the left with her eyes closed, and the faces of two younger girls are on the right side. The women are layered, overlapping and connected both across and down the page, stretching vertically and horizontally. The women span a wide range of skin tones representing the variety of womanhood, ages and backgrounds. Each woman is unique in hair colour, style and clothing, some wearing floral headbands. Black handwritten text reads "... for the joy set before him he endured the cross, despising its shame, and is seated at the right hand of God. Heb 12 2"

Figure 4.3: Where the Cross becomes Flesh: Focus on Hebrews 12:2

The artwork draws on Hebrews 12:2. Hebrews is a theologically rich text, traditionally attributed to Paul but more likely written by an unknown author with a deep understanding of Jewish scripture and emerging Christian theology.[63] Luke Timothy Johnson points out that Hebrews challenges readers to see the world differently where what is unseen is more real and lasting than what is visible. It calls for a reimagining - in which faith, rather than sight, becomes the means by which truth is known. Discipleship within the context of Hebrews asks readers to shift their perspective and live by what cannot always be seen or measured.[64]

While the Bible Journaler has focused on Hebrews 12, it is helpful to consider what precedes this. Hebrews 11 recounts the men and women of authentic faith who endured trials and hardship, yet persevered and responded to God's call.[65] Their lives are presented as testimonies of trust, as witnesses to what it means to live by faith. The term *faith* is used here in the sense of the grace of God by which believers have rested their hope of salvation in

[63] Luke Timothy Johnson and Jennifer K. Cox, *Hebrews: A Commentary* First edition, New Testament Library (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 1–8.

[64] For more on Hebrews, see Eric Farrel Mason and Kevin B. McCruden, *Reading the Epistle to the Hebrews: A Resource for Students*, Resources for Biblical Study; Number 66 (Society of Biblical Literature, 2011). Gabriella. Gelardini, *Hebrews: Contemporary Methods, New Insights*, 1st ed., Biblical Interpretation Series, v. 75 (Brill, 2005). Craig R. Koester, *Hebrews: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible ; v. 36 (Doubleday, 2001).

[65] These verses name the figures - Abel, Enoch, Noah (Hebrews 11:4-7); Abraham (Hebrews 11:8-22); Moses (Hebrews 11: 23-28) - whose endurance exemplify the faith described above.

Jesus Christ.[66] This is the reader's union with all past generations of believers both in the covenant of promise and the covenant of fulfilment.[67] Hebrews 12 turns the focus to the shared journey of the present community, expressing a hope that inspires believers to run the race of life with endurance.[68] Two key images stand out here. The first appears in Hebrews 12:1 which opens with a call to perseverance, drawing on the imagery of *cloud of witnesses* before moving to the metaphor of the race.[69] The image of the *cloud of witnesses* highlights the community of faith, emphasised through the plural use of "we and "us" inviting the community to recognise themselves as part of a living tradition united across time. The metaphor of the race also intensifies this communal call underscoring that the Christian journey is not static, but active, requiring discipline, focus and endurance. As Gause notes, believers are urged to consider not just that Jesus *ran the race* before them, but how he ran it because in the revelation and explication, his nature is revealed.[70] James W. Thompson in his book *Hebrews* argues that Jesus is not presented as the object of faith, but rather as the ultimate *example* of it.[71]

Within this context, verse 12:2 offers words of encouragement grounded in Christ: "Looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God."[72] This verse is intentionally chosen by the Bible Journaler as the focus of her artwork, highlighting the invitation to look to Jesus alone. For readers who have experienced abuse or

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[66] As Gause notes, at this time in early Christian history the concept of *faith* was starting to take on a creedal form, a development reflected in certain New Testament texts - in particular 1 Corinthians 15:3-4. However, this creedal dimension does not appear to be present in Hebrews 12. In this context, *faith* is illustrated in the examples in Hebrews 11 and the ongoing experiences of the early believers of Jesus Christ. Here, *faith* is understood as a grace through which believers rest their hope for salvation - its origin and perfection in the person of Jesus Christ.

[67] R. Hollis Gause, *Hebrews: A Pentecostal Commentary* (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 300.

[68] Gareth Lee Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2012).

[69] "Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us." Hebrews 12:1 NRSV

[70] Gause, *Hebrews*.

[71] James W. Thompson, *Hebrews*, Paideia: Commentaries on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 251–53.

[72] Hebrews 12:2. ESV - the version of the Bible used by the Bible Journaler

suffering (Heb. 10:33-34), Jesus serves as a powerful example – one who *despised the shame* by embracing the most shameful form of death. Thompson notes that the cross represented a deeply personal confrontation between Jesus and his enemies. In the eyes of the world, it was a moment of defeat, humiliation and destruction. The cross was meant to humiliate and shame him, but instead it revealed Jesus' refusal to be denied by society's view on honour and shame.[73] The phrase *for the joy set before him* suggests that Jesus was faced with a choice between the immediate relief of joy on earth and the suffering of the cross, and he chose the path of suffering, anticipating a deeper redemptive joy beyond it.[74] Through this choice Jesus became the ultimate example of faith recalled by the author of Hebrews *in order that they not become fatigued, giving out* (Heb. 12:3) – each believer likened to an athlete pressing on during a long-distance race. The athletic imagery is important here as it evokes the idea that there is a course to complete and a goal to reach, a marathon, not a sprint. The writer of Hebrews suggests that losing sight of Jesus suffering on the cross and the shame he endured risks distraction from the *race* and detachment from its goal. More significantly, losing sight of Jesus himself means losing sight of the manner in which he ran with endurance, faith and a radical disregard for worldly judgement. And yet the shame of the cross was not the end: it became the path to his exaltation and his place at the right hand of God.

Figure 4.3: Human Presence and Mystery: Artist's Interpretation

I would now like to consider the image in light of interpreting Hebrews 12:2. As mentioned above, the Journaler has drawn particular attention to the shape of the cross, yet rather than depicting a traditional wooden structure, she has re-imagined the cross using the bodies of women. The timber has been replaced with human presence connecting the biblical narrative with the lived reality of human experience. In this section I focus on two aspects of the artist's interpretation: the concept of shame and its theological relationship to the cross, and the way these themes resonate with liberation theology's understanding of the cross.[75] To frame this discussion, it is important to begin with the Bible Journaler's own words, shared alongside the artwork on social media:

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[73] James W. Thompson, *Hebrews* 303.

[74] James W. Thompson, *Hebrews* 226.

[75] The top of the page shows a tab labelled *freedom.* Although it appears to belong to a different page and is not directly attached to the artwork page itself, its visibility in the photograph gives it significance here. The artist is not explicitly drawing on Liberation Theology, yet the presence of the tab invites a resonant reading. The link between the cross and freedom echoes Liberation Theology's understanding of the cross as a site of transformation and liberating possibility. This offers a helpful lens which I will return to later in the chapter.

> Listening to testimonies of God's love, deliverance and healing in the lives of survivors of sexual abuse on @confidentcanvas 's page, I thought of the joy that must fill heaven when survivors receive His grace and flourish. Surely this was part of the joy set before Jesus. I thank Jesus today for despising the shame of the cross - now nobody has to carry *the weight of shame* and we can share in His joy as we stand in His deliverance and stand with those whom He is rescuing...
> #biblejournaling #illustratedfaith #saam #revealyourteal
> #thecrossisthereasonfortheseason #lent2021

What theological significance emerges from the Journaler's decision to depict women as the very structure of the cross itself? I believe the visual imagery here is not just symbolic in a decorative sense but it carries theological weight that needs to be approached with care. The cross has been interpreted in many varied ways across the Christian tradition with some main themes including, Christ saves as a blood sacrifice, Christ as a moral model of self-giving love; as exposing human sin through his death; as the crucified oppressed who announces God's solidarity with the poor. [76] Each of these models offers limits and strengths. In the context of violence, sexual abuse and trauma, certain theological interpretations become especially charged. *In Trauma and Grace: Theology in a Ruptured World,* Serene Jones critiques redemptive suffering, particularly concerning women's experiences of violence. She argues that such readings risk legitimising violence and can be deeply damaging to survivors of trauma. She writes that grace must not be mistaken as a call to *endure abuse* but as a transformative force capable of breaking cycles of violence. For Jones, the cross is not a model for accepting violence but a site where the reality of pain and trauma are acknowledged without being glorified, and where God's solidarity with those who suffer is made visible.[77] Similarly, Shelly Rambo urges for a theologically careful approach to the cross, cautioning that redemptive framings of trauma – if too quickly tied to resurrection – can silence or retraumatise women who have experienced sexual abuse and violence. Her introduction of the concept of *Holy Saturday* as a theological space that challenges the move from crucifixion to resurrection too quickly, insists on honouring pain and remaining with it without rushing toward resolution.

[76] A key text here is Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*. Trans. R.A. Wilson and John Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1974)

[77] Serene Jones, 'Trauma and Grace', *Theology in a Ruptured World*, 2nd ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2019).

Figure 4.3 invites reflection on these themes of suffering, shame, solidarity and the redemptive presence of Christ within the cross itself. These theological themes take on depth when considered alongside the Bible Journaler's own reflection of the image, particularly her use of the phrase the *weight of shame.* This notion of shame also emerges in Hebrews 12:2 and is worth further exploration as it deepens the emotional impact of the artwork and speaks directly to the lived experience of trauma, particularly for survivors of sexual abuse.[78] In much of the Christian tradition, the cross can tend to be gilded by the anticipation of victory, allowing triumph to overwhelm the shame. Gause observes that "often we make the cross of Jesus ornate and physically beautiful, treating the shame of the cross as if there is no shame."[79] In the Roman world crucifixion was the lowest and most degrading form of capital punishment reserved for slaves and criminals, marked by torture and public humiliation.[80] On the cross Jesus is mocked, ridiculed, and subjected to trials, hostility, dispute and hatred. The cruciform shape of the figures in the artwork requires the viewer to confront this sometimes-overlooked aspect of the cross and its association with violation, humiliation and societal silencing. By the positioning of the women figures, this artwork resonates with the experience of those, like Jesus, who have experienced shame through trauma. However, their presence also resists despair and testifies to a redemptive reframing of the *weight of shame*; one in which the shame is not final or defining.

The inclusion of the tab *freedom* is significant, although we do not know if its placement is intentional by the Bible Journaler. Its presence invites interpretation through the lens of a liberation theology of the cross in which the cross is not merely a symbol of suffering and trauma but a catalyst for transformation. The word *freedom* sets the artwork in a larger story of redemptive justice and hope – one where liberation is not about escaping or avoiding pain but allowing agency and voice to arise from within it.[81] This vision of *freedom* echoes with

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[78] *Shame* is a recurring theme within the Bible Journaling #revealyourteal community. See:
Example 1: @kjoy47, "ps25shameisthesexualabusesilencer," *The New Illuminators*, accessed June 2, 2025, https://nisar.omeka.net/items/show/2384 See Appendix C, Fig. C10
Example 2: @twelvestonesartstudio, "ps34freefromshame," *The New Illuminators*, accessed June 2, 2025, https://nisar.omeka.net/items/show/2365 See Appendix C, Fig. C11
In both images shame is a central concept – not as something hidden, but as something named and expressed

[79] Gause, *Hebrews*, 303.

[80] George H. Guthrie, *Hebrews.* The NIV Application Commentary. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998).

[81] Some key texts by liberation theologians that centre on themes of the cross, suffering and solidarity: Leonardo Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator: A Critical Christology for Our Time*, transl. Patrick Hughes (London: SPCK, 1985). Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation,* trans. and ed. by Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagleson,

Paul S. Fiddes' insight that the crucifixion of Jesus was not just a private moment of suffering, but a public and political act of violence. Seen through the lens of liberation theology, it becomes the ground from which *freedom* is imagined. The cross was a state sanctioned violent action that intended to silence dissent and reinforce structures of domination.[82] For Fiddes, the cross confronted systems of power and injustice. In Christ's suffering, God exposes the violence at the heart of worldly power and offers a different vision rooted in solidarity with the oppressed. Here Fiddes is highlighting a key theological point: the cross exposes human sin in its most structured collective form in terms of institutional sin, systematic violence. This means that God suffers with the violated and raises their voices against the systems that crucify them. Fiddes writes,

> When the death of Christ is understood to be the outcome of his conflict with the religious and political powers of his time, his offending of both Jewish and Roman authorities, then the cross must be seen in the first instance as the reaction of human sin against divine love. He is crucified by the powers that are in rebellion against God's intention for human life.[83]

From this liberation perspective it is possible to consider that the women portrayed reveal and resist the forces that judge their suffering invisible, bearing witness to the violent patriarchal or social systems that perhaps have seeked to shame and silence them or have failed to protect them. By using women's figures to make up the body of the cross and the inclusion of the word *freedom*, the artwork confronts rape culture, silencing and enduring marginalisation. The artwork depicts not just where Christ suffered but where all victims of systematic sin – including sexual abuse survivors – are dignified and held by God.

This section has considered the artist's engagement and interpretation with Hebrews 12:2 and what has emerged within Figure 4.3. I now turn to another aspect of the artwork - one that invites us into a place of *mystery,* opening the possibility for something *new* yet to be imagined. This reading comes from the Journaler's own words, which speak of sharing joy and standing in deliverance with Jesus, but also from the artwork's most striking and

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rev. ed (London: SCM press, 1988). Jon Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads: A Latin American Approach* trans. by John Drury (London: SCM Press, 1978). Dorothee Soelle, *Suffering*. trans. by Everett R. Kalin. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975.

[82] Fiddes, *Past Events and Present Salvation: The Christian Idea of Atonement.* 190–206.

[83] Fiddes, *Past Events and Present Salvation: The Christian Idea of Atonement.* 192.

enigmatic feature – the featureless women – whose presence invites a more imaginative engagement. It is at this threshold that a theopoetic lens offers a way in. The absence of facial features makes a theological statement inviting the viewer deeper into the mystery of the cross through what is left unseen. In what follows, I suggest that these figures embody a kind of radical universality and solidarity, functioning as an opening or an imaginative invitation. This invitation lies at the heart of theopoetic thought where theology becomes a living encounter with mystery and *becoming*.

Figure 4.3: The Other: Through a theopoetic lens

Jones meditates on the cross as a source of imaginative power for re-narrating the world. She suggests that it is important that violence is testified to, witnessed and believed in order for healing to take place. It is through a shared storytelling via voices which have been previously silenced that healing is woven into a broader life story and becomes part of a collective imagining. A redemptive community forms, making space for the possibility of a new and better future defined by flourishing and the restoration of dignity and voice. This is an important perspective when considering these featureless figures in the artwork. They invite us to consider the work of collective imagining and this sense of shared healing that emerges from collective witness, where one's own distinct and individual story is bound up with others. This is the kind of redemptive community that Jones invites us to imagine.[84]

To do the work of collective imagining it is important not to neglect individual stories, and this is where the figures draw us in, bearing within them the stories of real lives. They are an invitation to imagine ourselves, or others - men and women, both familiar and unknown, who have lived through the trauma of sexual abuse. Their featureless faces possibly reflect the erasure of personhood that trauma can inflict but they also invite the viewer to not only imagine who these women are and what they have experienced, but who they might *become.* They evoke a poetics of *becoming*, where each figure holds a space for what is yet to emerge. They are not *re*imagined in a fixed image or a closed portrait but held *open* in a poetic presence. This *openness* is a theological posture that invites attentiveness to encounter. I want to dwell a little longer with this theological posture of openness, exploring how it shapes our capacity to care for *the other*, to imagine otherwise and to hold space for what remains

[84] Jones, "Trauma and Grace," 163

unknown or unresolved.[85] I believe that this aspect of the artwork is not a minor detail, but a particularly significant and crucial dimension.

The figures do not suggest likeness or definition on the artist's terms but instead open a space where *the other* remains both near and unknowable, singular yet infinite. While we might initially interpret that the omission of the face signals anonymity, I believe it calls the viewer into a response - to construct, to imagine and ultimately to encounter. In this sense the absence of features is not a lack but a productive space for imagination. Viewed through the lens of Emmanuel Levinas, these featureless figures take on a deeper resonance.[86] For Levinas, the face is much more than a set of visual features but a space of presence and responsibility where the act of looking becomes a form of listening - the absence of facial details does not diminish our response but instead is a reminder of "the living presence" of the other person that expresses their unique humanity.[87] The open space of the face invites the viewer into an imaginative encounter with *alterity*.[88] Neither the Bible Journaler nor the designer of the printable set is defining *the other*; instead, they draw us into seeing not just

[85] This resonates with Emmanuel Levinas's understanding of the face as that which "resists possession" and cannot be fully seen, drawn or reduced to a representation. Their emptiness forces the viewer to imagine *the other* not as a specific person, but as an infinite presence (this is similar to Levina's apophatic icons). They are linked to imagination and Levinas because the featureless figures are not used to define, but to reach toward *the other.* Just as we cannot see the face of God, but we are called to respond to God's word, so too we are called to respond to *the other* we cannot fully see. Featurelessness gestures towards inclusivity. These figures invite the viewer into a relationship with *the other*. E. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* 4th ed. 1991., Martinus Nijhoff Philosophy Texts; 1 (Springer Netherlands, 1991), 194–220, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-009-9342-6.

[86] Emmanuel Lévinas on the Face: "it is a commitment for me, an appeal to me, an order for me to be at the service of this face. And this commanding of the face is what I call "the Word of God in the Face" See, https://youtu.be/CdFL_odCVdI?si=UYb-j1qLAWpbdh6M Emmanuel Levinas interview. He uses the phrase "the face of the other" (le visage de l'Autre) to describe direct, human encounter between myself and another person. By other he means another person who stands before me. It is a face-to-face meeting. The face is. In front of the face, I always demand more of myself. The skin of the face is which stays most naked, most destitute; the proof is that one tries to mask this poverty by putting on 'masks' or taking on countenance. See, Emmanuel. Levinas and Phillipe. Nemo, *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985), 86. Levinas idea calls to responsibility emphasising that the face is where alterity becomes visible.

[87] E. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority,* 66.

[88] In the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas, *alterity* speaks to the radical otherness of *the Other* – an otherness that cannot be reduced to the understanding of the self. *The Other* is not just a version of the self, but entirely *Other*. As Levinas writes, "the relation with the other is not an idyllic and harmonious relationship of communion or a sympathy through which we put ourselves in the other's place; we recognise the other as resembling us, but exterior to us; the relationship with the other is a relationship with a mystery." E. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority,* 39. For Levinas, when the self encounters the face of *the Other*, we are called into encounter and responsibility that disrupts our self-centred ways. *Alterity* names both the otherness of *the Other* and the ethical demand this places on the self.

one face, but every face. Rather than relying on the particularities of a portrait, the blank space invites recognition and an imaginative call to respond, "the face speaks to me and thereby invites me to a relation."[89] Bible Journaling artworks are often not portraits in the classical sense but works that speak to human experience, asking the viewer to respond just like the journaler themselves have responded.[90] As Levinas writes, "The face presents itself, and demands justice."[91]

Judith Wolfe in her book *Theological Imagination: Perception and Interpretation in Life, Art, and Faith* presents *the face* as a key meeting point between imagination and theology - one that invites us to love, to care and to remain open to what we do not fully understand.[92] She argues that *the face* is not just a set of features but a summons that draws us into encounter and asks for a response. Wolfe uses the painting of the Mona Lisa to show how we perceive people's faces through imagination, not only through sight. She argues that we often perceive emotions in faces that may not actually show them or display them directly.[93] This shows our ability to imaginatively grasp not just expressions but entire actions and lives. We are always

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[89] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority,* 198.

[90] There are many examples in Bible Journaling artwork that echo Levinas's insight that the face *speaks*. To see the face of *the other* is like hearing a silent message or command that demands a response. It confronts us with *the other*'s humanity and asks to be seen and acknowledged. It pulls the viewer into relationship, not to define it but to honour it. See, E. Levinas, Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority, 66. Many Bible Journalers choose to depict the face of *the other*, rather than focusing on self-portraits. Some examples include:

Example 1: Sandra Van de Wiel, "1pet4keeplovingoneanother," *The New Illuminators*, accessed June 5, 2025, https://nisar.omeka.net/items/show/2173 This artwork features a single eye with blue eyeshadow and bold eyeliner that looks intently at the viewer. The nose and lips are also visible amidst the intricate designs, blurring the distinction between where the facial features end and the artwork begins. Here, the face is a call through the intensity of the gaze. The direct stare confronts the reader and draws them in to the central message - a call to love and its importance in the Christian life that reflects the love that God has shown through Jesus Christ. See Appendix C, Fig. C12

Example 2: @marnellevdmerwe4, "acts19whoareyou," *The New Illuminators*, accessed June 5, 2025, https://nisar.omeka.net/items/show/2052 This artwork depicts a person's face with most of it concealed, except for a strikingly alert eye looking directly at the viewer. Multiple hands cover different parts of the face - two on the head obscuring the other eye, while three others conceal the mouth, chin, neck and side of the head. The printed text reads "who are you?" and a pointed finger is directed toward the main visual motif. The artwork reflects on the hidden aspects of a person or the masks we wear; the eye symbolising connection or searching for truth, identity and recognition. See Appendix C, Fig. C13

[91] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority,* 297.

[92] Judith Wolfe, *The Theological Imagination: Perception and Interpretation in Life, Art, and Faith.* 1st ed., Current Issues in Theology (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2024). 5. In her work, she is not trying to construct a model of the imagination, much less to defend an ontological account of a human faculty called *imagination* distinct from reason, faith, will.

[93] Alessandro Soranzo, 'The Psychology of Mona Lisa's Smile', *Scientific Reports* 14, no. 1 (2024): 12250.

reading the face for meanings that are never fully available or partly hidden, an act of searching that keeps us attentive. But what then, in light of Wolfe's writing, is the relevance of this when the face is not depicted at all? I believe that Figure 4.3 deepens Wolfe's argument by removing the possibility of misinterpretation and reminding us that we often see through the lens of our own expectations, of seeing what we expect to see. When considering the featureless figures, we do not grasp, either rightly or wrongly, what the face of someone who has experienced trauma looks like. We are not interpreting features but expanding our imagination to an even deeper space into the mystery of personhood. The blank space becomes a powerful site of the *collective imaginary* inviting meaning to emerge precisely because it refuses to close interpretation and is being held open. The figures allow us to encounter *the other* beyond surface readings or predefined identities.

There is another aspect of Wolfe's work that takes on depth when considered in light of Figure 4.3. Theologically, Wolfe draws on 1 Corinthians 13:12 to suggest that our true self will be revealed in the presence of God, that in some sense we do not fully *possess our own faces* until we are seen fully by God.[94] Until then our sense of self is always partial and unfolding, shaped by time, by others, by grace.[95] Wolfe writes,

> The deepest wellspring of who we are and how we are to orient ourselves in the world is found neither in fixed and impersonal values nor in the citadel of our inner selves, but in the calling and love of God.[96]

Therefore, the women depicted on the cross in Figure 4.3 are not fixed representations, but in the process of *becoming* that will be fully revealed in God's loving gaze. According to Wolfe, our task is to perceive and respond to the irreducible presence of *the other* and to do so as part of a *collective imaginary.* We are relational, made for communion with one another and

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[94] "For now, we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known." 1 Corinthians 12:12 NRSV. As Judith Wolfe reflects, St Paul suggests that it is not through introspection but through allowing ourselves to be seen by God that we *become* ourselves. We cannot achieve this fully in this life but it is something promised eschatologically when we are fully seen and fully known. As Wolfe notes, echoing C.S. Lewis, it is worth asking not only how we might meet God face to face, but "how can we have faces until He meets us face to face" Judith Wolfe, *The Theological Imagination: Perception and Interpretation in Life, Art, and Faith* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024), 63.

[95] Wolfe, *The Theological Imagination: Perception and Interpretation in Life, Art, and Faith,* 38.

[96] Wolfe, *The Theological Imagination: Perception and Interpretation in Life, Art, and Faith,* 62.

our capacity to heal and to move towards human flourishing is shaped through our connections.

To conclude this section, I have explored how Figure 4.3 reimagines the cross through the lens of *the weight of shame,* offering a theopoetic engagement with Hebrews 12.2. Through an act of theological *imagination*, the Bible Journaler replaces timber with human presence, transforming the cross into a living, collective body of witness and hope. This reimagining opens up new theological meanings and contributes to the *collective imaginary* by offering a contemporary interpretation of the cross, one shaped by resilience and survival. Drawing on thinkers such as Shelly Rambo and Serene Jones, I have emphasised the need for careful theological reflection when interpreting the cross within contexts of sexual abuse and trauma. I also considered how Figure 4.3 operates within a theopoetics framework as a site of *becoming* where meaning emerges through the lived reality of trauma and shared hope. The featureless figures open a radical space of invitation: a deeply imaginative way into the mystery of suffering, solidarity and the redemptive presence of Christ. In this way the artwork does not simply reflect the Journaler's perspective but invites viewers into shared participation. We too are drawn in to the work of constructing meaning, contributing to a collective theological imaginary shaped by what remains unseen.

I now turn to another Bible Journaling artwork within the #revealyourteal movement, that illustrates how survivors of sexual abuse creatively reclaim their stories. Within the creative *poiesis*, identity is not static and defined by abuse but reshaped through acts of reclamation and a vision of selfhood rooted in *becoming*. Survivors reshape their identities from once being broken or silenced, to being *seen*, loved by God and worthy of healing. Drawing on Kathleen Lennon's understanding of the imaginary as "the shape or form in terms of which we experience the world and ourselves,"[97] this section aims to show how #revealyourteal becomes a theopoetic act of recreation. It is to this reclaiming of one's identity that I now turn.

[97] Lennon, *Imagination and the Imaginary*, 73.

4.7: Reclaiming Identity

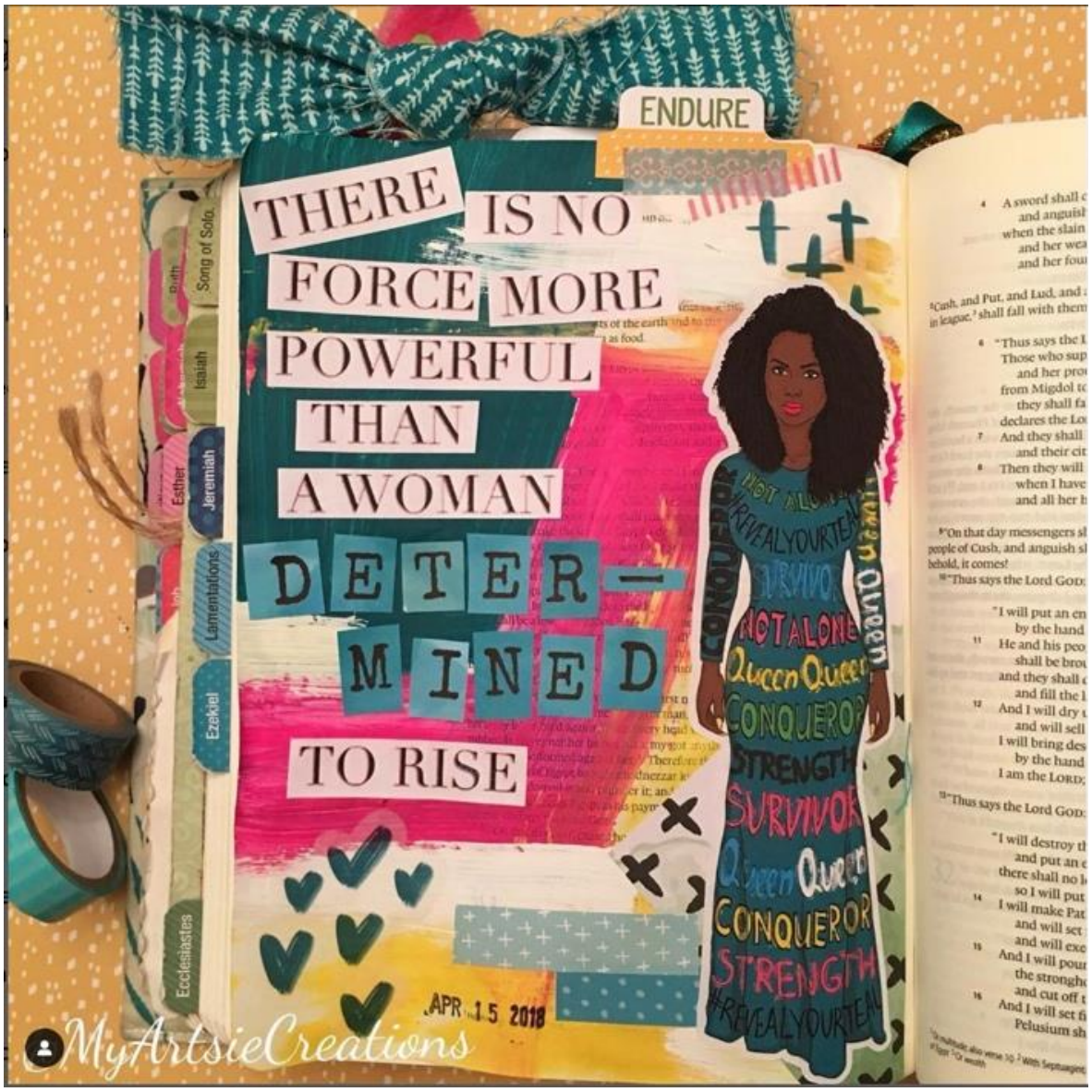


Figure 4.4 Bible Journaling artwork focusing on Ezekiel 30 [98]

Figure 4.4 shows an artwork covering the entire page of the Bible adjacent to Ezekiel 30:4-16. The background features bold blocks of pink, yellow, white and green, mostly covering the biblical text though some remains visible. There are also strips of washi tape and some cross and heart shaped motifs in three sections. Capitalised black text against a white background, with each word individually cut out and affixed onto the page reads, "There is no force more powerful than a woman determined to rise." Among these words, one stands

[98] @cre8_with_mssmith (Instagram) uploaded 15th April 2018 https://nisar.omeka.net/items/show/2387. The Bible used is ESV, Crossway

out *determined*. It is presented in blue and black, with *deter-* on one line and *mined* directly below it, visually splitting the word in two. This fragmentation draws attention to the word not only through its contrasting colour but also because each letter is individually placed. A woman in a fitted green dress stands tall looking directly at the viewer. Words are written across her body, including conqueror, not alone, revealyourteal, survivor, strength, queen. This woman comes from a printable set; a figure like this – an image of an individual – is commonly referred to as a *Doll* within the Bible Journaling community.[99] The word *endure* is placed as a tab and affixed with washi tape to the top edge of the page.

Figure 4.4 Focus on Ezekiel 30: 4-16

The Bible Journaler has not indicated which specific biblical text this artwork is based on. This is not uncommon in Bible Journaling where artwork is often placed apart from the direct text the Journaler is interpreting, often for a variety of practical reasons including space limitations or revisiting a text with fresh insight. In this case, however, the placement of the artwork opposite Ezekial 30:4-16 is significant and worth exploring, particularly in the context of sexual abuse and trauma. Before looking at this text specifically it is helpful to consider the wider context of Ezekiel in order to shed light on what might be shaping this interpretation.

The book of Ezekiel can be divided into three main sections: 1) prophecies of judgement against Israel (1-24), 2) prophecies against other nations and peoples (25-32), and 3) prophecies of salvation, hope and promise (33-48).[100] Jacqueline Lapsley's chapter on Ezekiel in the *Women's Bible Commentary* draws attention to the recognition of the book's long-standing discomfort for female readers.[101] What is especially troubling is the treatment of women in Ezekiel's use of sexual metaphor where a stark opposition is drawn between the male figure of YHWH and the female figure of Jerusalem, who is portrayed as sinful and defiling.[102] This is most disturbing in Chapters 16 and 23. As Andrew Mein writes,

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[99] This beautiful doll was created by @goldmineandcoco represents the community of support that #saam represents. See, https://www.instagram.com/p/BhQWGWDle3U/

[100] Carol J. Dempsey, *The Prophets: A Liberation-Critical Reading* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000). 93

[101] Carol A. Newsom, Sharon H. Ringe, and Jacqueline E. Lapsley, *Women's Bible Commentary, Third Edition: Revised and Updated (*Louisville: Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, 2012).

[102] Andrew Mein, "Ezekiel's Women in Christian Interpretation: The Case of Ezekiel 16," in *After Ezekiel: Essays on the Reception of a Difficult Prophet*, ed. Andrew Mein and Paul M. Joyce, Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 535 (New York: T&T Clark, 2011), 160.

> The language is vulgar, shocking and as sexually explicit as the Hebrew Bible gets. Its purpose is more likely to disturb than titillate, the text can reasonably be described as pornographic in its repeated display of the naked female body and its *misnaming* of female sexual experience.[103]

Lapsley also stresses the graphic and disturbing sexual violence of Ezekiel 16 and 23 where women's bodies are turned into metaphors for Israel's unfaithfulness and then become the very site upon which divine anger is enacted.[104] Through these graphic portrayals, the female body is subjected to violent punishment as a way of expressing divine judgement. Fokkelien van Dijk-Hemmes in her article *The Metaphorization of Woman in Prophetic Speech: An Analysis of Ezekiel 23*, explores how women are used as violent gendered metaphors for the cities Jerusalem and Samaria and portrayed as sexually deviant, while being humiliated and punished by God. She writes,

> The metaphorization of women in Ezekiel 23 performs first and foremost as a violent speech act which is even more offensive than the Hosean version: it simultaneously shapes and distorts women's (sexual) experience.[105]

I would like to consider Ezekiel 23 more closely, before turning to Ezekiel 30 - the passage beside which the artwork has been created – as the broader context offers valuable insights. In Ezekiel 23, Samaria and Jerusalem are portrayed as two sisters in a metaphor that shifts the responsibility for betrayal and political collapse onto women's bodies.[106] Their actions are regarded as sexual infidelity, turning national failure into a story of female shame. As a

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[103] Ehud Ben Zvi, "Ezekiel 16 in Israel's Memory and Imagination" in After Ezekiel: Essays on the Reception of a Difficult Prophet, ed. Andrew Mein and Paul M. Joyce, *After Ezekiel*, 160.

[104] For example Ezekiel 16: 35-38 (NRSV) "Therefore, O whore, hear the word of the Lord: Thus says the Lord God, Because your lust was poured out and your nakedness uncovered in your whoring with your lovers, and because of all your abominable idols, and because of the blood of your children that you gave to them, therefore, I will gather all your lovers, with whom you took pleasure, all those you loved and all those you hated; I will gather them against you from all around, and will uncover your nakedness to them, so that they may see all your nakedness. I will judge you as women who commit adultery and shed blood are judged, and bring blood upon you in wrath and jealousy."

[105] Fokkelien van Dijk-Hemmes, 'The Metaphorization of Woman in Prophetic Speech: An Analysis of Ezekiel XXIII', *Vetus Testamentum* (Leiden) 43, no. 2 (1993): 245–46, https://doi.org/10.2307/1519350.Van Dijk-Hemmes shows how the Hosean marriage metaphor, particularly in Hosea 2, operates as a violent speech act where YHWH, speaking as a betrayed husband, aggressively accuses and threatens his unfaithful wife - Israel - before shifting into a so-called love song that reinforces her passivity with no real agency of her own. This metaphor, which begins in Hosea 1's command to marry a "wife of harlotry," positions Israel as a sexually deviant woman and in need of control. The metaphor offers a repentance bound up in an ideal of female submission, anticipating the even more violently gendered metaphors found in Ezekiel 16 and 23

[106] Carol A. Newsom, Sharon H. Ringe, and Jacqueline E. Lapsley, *Women's Bible Commentary, Third Edition: Revised and Updated (*Louisville: Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, 2012).

result, the two women become scapegoats and blamed for inviting their own suffering in order to make a point about political failure. This gendered framing creates a deeply problematic vision of God's power and punishment in which the female body is rendered the site of guilt and disgrace. Van Dijk-Hemmes reminds us that many scholars have interpreted this text as revealing deeply troubling portrayals of women, echoing the dynamics of violence against women in today's culture. This kind of language turns women into metaphors for sin and shame, and can blame them for things that were done to them, such as sexual violence. Cheryl Exum presents a selection of texts from Ezekiel 23 that reveal several disturbing repeated features, including the scapegoating of women.[107] She argues that the logic of the text suggests that it is the woman's fault that she is sexually abused because she provoked it by deliberately defying her husband's authority and control. Sexual sin is punished further with sexual degradation, reinforcing a troubling dynamic of blame and retribution.

Lapsley has urged that rather than dismissing Ezekiel outright a deeper reading is needed: one that recognises the rhetorical function of these metaphors within their historical and theological contexts while also confronting the profound harm they inflict through their portrayal of gendered power and violence. Lapsley suggests that Ezekiel's strategy might be read as an attempt to shock his audience into awareness – particularly his male hearers, who are being asked to imagine themselves as violated women, symbolically bearing the shame. The feminisation of the nation may have been used to provoke a sense of vulnerability and reckoning.

This troubling vision of collapse and judgement sets the theological backdrop for interpreting the Bible Journaler's artwork. While her creative response is located beside Ezekiel 30, not 23, it still draws on similar themes of judgement and downfall. The reference to a woman rising, through power and force, suggests that she has already experienced a fall or collapse. A *rising force* implies a prior state of collapse of being cast down or made low. I now turn to Ezekiel 30, the passage adjacent to where the Bible Journaler has created her artwork. While verses 4 – 16 offer a broad and sweeping depiction of destruction, it seems contextually justifiable to focus specifically on verses 6 and 7. I believe these verses connect meaningfully to the interpretive choices reflected in the artwork itself:

[107] J. Cheryl. Exum, *Plotted, Shot, and Painted: Cultural Representations of Biblical Women,* Gender, Culture, Theory; 3 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 110.

> Thus says the Lord: Those who support Egypt shall fall, and its proud might shall come down; from Migdol to Syene they shall fall within it by the sword, says the Lord God. They shall be desolated among other desolated countries, and their cities shall lie among cities laid waste.[108]

Unlike Ezekiel 23, this text does not hold the personified female figures, although in some biblical versions, Egypt has a feminine pronoun.[109] Nonetheless, the theme of collapse – of something once strong brought low, remains central. The image of "proud might shall come down" echoes the familiar prophetic theme: those who rely on power built through domination will fall. It reflects a masculinised conception of strength and authority, a way of speaking that reflects a male-centered view of power without using the same overtly gendered metaphors. This connection may well inform the Bible Journaler's placement and interpretation as she seems to have drawn a connection between the themes of downfall, judgement and collapse, alongside her creative response. Although the artwork resonates with Ezekiel 30: 6 - 7, it should not be read in isolation but in continuation with the disturbing imagery of collapse and divine judgement already explored in previous parts of Ezekiel, including chapter 23.

Figure 4.4 Resistance, Healing and Hope: Artist's interpretation

In considering the Bible Journaler's interpretation, we are prompted to consider the question: what happens when we shift the imagery of humiliation and gendered judgement that portray women as symbols of disgrace and failure? When, as Exum asks, "how should we respond to these offensive prophetic texts, and what is our responsibility as readers and consumers of these violent images?"[110] Rather than accepting the imagery we are invited to *imagine otherwise* and consider the possibilities that emerge when, instead of allowing a woman's body to remain a metaphor of failure, we reimagine it as the site of recovery and rising.

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[108] Ezekiel 30: 6-7 (NRSV)

[109] For example, "Thus says the Lord: Those who support Egypt shall fall, and her proud might shall come down; from Migdol to Syene they shall fall within her by the sword, declares the Lord God" - (ESV) and, "This is what the Lord says: "'The allies of Egypt will fall and her proud strength will fail. From Migdol to Aswan, they will fall by the sword within her, declares the Sovereign Lord" - (NIV)

[110] J. Cheryl. Exum, *Plotted, Shot, and Painted*, 102.

This is precisely what the Bible Journaler has done in her image. She disrupts the imagery and reclaims the metaphor on her own terms, offering a visual response that challenges the violence leading up to Ezekiel 30. In the artwork, the depicted woman stands tall. Each word on her dress is a direct counterpoint to Ezekiel's portrayal. The prominent phrase "there is no force more powerful than a woman determined to rise" shifts the frame entirely: the woman is no longer a figure of shame but of strength; no longer blamed for violence but rising from its aftermath. Here, power is reimagined as determination instead of domination. This image becomes a theopoetic response to the prophetic metaphor challenging the idea that women's bodies should carry the blame for a nation's downfall. Instead of being a symbol in the biblical story, the woman is *becoming* as the subject of her own. It shows that strength does not belong to empires but can also *live* in survivors. It is found in women who endure, who remember and who rise. In her book, *The Prophets A Liberation – Critical Reading*, Carol J. Dempsey says that Ezekiel speaks of divine restoration, liberation and redemption and offers a powerful and positive vision for readers today. It challenges us to realise the text's incompleteness and the need for ongoing work of interpretation.[111] This, I would argue, is exactly what the Bible Journaler has done: rather than rejecting the biblical imagery outright she has reshaped and changed it.

Nancy Bowen approaches the book of Ezekiel by combining feminist critique with insights from trauma studies.[112] She strongly rejects the depiction of women being violently punished, arguing that feminist interpretation must reject these portrayals and challenge any biblical text that normalises or spiritualises such violence. She also argues that the extremes prevalent in the book of Ezekiel such as guilt, control, violence and hope, can be read as expressions of a trauma survivor's voice. While Ezekiel's vision may appear disturbing, viewed through the lens of trauma, it reveals a deeply human struggle to process and reconfigure the memory of violence and to imagine a future where it might never happen again. Trauma studies also offers Bowen another layer of insight. She suggests that both the *Prophecies of Punishment* and the *Prophecies of Salvation* reflect the voice of a trauma

[111] Dempsey, *The Prophets: A Liberation-Critical Reading*, 112.

[112] Nancy R. Bowen. "Ezekiel." In The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Books of the Bible, edited by Michael D. Coogan. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011. For more, see Brad E. Kelle, "Dealing with the Trauma of Defeat: The Rhetoric of the Devastation and Rejuvenation of Nature in Ezekiel," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 128, no. 3 (2009): 469–90, https://doi.org/10.2307/25610197. Also, David McLain Carr, *Holy Resilience: The Bible's Traumatic Origins* (Yale University Press, 2014).

survivor. The *Prophecies of Punishment* - where God announces punishment on Jerusalem, Israel and foreign nations - reflect anger, a sense of destruction and divine injustice. Bowen argues that these prophecies reflect the emotional turmoil of someone living through trauma. They can be read as attempts to make sense of what has happened, something many survivors try and do in the aftermath of violence. The *Prophecies of Salvation* – those that speak of healing and hope – promise the renewal of the people, the restoration of the land and the rebuilding of the temple after exile. According to Bowen these also reflect a trauma response to crisis, a perspective that is echoed in the Bible Journaler's interpretation which emphasises rising or rebuilding. Yet from a trauma-informed recovery perspective, these visions can be problematic. Ezekiel envisions a future marked by absolute control and divine perfection, one in which God will cleanse the people and give them *new hearts* so that they will live in perpetual obedience. But as Bowen reminds us, such obedience is neither realistic nor sustainable and it does not eliminate the possibility of future harm. She also suggests that perhaps recognition of this tension led later readers to interpret Ezekiel 34–48 eschatologically – as a vision of what God will one day bring about rather than what can be expected in the aftermath of trauma. In light of Figure 4.5 however, the artist has offered a more grounded and embodied response to trauma – one that does not rely on an idealised, unattainable future, but carves a space for healing and hope. A gesture towards restoration that begins from within, of self-naming and imagination rather than *a new heart from above.*

Overall, the Bible Journaler's artwork can be seen as a creative reworking of this text. Rather than accepting imagery that normalises violence against women, the artist is depicting a strong resilient figure whose marked body becomes a site of resistance, healing and hope for a different future. I will now turn to a closer engagement of the *doll* itself, focusing on the words inscribed on her body and exploring their significance through a theopoetic lens.

Figure 4.4 Making Up a Life: Through a Theopoetic Lens

The words on the woman's body provide an important way into some ideas explored by Judith Wolfe. Wolfe argues that human identity is not static or predetermined but continually shaped in time through the living out of the relationship between memory, present awareness and future hope.[113] She writes that we are always in the process of *making up a life*, that is, that we are constantly in the process of creating and shaping meaning through the choices we

[113] Wolfe, *The Theological Imagination: Perception and Interpretation in Life, Art, and Faith*, 37–66.

make, the stories we tell about ourselves and the way we respond to the world around us. She emphasises that this ongoing *process* is deeply relational and that the capacity to *imagine* and reframe our lives plays a vital role in how this unfolds. This *process* allows us to inhabit a different future; one not bound by the past or confined by narratives of pain or silence but open to the possibility of transformation and hope. This takes on added resonance when considered in light of Figure 4.4. The body, inscribed with words, powerfully enacts the re-authoring Wolfe describes – an act of reconfigured identity rooted in agency, courage and the claiming of one's voice. Not only is this evident in Figure 4.4 but it is also a thematic thread in many Bible Journaling artworks within the #revealyourteal movement, where individuals re-narrate their lives bearing witness to how they have, and continue to, reclaim their stories through creative *poiesis*. As Wolfe explains,

> The self is accessed and lived out in the form of an unfolding, but also constantly a re-narrated story about ourselves. One might say, indeed, that telling a story about our own lives, projecting a whole out of its parts, is a primary work of the human imagination... in this process, there is a strange dynamic at work: for the creation of our story often feels to us supremely like a work of finding – of unearthing our true story, and thereby making sense of our lives – while it is also, undeniably, a work of construction: the ways in which we narrate our past to inform our present choices and our future possibilities.[114]

By telling her story in this way, the Bible Journaler invites others into a new way of seeing. It is a visible act of *imagination* – not simply about private healing but a public expression that resonates beyond the individual via social media. It expands relational connections with others who share similar wounds. It becomes what Wolfe would call a form of *public thinking* - an imaginative reshaping of the *collective imaginary*.

To close this section, I have reflected on how Figure 4.4 engages some of the most troubling aspects of biblical imagery and in doing so reclaims and reshapes it. Set alongside Ezekiel 30, yet still carrying echoes of the violent and gendered metaphors from earlier in the book, the artwork refuses to view the female body as a site of disgrace or divine judgement. When viewed in this way the artwork challenges the power dynamics in Ezekiel's rhetoric and points to a different kind of strength that is rooted in determination rather than domination. The Bible Journaler presents a figure of strength and survival transforming the female body

[114] Wolfe, *The Theological Imagination: Perception and Interpretation in Life, Art, and Faith,* 38–39.

into a site of agency and hope. In this way, the artwork holds together personal testimony and an invitation for others to imagine their own stories taking form, affirming that even from collapse and downfall, the *flourishing* of new life can emerge. In theopoetic terms, the artwork becomes a theological site where trauma and creativity meet and where the divine *lure* is perceived as an invitation to *rise*, to endure and *imagine otherwise*.

For the last image I will examine in this chapter, I now move in an entirely different direction. Whereas the other images invited imaginative possibilities such as reclaiming identity and redemptive community, this next image turns toward the stark aftermath of violence. I will explore how the act itself can happen in a moment, but what follows spreads outward, touching and harming the whole community. I want to explore how, within the wider *collective imaginary,* violence marks a site of total rupture, devastation and abandonment. It shows that *collective imaginaries* are built and broken in shared spaces. In this sense, the following image becomes essential to the chapter's exploration as *flourishing* cannot be understood without attending to the wounds that threaten it. Violence does not remain contained within one life but spreads, altering relationships, distorting the communal imaginary - those shared pictures of who we are, who belongs and how we live together, unsettling the very spaces where *flourishing* might otherwise grow.

4.8: Rupture without Resolution

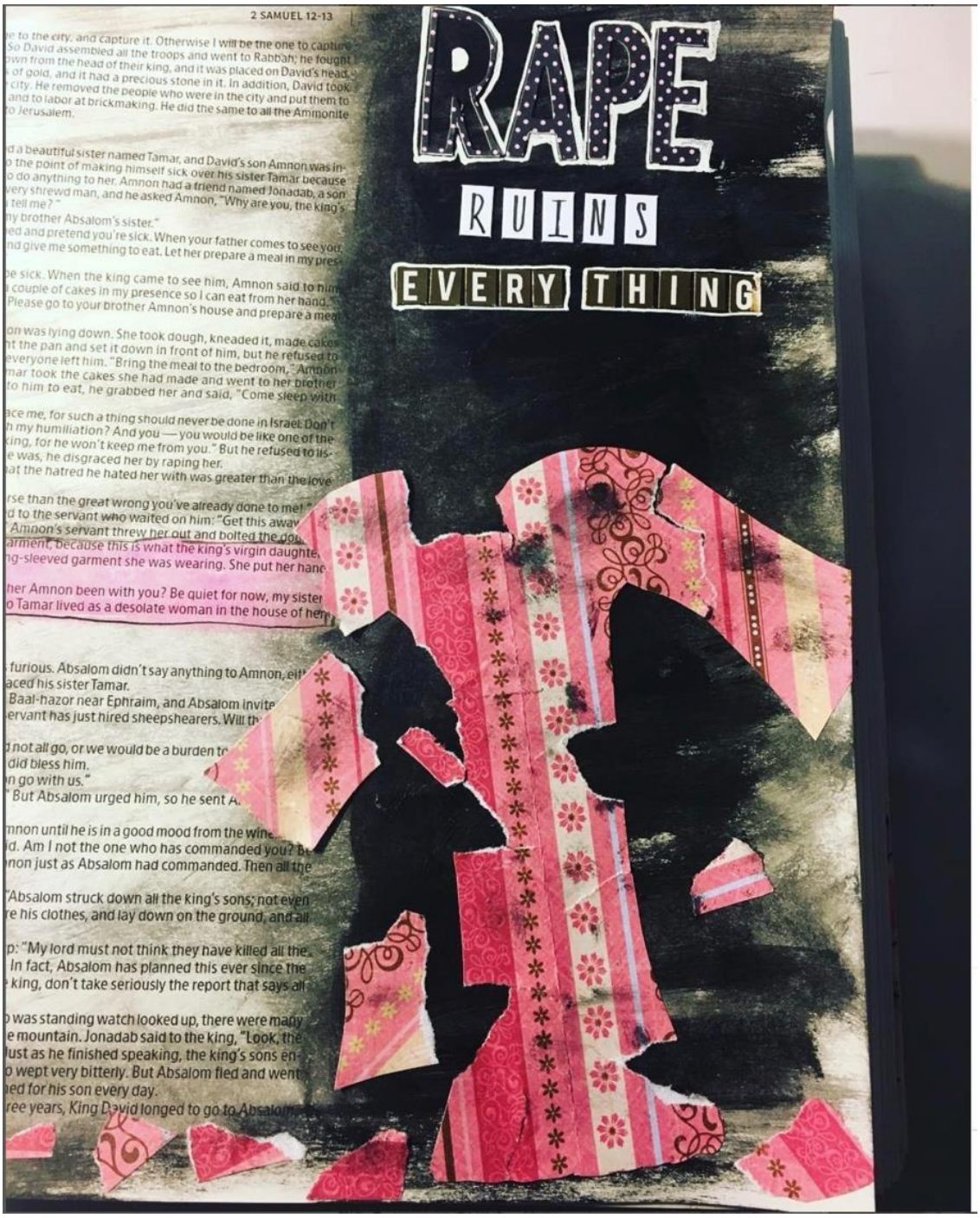


Figure 4.5 Bible Journaling artwork focusing on 2 Samuel 13:18-20 [115]

[115] @soulsatisfiedco_jcm (Instagram) uploaded 9th April 2019 https://nisar.omeka.net/admin/items/show/2376
The Bible used is CSB Illustrating Bible, DaySpring

Figure 4.5 is quite different from Figures 4.3 and 4.4 and it stands out within the #revealyourteal movement because there is no human figure depicted. Instead, the page is stripped back to a stark and minimalist scene. The entire blank margin is filled with dense black paint applied heavily with smudged edges that extends lightly outward across the biblical text. Affixed over this is a collage of patterned paper with torn irregular fragments – pinks, florals, stripes, swirling motifs – assembled in a way that implies something broken or pulled apart. Above this are the words *rape ruins everything* affixed to the page in three separate styles. The word *rape* is the largest of these words written in capital letters to ensure emphasis.

Figure 4.5 Focus on 2 Samuel 13: 18-20

The artwork draws on 2 Samuel 13, a section of the Hebrew Bible that brings together themes of desire, deception, rape, power, silence and revenge. Although the Bible Journaler focuses on verses 18-20, these verses sit inside a much bigger story about the house of King David. This chapter marks a turning point in Israel's monarchy where the cracks within David's own family begin to show deeper moral, political and theological tensions.[116] In the wider *Succession Narrative*, the story of Amnon, Tamar and Absalom is more than a family conflict. It reveals the instability of David's kingdom and the consequences of earlier failures that spill into the next generation.[117]

Earlier in the chapter we are told that Amnon, David's firstborn son, becomes infatuated with his half-sister Tamar. With the help of Jonadab he tricks David into sending Tamar to him. What follows is a carefully paced depiction of Tamar's resistance, Amnon's overpowering of her, and the immediate reversal of his desire into loathing. After the rape, Amnon dismisses her violently, leading us into verses 18-20 which Figure 4.5 focuses on:

> Now she was wearing a long robe with sleeves; for this is how the virgin daughters of the king were clothed in earlier times), So his servant put her out, and bolted the door

[116] Rachel Adelman, "The Rape of Tamar as a Prefiguration for the Fate of Fair Zion," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 37, no. 1 (2021): 91-97, https://doi.org/10.2979/jfemistudreli.37.1.06. Also, Claudia V. Camp, "The Wise Women of 2 Samuel: A Role Model for Women in Early Israel?," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 43, no. 1 (1981): 15. Here, Camp discuses themes of power, violence and women's speech in the wider 2 Samuel narrative

[117] D.M Gunn, "Traditional Composition in the "Succession Narrative," *Vetus Testamentum* 26, no. 2 (1976): 214-219, https://doi.org/10.1163/156853376X00367.

> after her. But Tamar put ashes on her head and tore the long robe that she was wearing; she put her hand on her head, and went away, crying aloud as she went.
>
> Her brother Absalom said to her, 'Has Amnon your brother been with you? Be quiet for now, my sister; he is your brother; do not take this to heart.' So Tamar remained, a desolate woman, in her brother Absalom's house.

The focus shifts entirely to Tamar when we arrive at verses 18–20. In these verses, the text shows us the full weight of the harm done to her by Amnon as well as the long-term consequences when those around her fail to act. These verses also highlight Tamar's own response - the tearing of her robe, the ashes on her head, and her loud public lament. These gestures are not small details but reveal the depth of her grief and the collapse of the support that should have surrounded her.[118] As the language moves from violence to abandonment and the passage ends on an unresolved note, these verses become the emotional and theological centre of the story.

Gerald West writes that verses 18 – 20 represent a turning point in this narrative. This is the moment where Tamar's response brings the truth to the surface and where those around begin to shut her down.[119] West stresses that Absalom's words in verse 20 *be quiet... do not take this to heart* are not comforting but silencing. Absalom is acting out the same patriarchal system that strip Tamar of her voice.[120] What is striking in West's reading is his focus on how those closest to Tamar fail her. Her desolation is not the result of anything she has done but of the complete breakdown of support from those who should have stood with her. She is abandoned repeatedly by Amnon, Jonadab, David, the household servants, Absalom, and finally by the wider community.

Figure 4.5 Shattered Fragments: Artist's Interpretation

The Bible Journaler's choices show a careful engagement with 2 Samuel 13: 18-20 and two aspects of the artwork stand out: the use of a deep black background and the scattering of torn fragments. These will be considered in turn. First, the black backdrop dominates the page.

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[118] L. Juliana M. Claassens, "Daughter Zion's Resistance: The Power of Protest," in *Claiming Her Dignity: Female Resistance in the Old Testament*, (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2016). 17-31.

[119] Gerald West, "Tamar Summons the Church to Account: Resisting Patriarchal and Ecclesial Impunity in 2 Samuel 13:21," *Journal of Anglican Studies* 22, no. 2 (2024): 372–76, https://doi.org/10.1017/S1740355324000354.

[120] West, "Tamar Summons the Church to Account: Resisting Patriarchal and Ecclesial Impunity in 2 Samuel 13:21," 376.

The Journaler places the entire scene within a dark field, setting the emotional tone for the verses in which Tamar moves from violation to abandonment and finally to desolation. Black is the colour of grief, often associated with mourning, and it also recalls the ash Tamar places on her head in the text. There is no face, no figure, no comforting symbol; the darkness becomes a refusal to soften or narrate over the wound. Yet the blackness is not entirely solid or contained. It bleeds outward, spilling onto the biblical text without fully covering it. This could imply a darkness that seeps rather than stays confined, hinting at how the consequences of Tamar's assault spread into her life, her relationships and her social world. The blurred edges evoke shadow, smoke, or even bruising, lingering qualities that give weight to the closing line of verse 20, that she *remained.... desolate.*

Second, the torn fragments scattered across the page form the central visual motif of the artwork. These pink pieces may evoke Tamar's ornate robe in verse 18, which she tears after the assault.[121] Although the text does not specify that the robe is torn into many pieces, the ragged and broken quality of the fragments may point to a robe, and a life, destroyed beyond repair. Set against the black background the torn pieces stand out clearly, emphasising that the rupture in Tamar's life extends far beyond the initial violence. West identifies Tamar's robe as a key literary symbol in the story, and in this artwork the Journaler pushes that symbol even further from something torn to something completely shattered. The way the artist works with this sense of brokenness is especially striking when you compare it to much of Bible Journaling where broken pieces are often pieced back together or transformed into something hopeful. Some Journalers draw on *kintsugi* imagery in which broken pottery is repaired with gold and the fracture becomes a place of beauty and healing.[122] In Figure 4.5, however, the Journaler resists any movement toward repair. The fragments remain scattered and

---

[121] For a detailed discussion of Tamar's *Kětonet Passim* and its wider cultural and theological significance, see Chapter 4 by Adrien Janis Bledstein 'Tamar and the Coat of Many Colours' in Athalya Brenner-Idan, ed., *Samuel and Kings*, Feminist Companion to the Bible (Second Series) 7 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000).

[122] Bible journaling often references *kintsugi,* the Japanese art of mending broken pottery with gold in a way that honours the break instead of concealing it.
Example 1: @patjournals, "john3goldenrepair," The New Illuminators, accessed November 22, 2025, https://nisar.omeka.net/admin/items/show/2555. See Appendix C, Fig. C14

Example 2: @mikipietak, "ps34kintsugi," The New Illuminators, accessed November 22, 2025, https://nisar.omeka.net/admin/items/show/1102. See Appendix C, Fig. C15

Example 3: @n.hug_baj, "luke4healmeanointme," The New Illuminators, accessed November 22, 2025, https://nisar.omeka.net/admin/items/show/1186. See Appendix C, Fig. C16

unresolved, the dark background only intensifying this, offering no hint of restoration. The pieces are left as they are, holding the brokenness in view and bearing witness to a world that has come apart refusing any easy turn toward healing or consolation.

Overall, the Bible Journaler gathers the emotional arc of the text - violation, abandonment, desolation, and lets it spill outward rather than trying to contain it. The image suggests a life shattered beyond repair. I now turn to look at this artwork through a theopoetic lens, looking more closely at that stark and unsettling text: *rape ruins everything.*

Figure 4.5 A Wounded Collective Imaginary: Through a Theopoetic Lens

Rape ruins everything. This phrase hits the viewer with real force. Gerald West's analysis of 2 Samuel 13 is useful in considering both Tamar's experience and the Journaler's interpretation, showing how the artwork brings Tamar's story and the Journaler's own response into conversation with one another. West writes about *a system of patriarchal impunity* drawing on intercultural biblical scholarship in Latin America where violence is understood as operating in two devastating movements: first the violation itself, and second the institutional failure to respond, believe or protect.[123] West aligns Tamar's story with this political-theological pattern echoing David Tombs concept of *abandonment*.[124] That is, Tamar's suffering Amnon's assault but also the silencing of Absalom, the passivity of David and the wider community's withdrawal of solidarity. This layered abandonment brings a second form of victimisation enacted by those who could have offered support but instead reinforce harm. Read through this lens, the phrase *rape ruins everything* names the initial act of violence and the entire system that compounds it including those who look away and the collapse of communal protection. I think West's case study gestures towards a concept of *everything* that extends beyond the rape itself encompassing the full social, political and theological aftermath that destroys the structures a survivor should have been able to rely on.

[123] West, "Tamar Summons the Church to Account: Resisting Patriarchal and Ecclesial Impunity in 2 Samuel 13:21," 374.

[124] Tombs conceptualizes the notion of *abandonment* by focusing on the victim's initial *abandonment* by those who could perhaps have prevented the rape, then on the rape itself, and finally their second *abandonment* in the aftermath of their assault. He recognises that contemporary survivors of sexual violence who turn to their community for help or compassion are often subjected instead to blame, stigma and social rejection. David Tombs, "Abandonment, Rape, and Second Abandonment: Hannah Baker in *13 Reasons Why* and the Royal Concubines in 2 Samuel 15–20," in *Rape Culture, Gender Violence and Religion: Biblical Perspectives*, ed. Caroline Blyth, Emily Colgan, and Katie B. Edwards, Religion and Radicalism (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 117.

One of the most striking features is that the word *everything* is split into two words: *every* and *thing*. The Bible Journaler could have left it as a single word but this breaking apart is theologically suggestive. In this form it points to the way every aspect of life is affected – every relationship, every memory, every sense of safety, every imagined future. No element escapes the wound. Rather than a vague, catch-all *everything,* the split word draws attention to the many particular *things* that are damaged and invites the viewer to consider each one. It opens an imaginative space for considering the reach of such violence. Alongside the artwork, the Journaler also offered the following text,

> April is Sexual Assault Awareness month.
> This sad story begins in 2 Samuel 13. Amnon rapes Tamar. Absalom kills Amnon 2 years later. In the course of time Absalom leads a conspiracy against King David- father to Amnon, Tamar and Absalom- and is killed.
> The point - Tamar is brutalized and the family is torn apart.
> Rape impacts the victim, her or his family and *the community* too.

The explicit reference to *community* in this accompanying text underlines that the harm Tamar suffers is not hers alone to carry. Trauma ripples outward. A wound never stays with one person along but becomes a wound carried by the community. It shows how harm can crack the *collective imaginary* and damage the shared world of meaning a community holds in common. The outward shattering is echoed visually in the split word *every-thing.*

This widening movement of harm resonates with the interrelatedness Catherine Keller describes in *Cloud of the Impossible*. Drawing on *quantum entanglement*, Keller makes a metaphysical and theopoetic claim about non-separability: We cannot separate the observer from what is observed; subject and object are intertwined.[125] We are not separate from one another, physically, relationally, or spiritually. Keller notes that classical physics once assumed a stable, discrete world in which things existed independently of our observing or relating to them, but quantum theory disrupts that assumption revealing that nothing exists in isolation.[126] There is no neutral *thing* untouched by relation, but everything exists within and

[125] Catherine Keller, *Cloud of the Impossible: Negative Theology and Planetary Entanglement,* (Columbia University Press, 2015). See, Chapter 4 "Spooky Entanglements – The Physics of Nonseperability," 135-141.

[126] Here Keller draws on quantum theorists such as Niels Bohr, Albert Einstein and Richard Feynman to show that physics no longer treats *things* as self-contained entities, or that objects exist independently of observers. Keller argues that quantum Nonseperability suggest at the most fundamental level reality is constituted through relations. Keller, *Cloud of the Impossible: Negative Theology and Planetary Entanglement.* 150-155.

is affected by a field of connection. Here Keller quotes Karen Barad's work on *quantum entanglement*,

> The world and its possibilities for *becoming* are remade with each moment. If we hold on to the belief that the world is made up of individual entities, it is hard to see how even our best, most well-intentioned calculations for right action can avoid tearing holes in the delicate tissues structure of entanglements that the lifeblood of the world runs through.[127]

Keller uses this scientific insight to make a theological claim about the world we share: we are always already in relation. Her quantum – theological argument strongly supports my reading of figure 4.5. Harm reverberates through the relational field and violence exposes the fragile interdependence of the human community. *Every-thing* exists in entanglement. Keller's work deepens theology by insisting that separation is an illusion and connection is the basic structure of existence. This brings challenging ethical questions to the surface for a wounded *collective imaginary*. How do we live responsibly in an entangled world? How do we pay attention to the ways our lives cross and affect one another, especially when violence breaks the very spaces where *flourishing* might have grown? The artwork shows that *flourishing* is shaped by what sustains us but also by what wounds us. It is a stark reminder that violence leaves its mark on the communal *imagination*: harm to one becomes harm to all. Personal violation becomes collective rupture; a wound in one body becomes a wound in the people of God. *Flourishing* requires honesty, attention and the shared goal of resisting what threatens life together. Communities cannot *flourish* where abandonment is normalised or where silence replaces solidarity. Instead, *flourishing* calls us to compassionately carry one another's wounds and to hold space for grief rather than rush toward repair.

4.9: Conclusion

This chapter has explored the movement from Bible Journaling as a personal devotional practice where *imagination* takes form in the private work on the page, to its place within a *collective imaginary* that gathers many individual artworks into a shared space of meaning. *Imagination* often begins in these private or hidden moments where meaning is grounded in the textures of the Journaler's own life and faith. Even before an image is uploaded or shared, the creative *poiesis* carries the potential to speak beyond the individual Journaler, to be taken

[127] Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 396, https://doi.org/10.1515/9780822388128.

up by others, and to contribute to a wider fabric of meaning. In this way, the *collective imaginary* grows in breadth and depth, holding far more than any single act of *imagination* could hold on its own.

In considering the powerful Instagram hashtag #revealyourteal, we see the life-giving potential of a *collective imaginary* and its ability to extend and deepen the meaning of individual acts of *poiesis* by gathering them into a participatory, evolving space. This becomes clear in the way the hashtag gathers and holds the wounds of trauma, offering a space where experiences of sexual abuse can be transformed opening the possibility for human *flourishing.* The #revealyourteal collection is not simply a digital archive or a space for individuals to vent or share, but it also testifies to the way survivors of sexual abuse engage biblical texts as living conversation partners. This, I suggest, can be understood as a *theopoetic imaginary.* It is *imaginary* in the sense that it emerges from a shared, constructed and participatory space, and *theopoetic* because it draws on lived experience – memories, emotions, wounds and hopes – brought into conversation with biblical texts through creative practice.

Theopoetics as explored in this thesis, is rooted in *poiesis* – the act of making. In Bible Journaling this begins in the creative work of the page, yet it does not end when the image is complete. Its life continues in the way it is received, engaged with and taken up by others. Viewers are drawn into the process and in this shared space, the original act of *making* continues to live, taking on new resonances as it is woven into the *collective imaginary*. As Matt Guynn describes it,

> Theopoetics, opens up a space for unanticipated dreaming in which the past, present and future are re-shaped as we organise and even re-create our own stories and our relationships with others, the world and the divine.... to face the unknown, engage mystery, to dream and be transformed.[128]

The images in this chapter inhabit this same space that Guynn articulates. Both makers and witnesses are drawn into the work of *imagining otherwise.* The *collective imaginary* expressed in #revealyourteal enacts the power of *imagination* to turn what has been silenced

[128] Matt Guynn, "Theopoetics: That the Dead May Become Gardeners Again," *CrossCurrents* (New Rochelle, N.Y.) 56, no. 1 (2006): 99.

into connection and the possibility for *human flourishing*. This is the work of theology and theopoetics, to create spaces where we may be changed by what remains beyond our grasp.

Conclusion

Chapter Overview

Situated within a broader interest in the relationship between theopoetics and creative practice, this thesis brings into conversation theopoetics and Bible Journaling. It examines how women engage biblical texts and how theological meaning is formed through embodied and imaginative response. Theopoetics is approached as a way of doing theology that emphasises embodiment and imagination in engaging the mystery of God, self, world and others. Bible Journaling, in turn, is explored as a contemporary creative practice in which artworks are created by individual Bible Journalers in response to their understanding and personal appropriation of the biblical text. Each offers a deepening of the other: theopoetics provides a language and framework for understanding what is taking place within the practice, while Bible Journaling gives concrete form to the theological dynamics named within theopoetics, rendering them visible and tangible.

Chapter One establishes the hermeneutical grounding for this study by framing interpretation as a lived and ongoing event in which understanding takes place through the encounter between reader and text. Developments in reception and reader-focused approaches further draw attention to the role of the interpreter, prioritising the question of who is reading and how understanding takes shape within particular contexts. Central to this development is the recognition of the transformative potential of interpretation particularly in relation to biblical texts. When a text comes to carry meaning for the reader, that meaning often does not remain internal but begins to move outward. Interpretation does not end in understanding alone but gives rise to a *response*, as what the text comes to mean often cannot remain at the level of thought alone and is expressed through forms such as image, story, journaling, metaphor and poetic expression. In this way, interpretation brings into focus *response* as an integral part of the interpretive event providing the hermeneutical grounding for theopoetics. This hermeneutical grounding is fundamental as it makes it possible to recognise Bible Journaling as a contemporary expression of interpretation that gives rise to *response.*

The development of a process theopoetic framework in Chapter Two establishes the legitimacy of treating Bible Journaling as genuinely theological. Within this framework, the biblical text remains the site of engagement, a space in which creativity unfolds through a call

and response drawn forth by the divine *lure* with God understood as the *poet of the world*. Within this unfolding creative process, theology emerges through *making* in ways that reading alone cannot produce. It is here that God is encountered, as *making* becomes part of an ongoing movement of *becoming*. Process theopoetics provides a framework to name this relational dynamic through which Journalers are understood as co-creative participants and Bible Journaling becomes a visible instance of this process. The analysis of selected artworks has demonstrated how this process unfolds within the practice.

Through the lens of embodiment in Chapter Three, the thesis has shown that engagement with the biblical text is often enacted through the body. The tactile practice of Journaling is not incidental but integral to how meaning is formed and *worked through.* By closely examining embodiment this chapter also highlights the significance of women's bodily experiences within theological discourse. Rather than relying on formal theological language, these women often depict their lived and bodily experiences as sites of reflection. This highlights how interpretation is not detached from lived experience but grounded within the textures of the Journaler's own life. The body becomes both the site and recipient of divine encounter through which interpretation is mediated and expressed. This resonates with phenomenological insights while remaining situated within a constructive theological framework.

The turn to imagination in Chapter Four further develops this argument. Imagination is treated as a theological mode in its own right, alongside embodiment. In the artworks considered, imagination enables a constructive reimagining of the divine allowing new meanings to come forward while also retrieving and drawing on images of God from older or overlooked traditions. In doing so, some of these artworks challenge more dominant inherited images of God. This imaginative work is both *personal* and *collective*, as what begins as a private act of imagination on the page, when it is shared online holds potential to participate in a wider collective imaginary in which meanings are circulated and taken up by others. Through the selected artworks the chapter shows how futures are reimagined and identities redefined. In this way, the artworks make visible women's agency and contribute to a theopoetic vision of flourishing. The biblical text continues to anchor these interpretations even as it is reimagined and contested.

The Central Thesis Question

Taken together these chapters make it possible to answer the central research question of this thesis: **How does theological meaning-making take shape through Bible Journaling as a theopoetic activity?** Theological meaning-making takes shape through *poiesis*, as engagement with the biblical text is worked through embodied and imaginative acts of making. It arises as Bible Journaling responds to the text in ways that move beyond reading alone and open into material practice on the page where meaning is formed through the interaction between text, body, materials and wider life context. In this sense Bible Journaling can be understood as a theopoetic activity in which Journalers participate creatively within an ongoing relational process.

Contributions of this Thesis

This thesis makes several contributions to the field. First, it extends theopoetics beyond its more familiar location in written prose and poetry by situating it within the contemporary visual practice of Bible Journaling. In doing so, it demonstrates how the conceptual insights of the theopoetic scholars engaged in this work are not only articulated in abstract ways but also *brought to life* in and through artwork. Bible Journaling, understood as a theopoetic practice, allows their work to be seen and understood making their ideas tangible and recognisable as what they describe becomes visible and realised in practice. Theopoetics is not only a way of writing theology but a way of *doing* theology and Bible Journaling makes this visible giving concrete expression to what is already present in conceptual form.

Second, the thesis offers a methodological contribution by showing how a creative practice can be approached theologically without reducing it to personal, autobiographical or therapeutic expression. The thesis provides a way of reading Bible Journaling that takes its theological dimensions seriously by holding together hermeneutics, process theology and close attention to the practice itself. This framework also has the potential to extend beyond the practice of Bible Journaling, offering a model for attending to other creative and embodied practices. My exploration of *embodiment* and *imagination* shows how theology can be exploratory and future-oriented, expanding how interpretation takes place and moving beyond purely text-based accounts. It is important to reiterate that while *embodiment* and *imagination* are generative and offer a creative and relational vision of theology, they do not replace critical or historical approaches but sit alongside them. This thesis is not about replacement but about expanding how theology is understood and where it takes place.

Third, this study brings Bible Journaling into the academy as a way of foregrounding forms of *knowing* that emerge through practices of *making*. At the heart of theopoetics lies a question of what counts as theological knowledge. Theology is often articulated within academic contexts through monographs, articles, and propositional argument usually in conversation with tradition. Other ways of *knowing* – such as *poiesis*, the creative capacity to bring something new into being – are not always explicitly named or foregrounded within theological discourse. The study has explored how such ways of *knowing* can be approached as theological. This includes greater attention to embodiment, affect, and the aesthetic. In this expanded sense, theology includes the emotional, the embodied, and the experiential as legitimate modes of *knowing*. Bible Journaling reveals a participatory and creative vision of theology as lived, made and responded to.

This thesis also has implications for how the work of women in particular, is recognised within theological discourse. It calls for a willingness to recognise theology as it takes shape in lived and embodied forms. My work aligns with broader developments within theopoetics that seek to expand whose voices and forms of expression are recognised within the work of theology. Recent work such as *Theopoetics in Color* centres collective black voices highlighting the significance of theopoetic *knowing* today while also articulating the importance of contextual understandings of theopoetics.[1] Such work shows that there are different ways in which theology can be done outside of dominant theological frameworks demonstrating how it can take place within the particularities of lived practice. In doing so, it supports the wider claim of this thesis that theological meaning takes form through embodied and imaginative engagement in practices of creative making.

Limits of the Study

The analysis has focused on a specific collection of images drawn primarily from online communities and does not claim to represent the full diversity of Bible journaling practices. Bible Journaling exists in many contexts including offline and private journals, church groups and within different cultures and denominations. The sample used here is selective and is shaped by what is publicly shared. In addition, the analysis does not seek to reconstruct the

[1] Oluwatomisin Olayinka Oredein et al., *Theopoetics in Color: Embodied Approaches in Theological Discourse*, 1st ed. (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2024).

religious views of individual Journalers or to map their theological understandings in a systematic way.

Possible Directions for Future Research

Building on this, there are several clear directions for future research. One area would be to explore more explicitly how embodied and creative ways of working with the Bible are received within the church communities to which Bible Journalers belong. This could look at how Bible Journaling is understood alongside more established theological traditions, and whether it is recognised as meaningful or placed at the margins as informal or secondary. It would also open up questions around whether creative approaches are seen as complimentary to, or in tension with, more dominant theological frameworks particularly within church settings.

Beyond this, the work developed here could be extended to other creative practices beyond Bible Journaling. It begins from the recognition that there are many ways of *knowing*, and that theology is not only expressed through thinking, writing, or analysis, but also through practices of *making*, including art, music, film, poetry, and digital media. These practices can engage questions of justice, identity, belonging, and healing, through which theology takes shape. In this way, what counts as theology is broadened opening the field to a wider range of practices and forms. While not yet named under a single term, this future work may be described as a *theology of making*, contributing to wider conversations across theopoetics, theology and the arts, and practical theology. A *theology of making* seeks to recover the capacity of theology to speak to the fullness of human experience through processes of creating, responding and becoming. The analysis of Bible Journaling in this thesis offers one concrete example of how such a theology can already be seen in practice.

Appendix A: Images Relating to Chapter 2



Fig. A1 @biblejournalingsuss, *ex35createdtocreate*



Fig. A2 @ninas.bible.journal, *gen1iamcreatedtocreate*

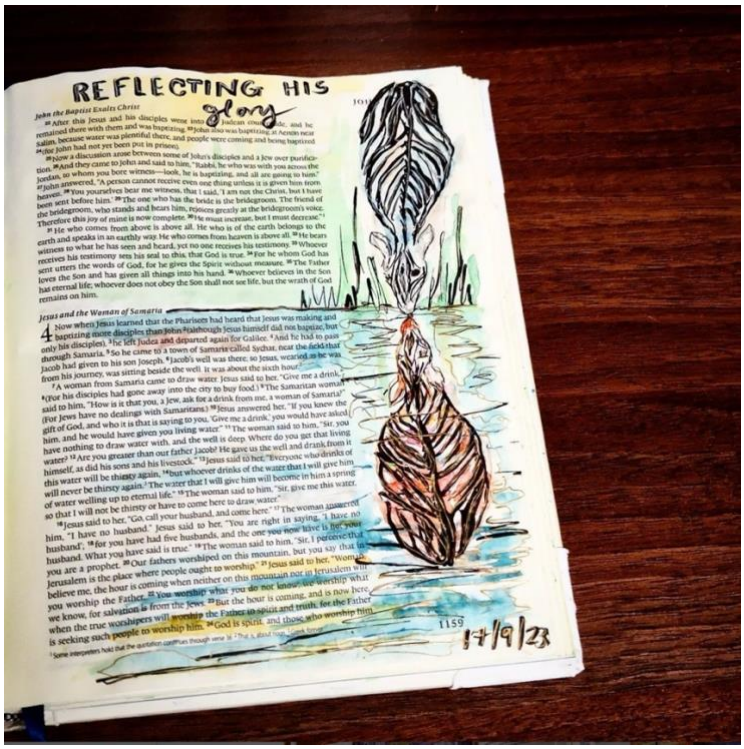


Fig. A3 @createfullliving, *john4reflectinghisglory*



Fig. A4
Jeanette Morrison, *gen1create*

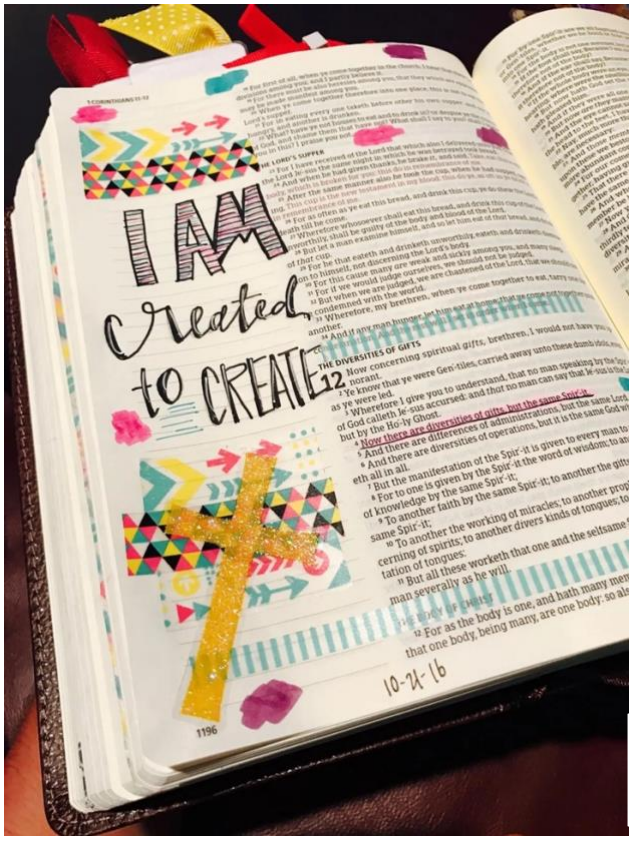


Fig. A5
Lori C Johnson, *1cor12iamcreatedtocreate*

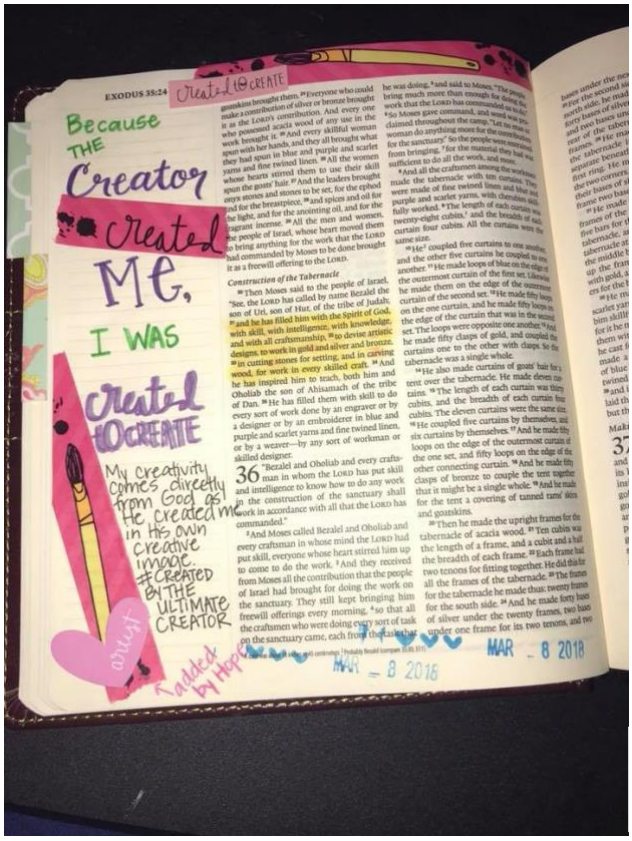


Fig. A6
Leslie Ryan Cherry, *exod35theultimatecreator*



Fig. A7
Liz Travers, *2cor5-6floralbutterfly*



Fig. A8
@n.hug_baj, *1cor15transformed*



Fig. A9
kimberley@hispalette.com,
rom12butterflytransformation



Fig. A10
@amayah_biblejournaling
rev21imakeallthingsnew

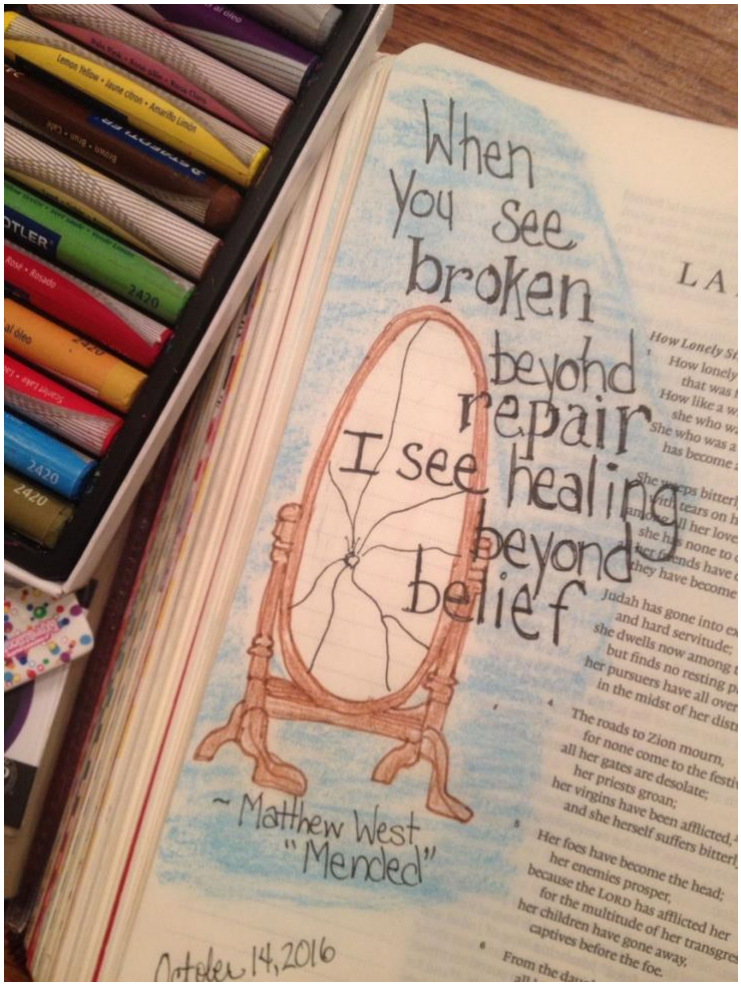


Fig. A11
Andrea Buttry - Dodge,
lambrokenmirror



Fig. A12
Diane Noble, *ps41wesingodheals*



Fig. A13
@chelsies_bible,
deut32rainydays



Fig. A14
@kellybangscreative,
isa40theartofholynoticing



Fig. A15
Pat Nygren Davis, *phil3presson*



Fig. A16
@matawisfavorites, *is43leaveoldways*



Fig. A17
The Secret Life of a Scrappy Wife,
2cor12justkeepgrowing

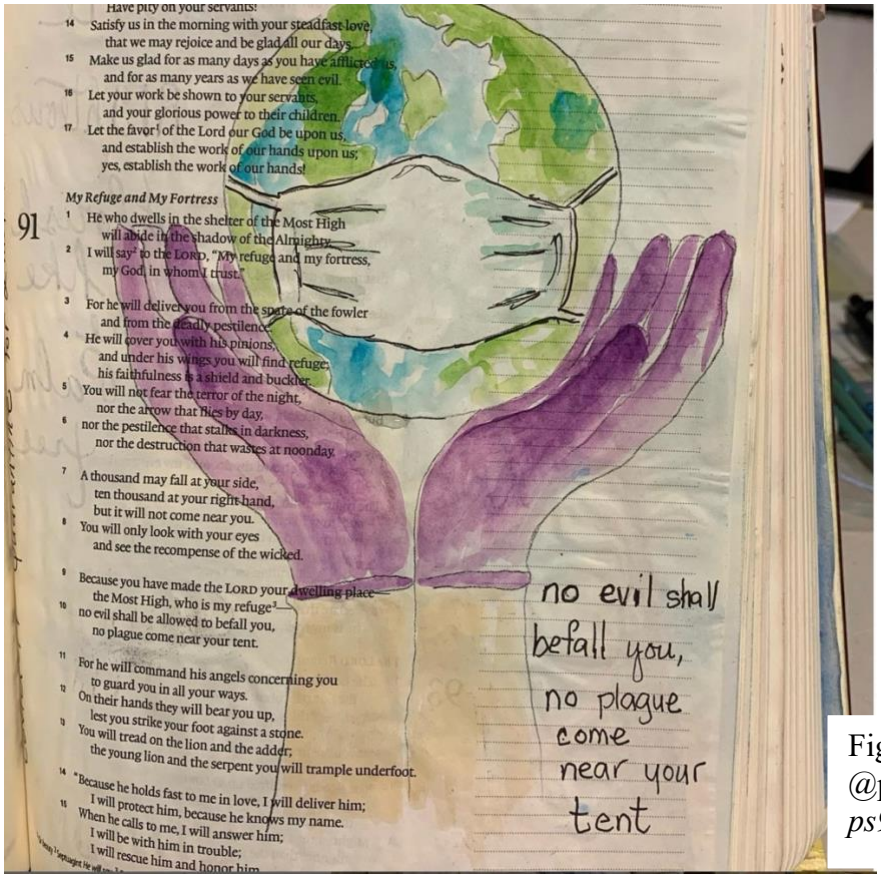


Fig. A18
@paintingwithbev,
ps91handsandmaskaroundtheworld



Fig. A19
@jenn_journals90,
ps46sunflowersukraine

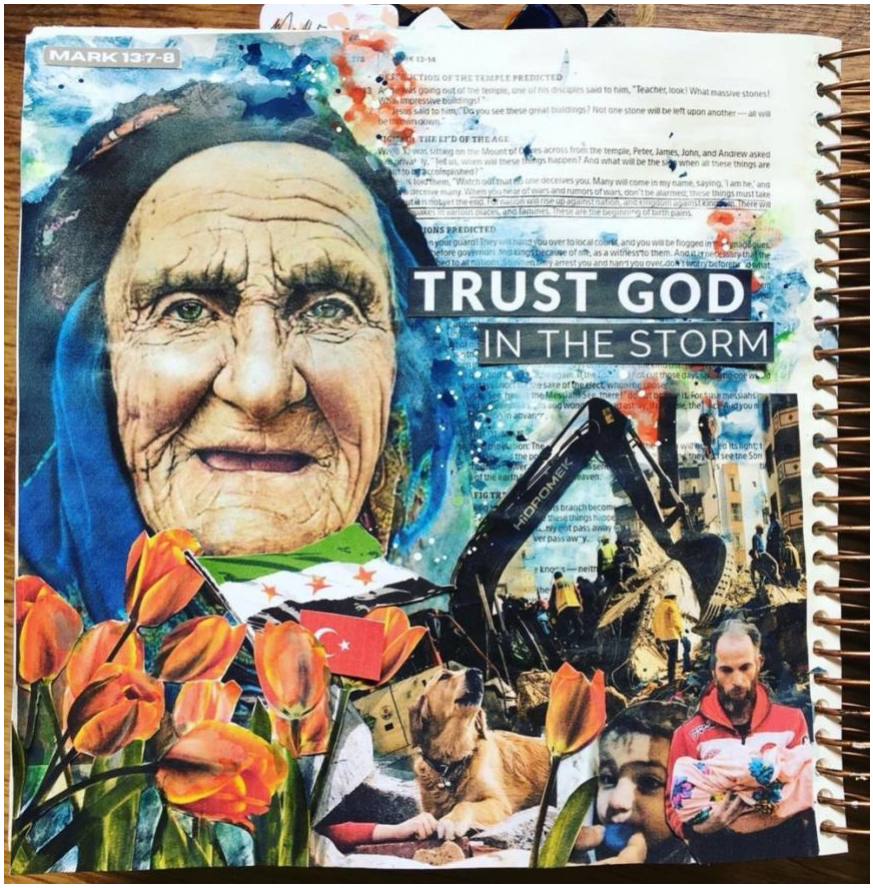


Fig. A20
@marnellevdmerwe4,
mark13trustgodinthestorm



Fig. A21
@Cora_biblejournaling
ps8&9compareandcontrast

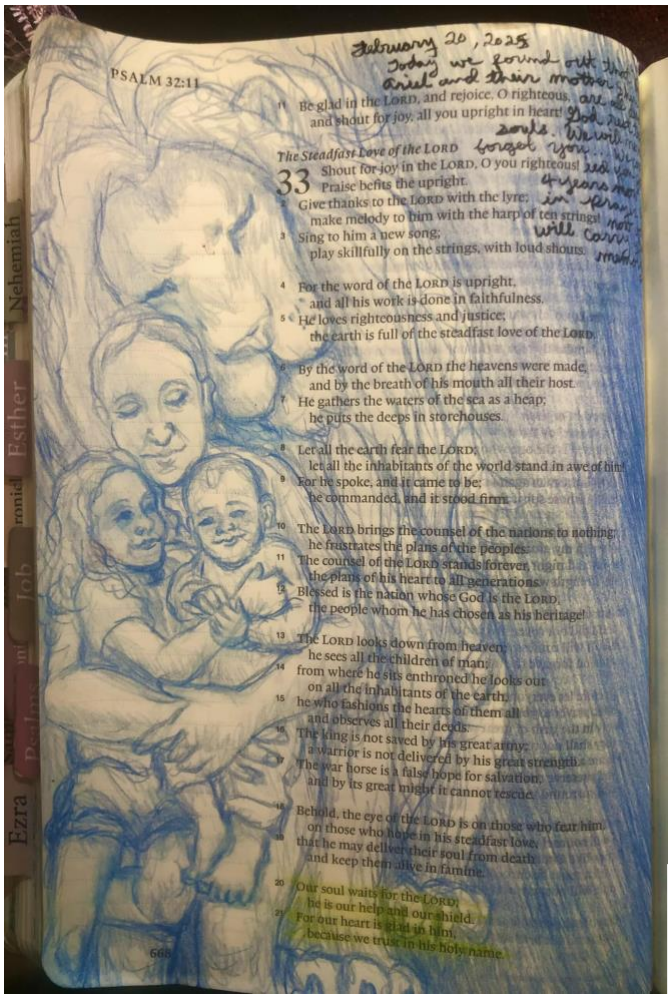


Fig. A22
Reidun LaFleur, *ps33carryingthem*

Appendix B: Images Relating to Chapter 3



Fig. B1
@thisdaughtersjourney
ps147brokenheartedarehealed



Fig. B2
@chelsies_bible,
ps147godhealsall



Fig. B3
@lori_p123, *ps147godheals*

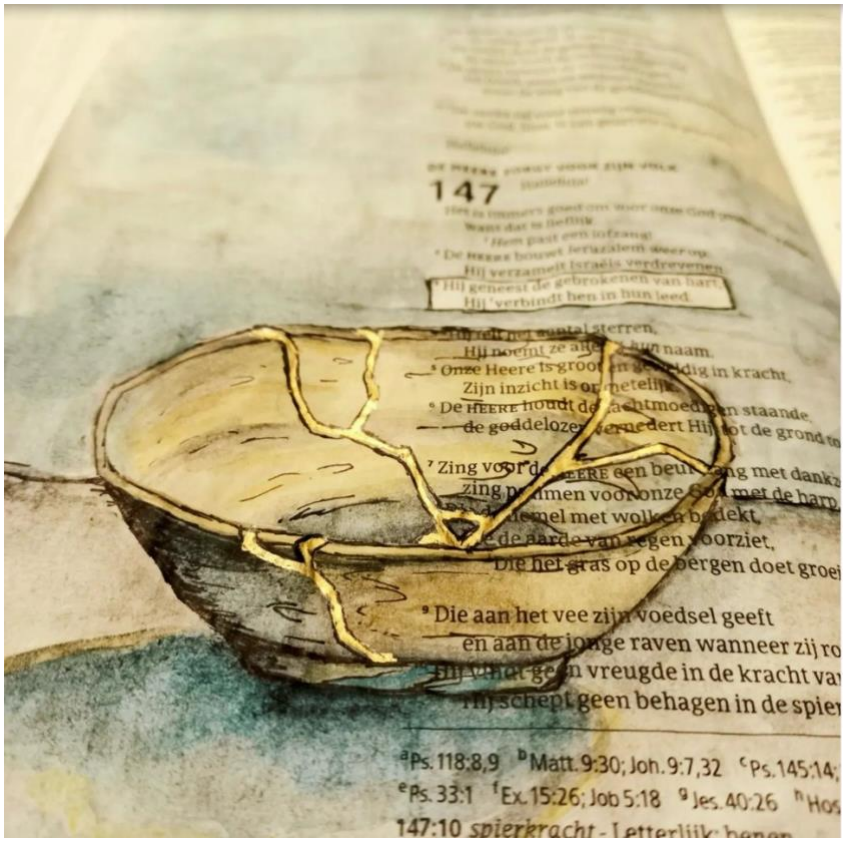


Fig. B4
@fromfaith, *ps147kintsugi*

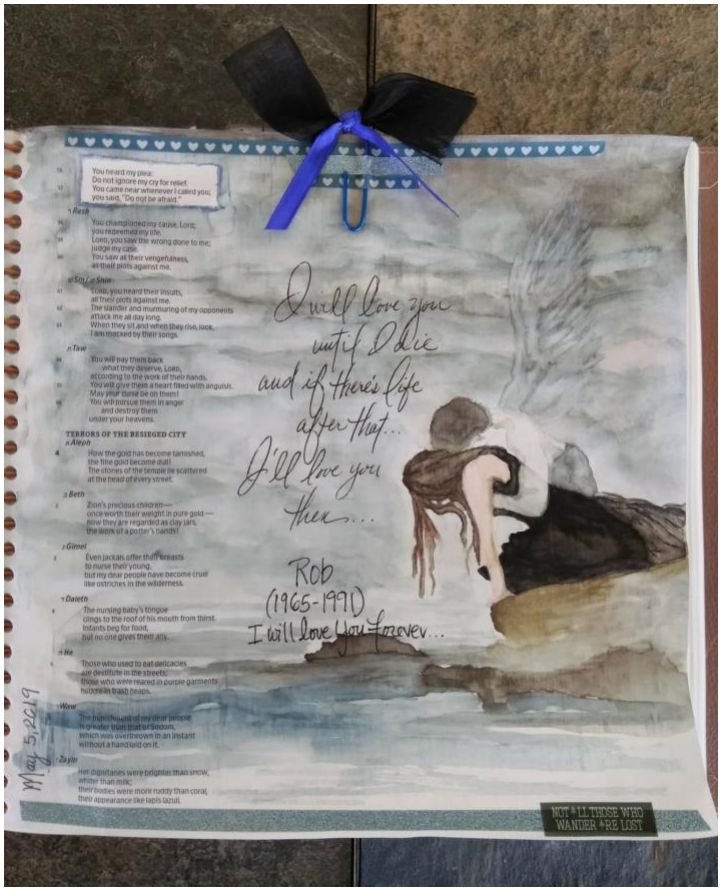


Fig. B5
Christina Giordano,
lam3iwillloveyouforever



Fig. B6
@shejournalswisdom,
mic7thelordwillbemylight



Fig. B7
Charlotte Hey,
matt6girlandbirds

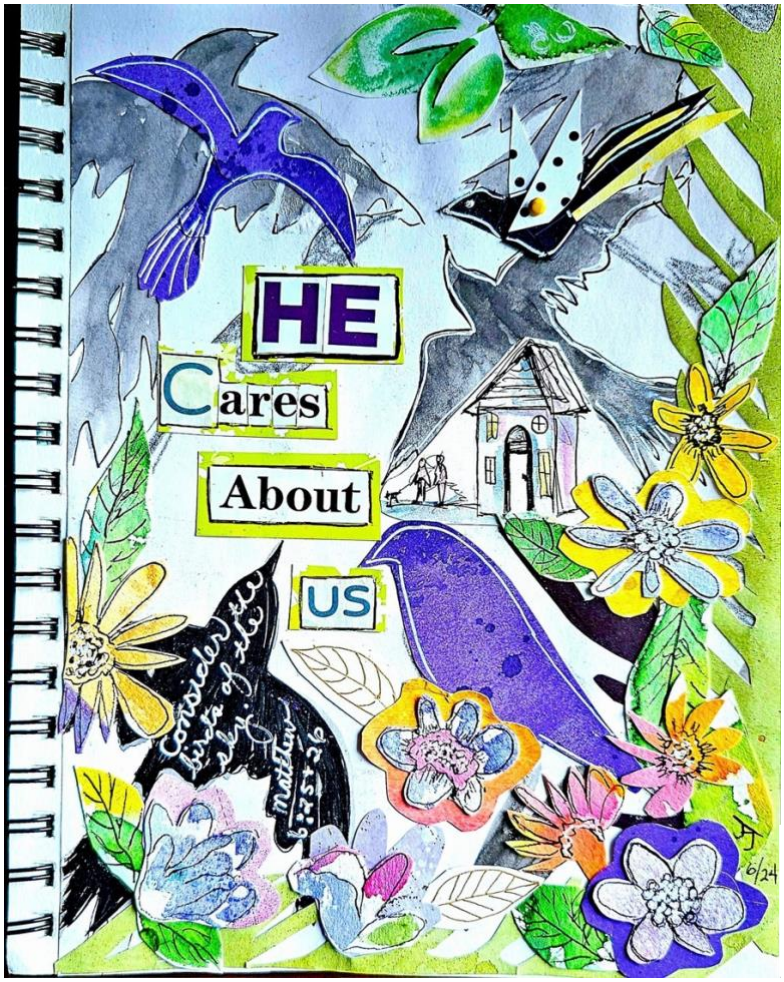


Fig. B8
Judt Jacques,
matt6hecaresaboutus



Fig. B9
Jen Alward,
matt6birdsandflowers

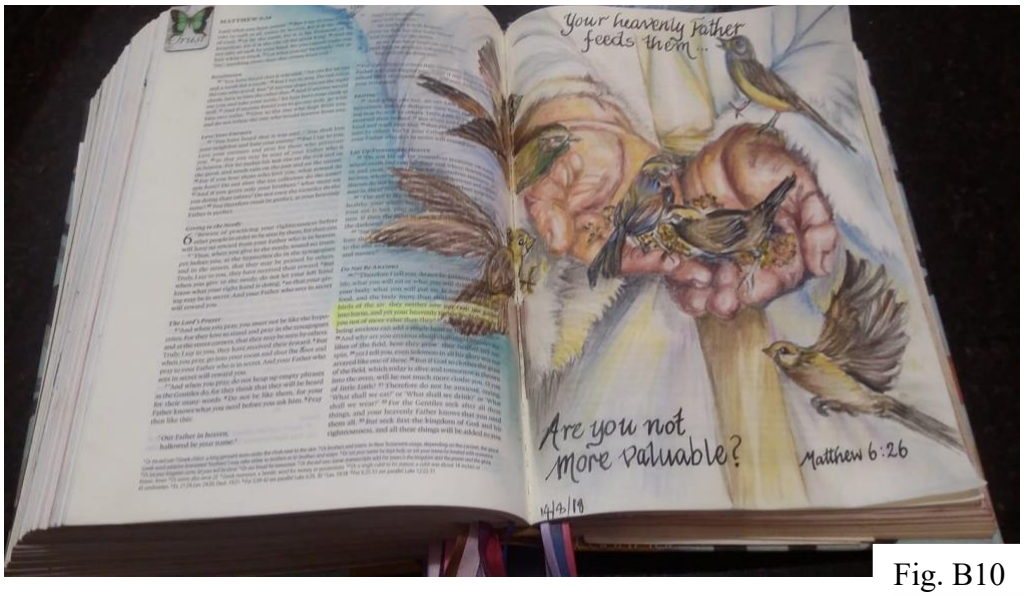


Fig. B10
Jenny Pollett,
matt6feederofbirds

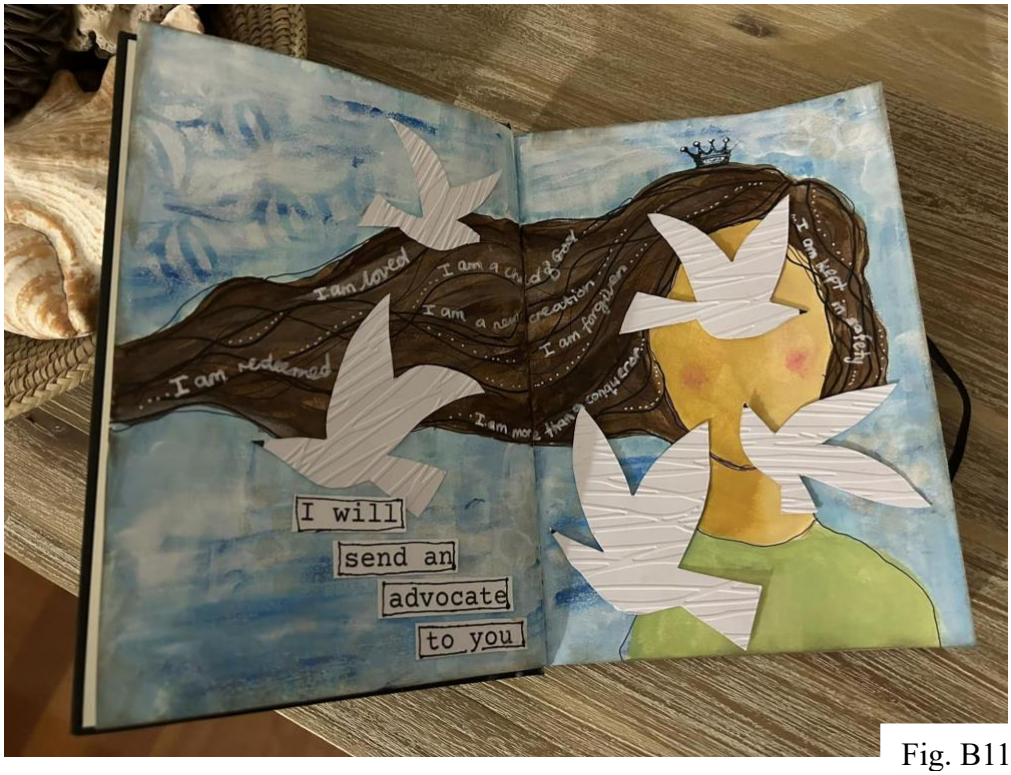


Fig. B11
Elaine Needham, *john14iam*



Fig. B12
Casey Turner, *ps89soulcare*



Fig. B13
Karen Thoms, *artistwriterdreamer*

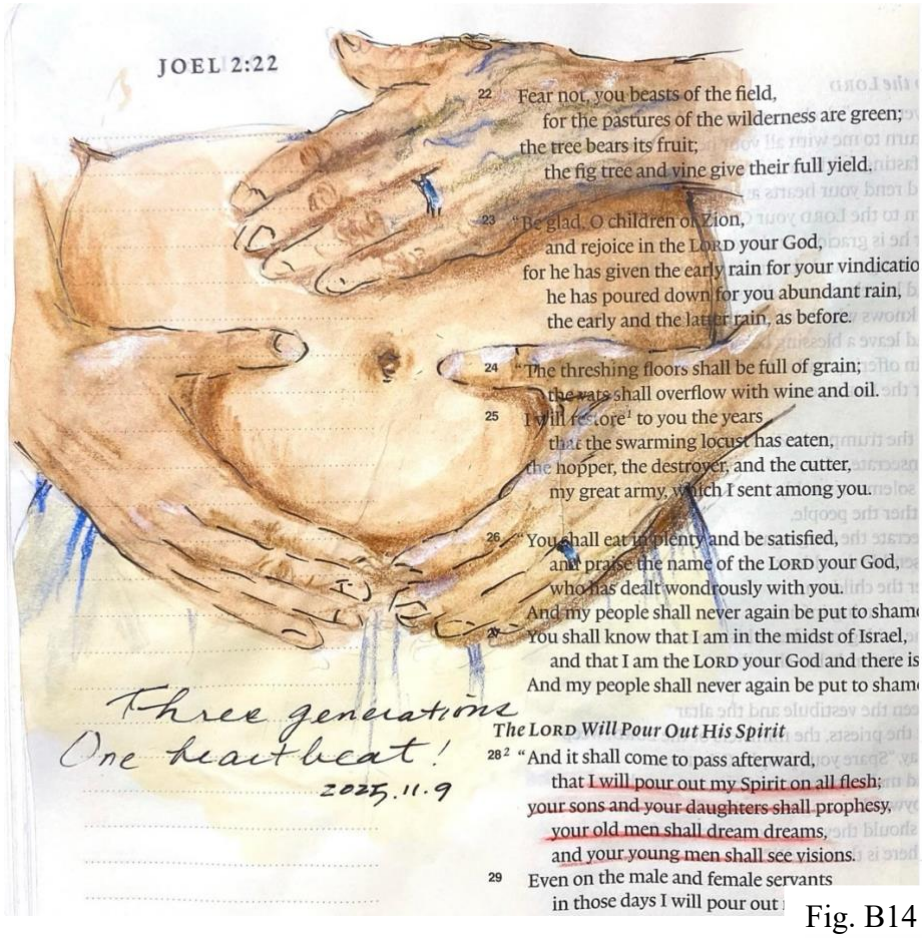


Fig. B14
@colors_of_faith, *joel2midwifethefuture*



Fig. B15
@biblejournaling_marjan_l, *isa7expectant*

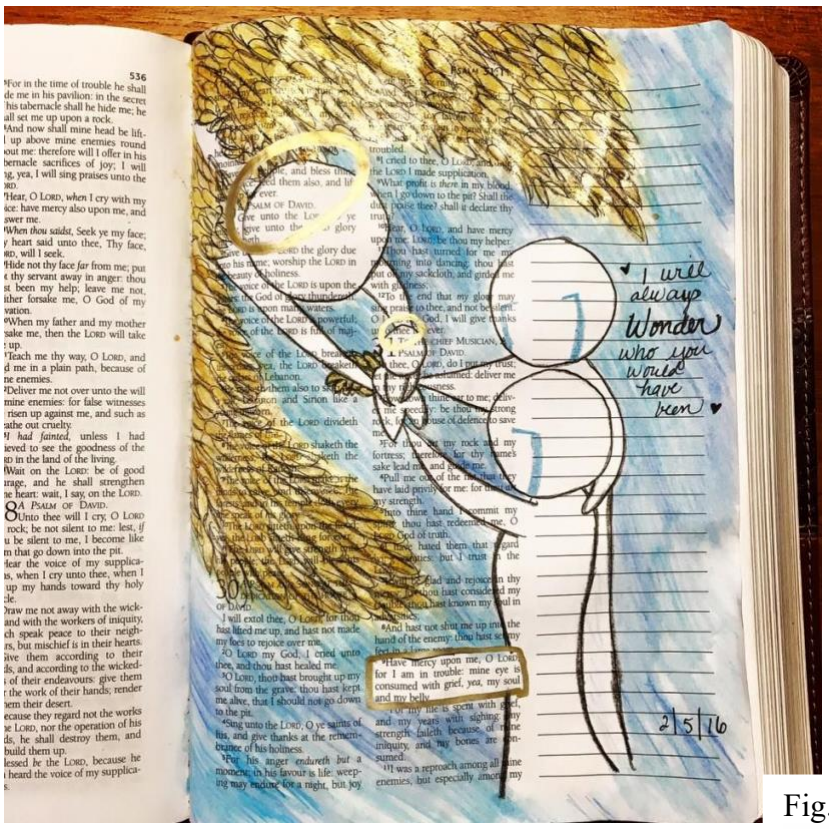


Fig. B16
Lisa Bloom Owen, *ps31pregnancyloss*

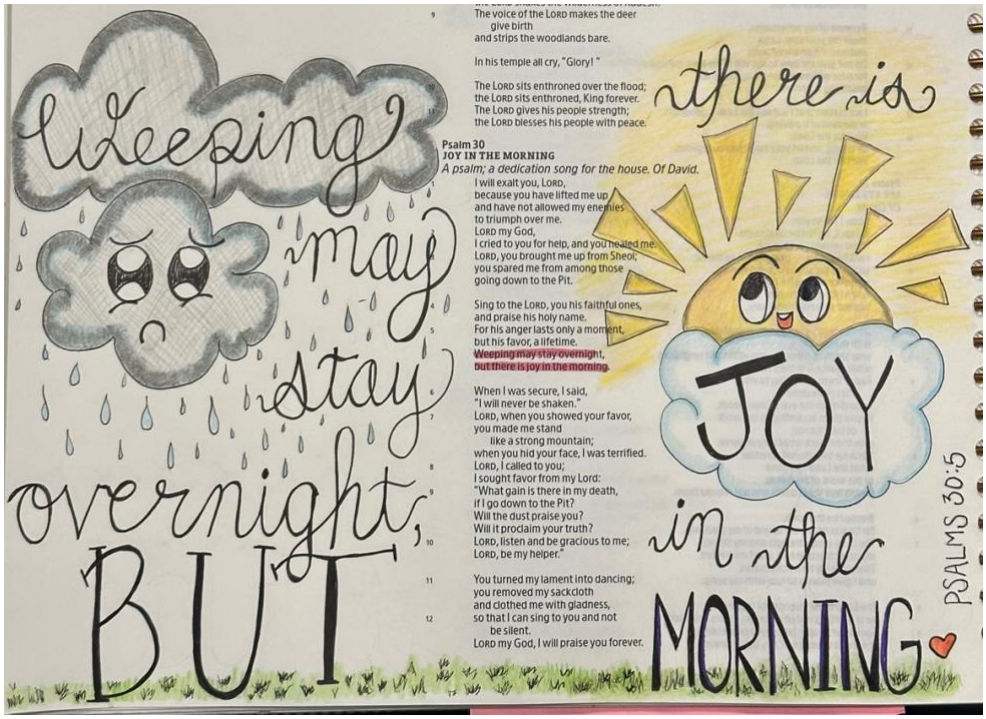


Fig. B17
Daryl Banegas,
ps30joyafterweeping

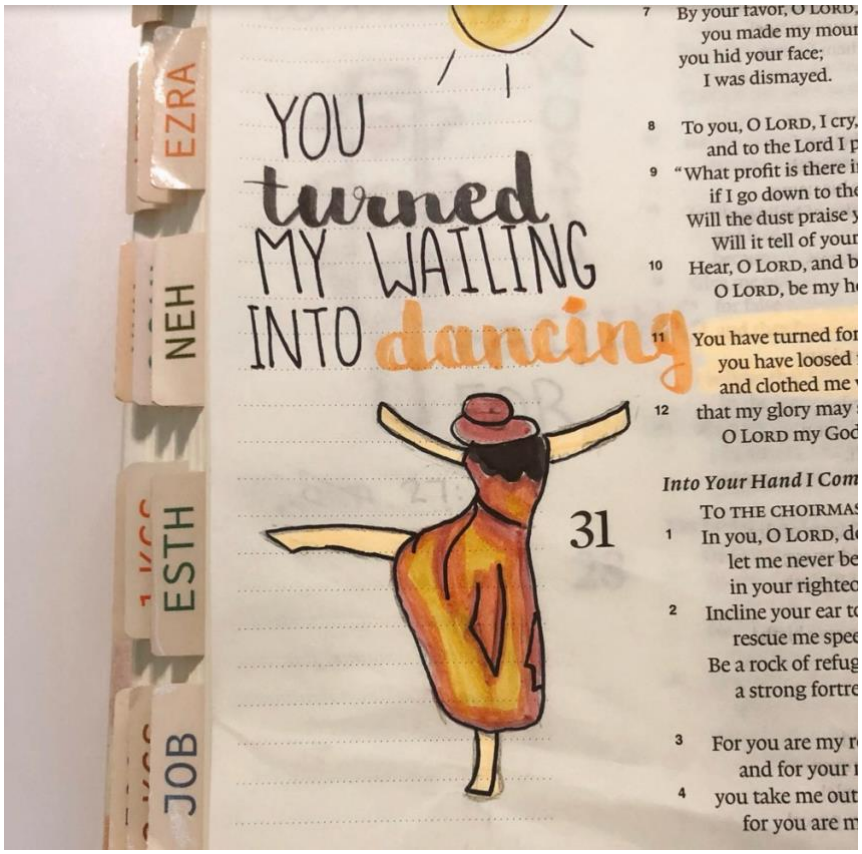


Fig. B18
@dalsbible,
ps30wailingintodancing

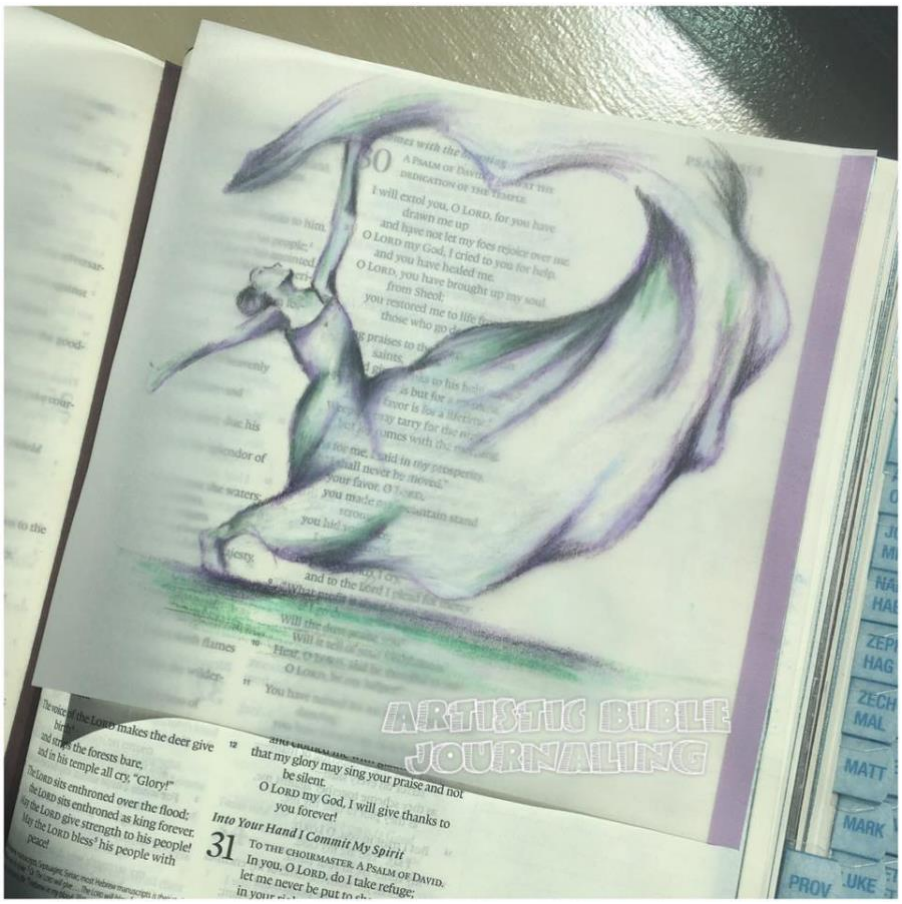


Fig. B19
Artistic Bible Journaling,
ps30dancingwoman

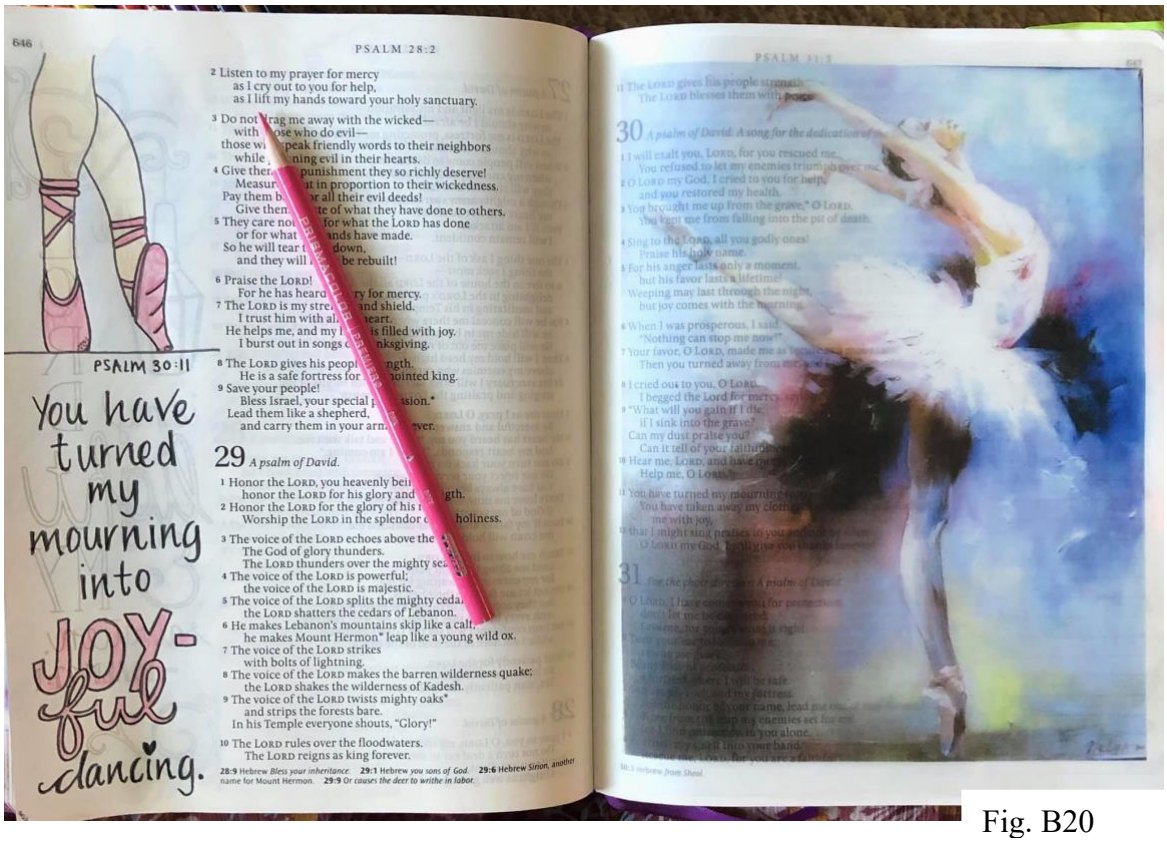


Fig. B20
Barbara Kirby Davis,
ps30joyfuldancing



Fig. B21
Jenna Burne,
gen1creativityfromchaos



Fig. B22
Kelly Owen,
gen1lcreativityoutofchaos



Fig. B23
Sarah Lowry McGregor,
gen1chaos



Fig. B24
Liz Jones,
john10lifefromchaos

Appendix C: Images Relating to Chapter 4

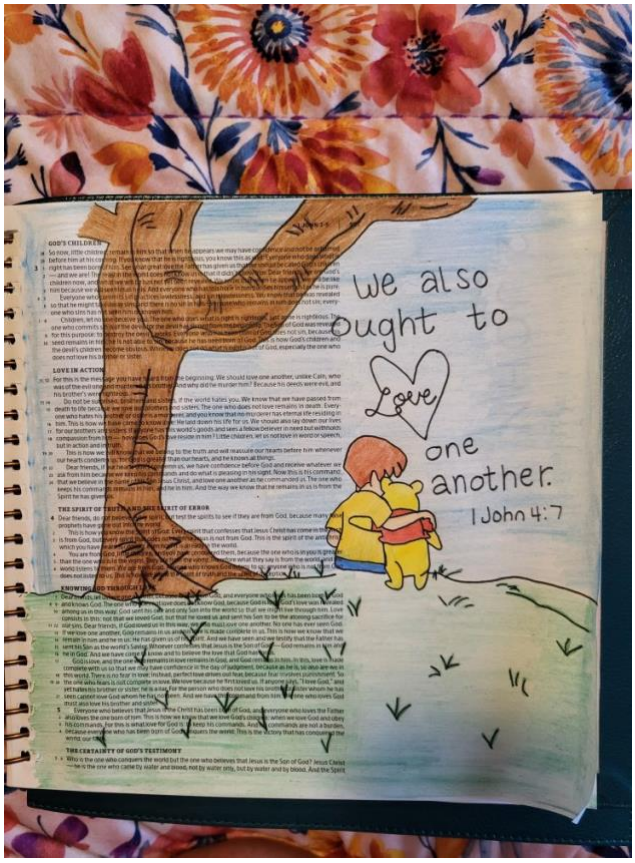


Fig. C1
Carrie Hensley,
1john4winnethepoohandchristopherrobin



Fig. C2
@cora_journalingbible, *pet2envyinsideout2*

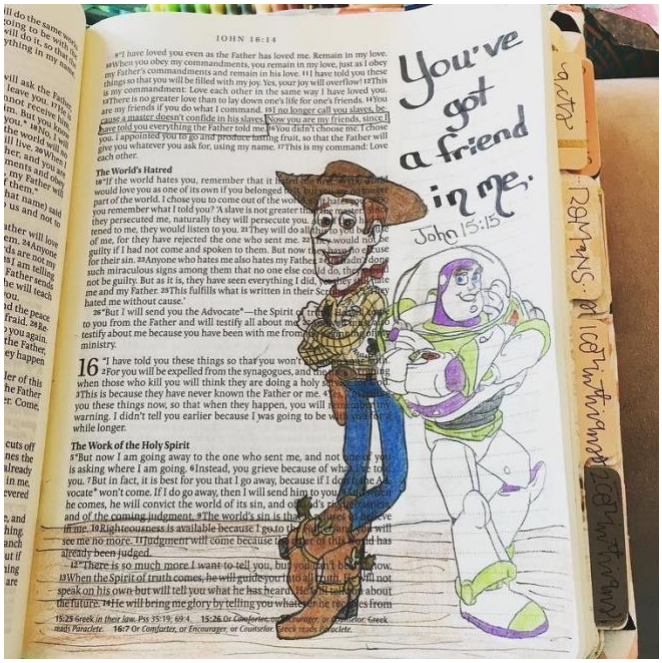


Fig. C3
Unknown, *john15woodyandbuzz*



Fig. C4
Unknown, *ps94mrpetersonshouse*



Fig. C5
@annyscriptures, *gal5theusoffice*

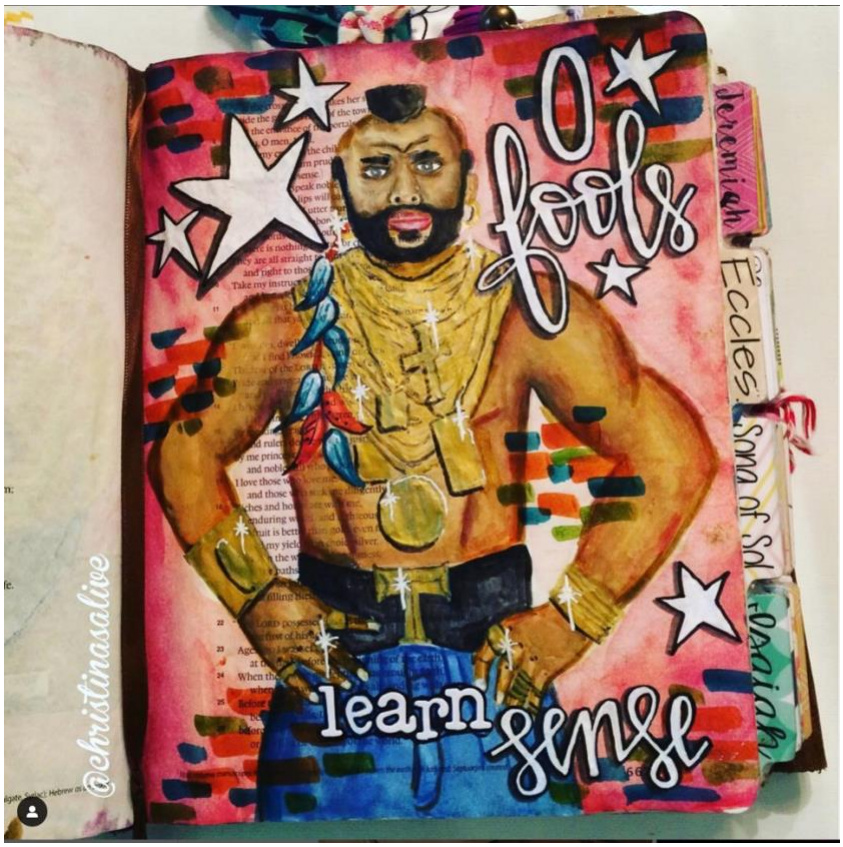


Fig. C6
@christinasalive,
prov8ipitythefoolbabaracas

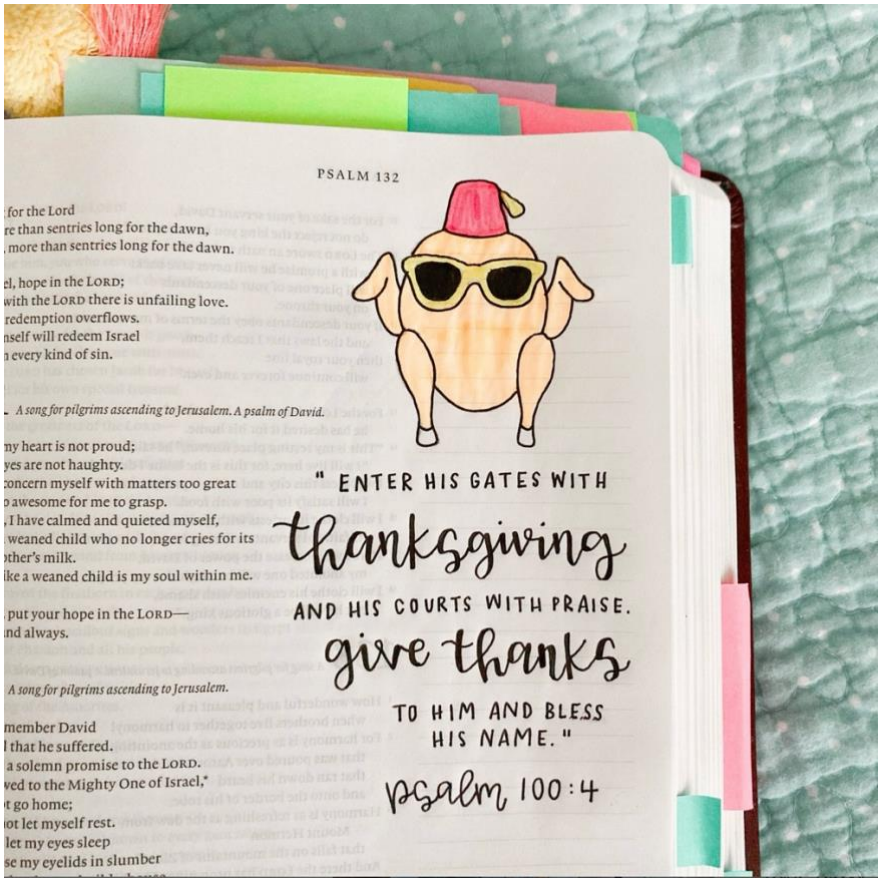


Fig. C7
@Jesus.loves.coffee,
ps100friendsturkey



Fig. C8
Sharon Whitmarsh,
ps72charlescoronation

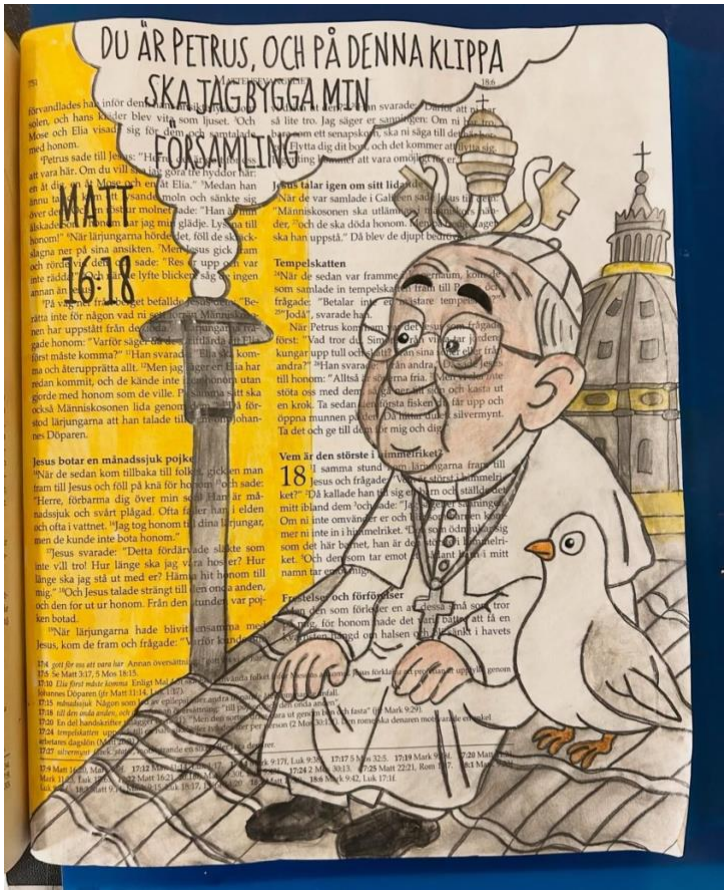


Fig. C9
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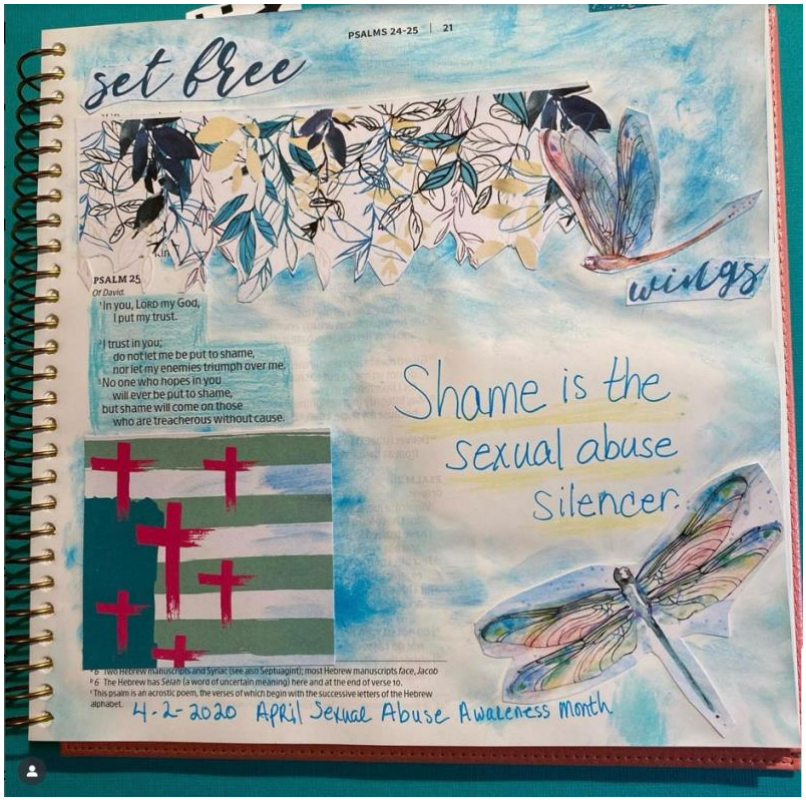


Fig. C10
@kjoy47,
ps25shameisthesexualabusesilencer

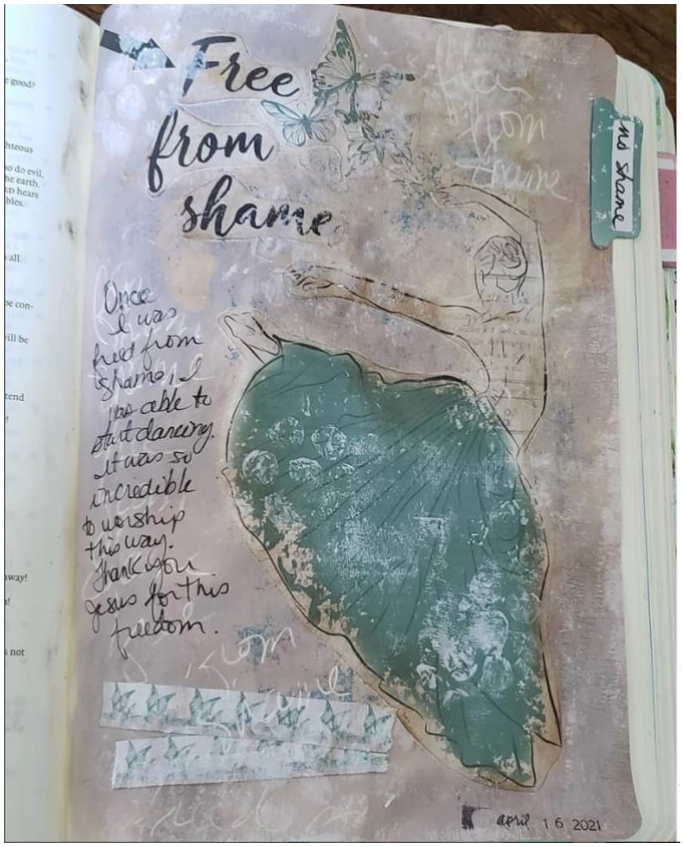


Fig. C11
@twelvestonesartstudio,
ps34freefromshame

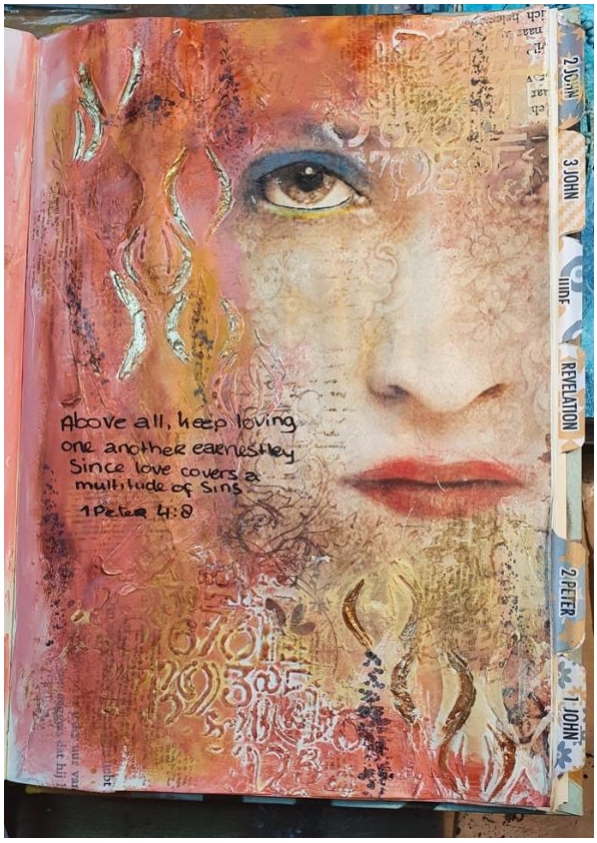


Fig. C12
Sandra Van de Wiel,
1pet4keeplovingoneanother

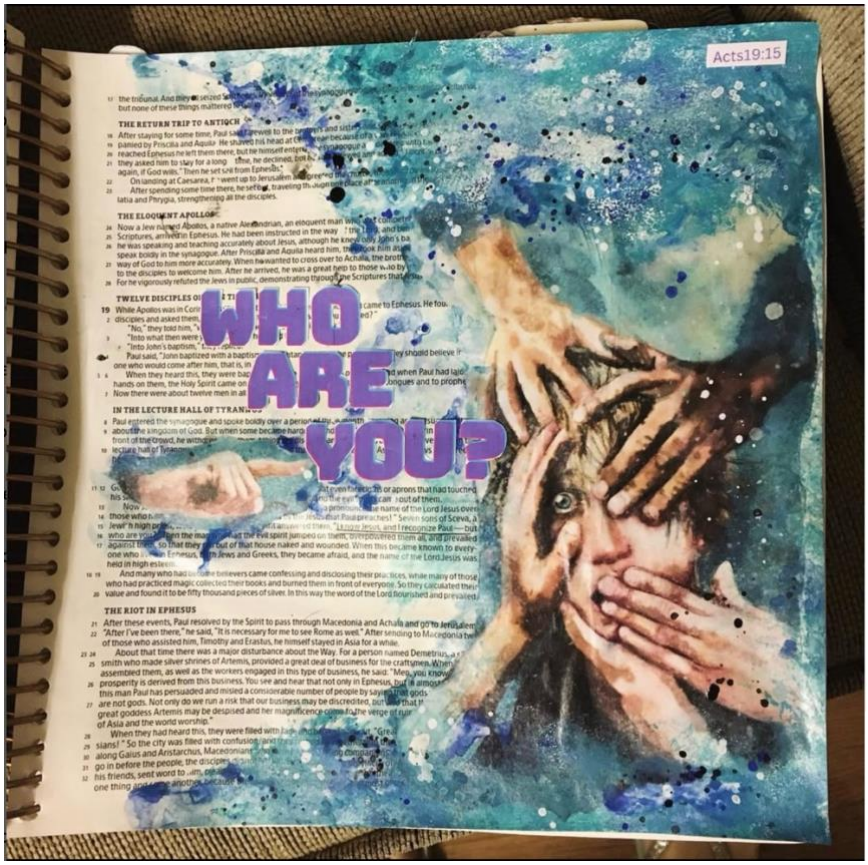


Fig. C13
@marnellevdmerwe4,
acts19whoareyou

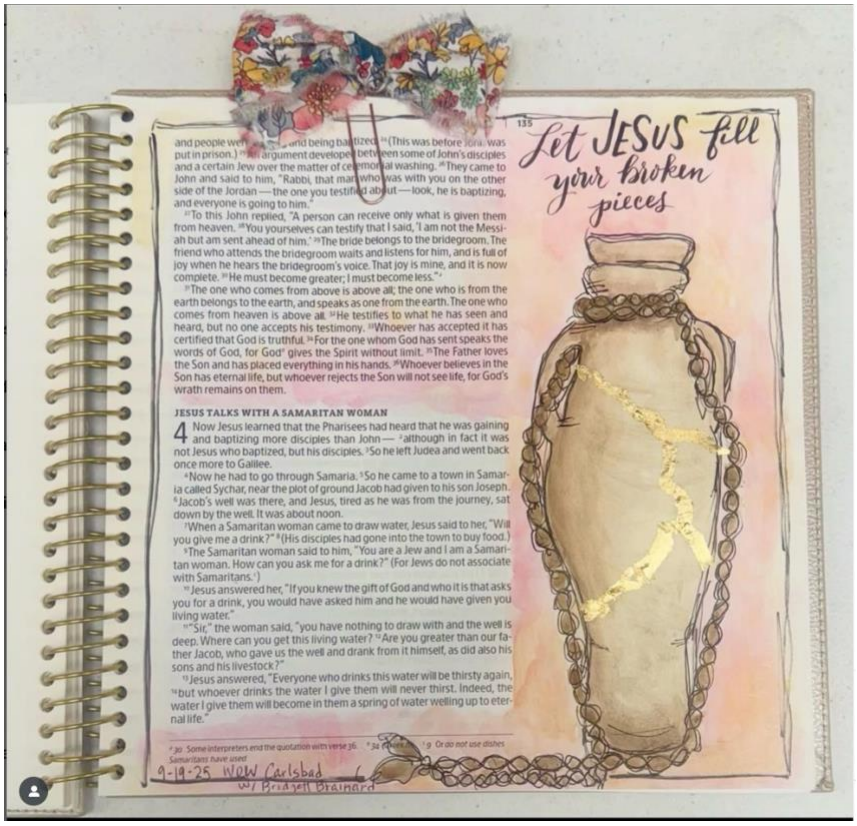


Fig. C14
@patjournals,
john3goldenrepair



Fig. C15
@mikipietak, *ps34kintsugi*



Fig. C16
@n.hug_baj,
luke4healmeanointme

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