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# Be Your Own Scribe: Bible Journalling and the New Illuminators of the Densely-Printed Page

## 1 Introduction

Bible journalling is a popular trend of recent times amongst mostly female readers of the Bible in the United States. It involves an active and creative engagement with the material book of the Bible. Readers, empowered with a plenitude of attractive stationery accessories – coloured pens and pencils, watercolour paints, wash tapes, stickers and templates – draw and make typographic designs directly into their Bibles, illustrating verses and passages that have particular personal resonance for them. The name given to this trend is Bible Journalling and it is essentially a devotional practice of reflecting on the Bible – and yet distinctly new as a trend amongst lay readers of the Bible. This paper considers the striking retention and valuing of the iconic material artefact of the Bible at the heart of this practice, as well as the considerable agency taken by the readers (and facilitated by the producers of the Bible journals and stationery) in the making of these creative interventions to the densely-printed and “sacred” page. These readers have become illuminators of their own Bibles. Photographs of these newly illuminated verses and pages are often shared on social media platforms such as Instagram and Pinterest, thereby migrating beyond the material page into the digital realm. Here online communities share their pages and choose common themes to work on, over short periods of time, occasionally with exegetical input from one of the members of the group. A brief introduction to the process of Bible journalling contains distinct echoes of the ancient monastic practice of *Lectio Divina*:

As you read your Bible, allow God’s Word to speak to your soul. It’s worth taking time to quiet your heart and be still before beginning. Depending on where you are in your faith walk, you may be drawn to certain passages. Read the passage once to get an overview, and then again to dig deeper into the text. Look for the verse, phrase, or concept that speaks to you. Once you identify scripture that you find meaningful, try to determine what God is saying to you through the passage, so you can begin the process of bringing it to life by lettering, colouring, and/or illustrating its message.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Joanne Fink and Regina Yoder, *Complete Guide to Bible Journalling: Creative Techniques to Express Your Faith* (Mount Joy, PA: Fox Chapel, 2017), 8. Cf. Christine Valters Paintner, *Lectio Divina: The Sacred Art* (London: SPCK, 2012), 8–11.

This chapter explores the creative process of Bible journalling, with a specific look at the agency of women readers who take up this practice. Materiality, and the Bible-publishing enterprise, both play considerable roles in this emerging trend. Two Bible journal entries – creative illuminations of different texts by female Bible journallers – shall be considered in depth, in the context of this emerging spiritual practice, among those who value the material artefact of the printed Bible.

## 2 The Practice of Bible Journalling

Bible journalling as a hobby has taken off in the United States and appears to be gaining some traction in Europe, with Dutch Bible-readers most notably.<sup>2</sup> As we shall see, publishers, including Zondervan, Crossway and Thomas Nelson, are now producing dedicated journalling Bibles designed to facilitate this direct, artistic engagement with the Bible. These Bibles have wide margins, sometimes feint-ruled and sometimes blank. Some “interleaf” Bibles leave complete pages blank intermittently throughout the Bible – thereby facilitating expansive artworks stretching across the double page spread. A definition of Bible journalling as it appears in the best-selling *Complete Guide to Bible Journalling* suggests:

In its simplest definition Bible journalling is a way to express your faith creatively. Putting pen to paper is a great way to remember and record biblical concepts that are meaningful and relevant to your life. Whether you are drawing, colouring, and writing right inside your Bible – the most commonly understood definition – or writing and illustrating scripture verses in a separate book or on to paper alongside your Bible, the essential thing to understand is that Bible journalling is about creating while reflecting on God’s Word.<sup>3</sup>

The reader/artist receives a book that conforms to all expectations of what a material Bible is; hundreds of thin pages densely printed with the written text of the Bible. The only exception here is the margin that has been left wider than usual. In most of the journalling Bibles this margin is approximately five centimetres (2 inches) wide and 20 centimetres (8 inches) in length. This extra-wide margin is the area of invitation to the reader to make their mark. It is their piece of “blank canvas” on the page. In a few editions, designs are already featured in the margins for colouring in. However, it appears the preferred versions have blank margins open to the reader’s creativity.

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<sup>2</sup> This is from evidence gleaned from the social media platforms of Instagram and Pinterest.

<sup>3</sup> Fink and Yoder, *Complete Guide*, 8.

Interventions are made, by the reader, to the physical and material structure of the book through the addition of further paper and ink. The edges of pages are lined with coloured and patterned washi tape. There is the addition of tabs, often pre-designed; they may have a textured background, a watercolour appearance, or be patterned; but they are always colourful. These tabs indicate the beginning of a new book of the Bible. There are also theme tabs that relate to particular topics, such as prayer, or hope, for example. There is a trend of marking the first page of a new book with washi tape as well as a tab. Further techniques include “Tip-ins” and “tip outs.” A “tip in” is an extra page, conventionally a page of similar thickness to that of the Bible pages, like a tracing paper, that is taped in place along the *inner* margin or “gutter” of the Bible. It becomes an extra page between two pages, held in place most usually with washi tape. The extra page allows for a design to stretch across two pages without interfering with the text of the facing page. A “tip out” is a similar process but here the extra page or piece of paper is taped in place along the *outside* edge of the page and may fold out of the Bible – creating a three-page effect.

Clear gesso is a type of added substrate that comes in a liquid form, and may be applied to a ground on which an artist desires to work – in this instance a page in the Bible.<sup>4</sup> Spread thinly and evenly over the page, possibly with the edge of a plastic (credit) card or some such thin, sharp and hard object, it creates a thin, transparent film, almost like a layer of clear varnish over the page. When the gesso dries, the page is not buckled and is now ready to have other inks and paints applied on over it. The gesso protects the page from buckling with the addition of watercolour washes. This transparent layer of gesso allows the scriptural text to remain visible beneath thin applications of colour, if desired. It is, of course, also possible that the text may be obscured by a darker or thicker application of ink or paint. This use of gesso to make of the page a working surface for other applications is of particular interest. The scriptural text is now layered into a foundation for further addition. It is possible for the artist to move out of the margin and make incursions into the printed page, to occupy the page with their designs. This can be a subversive act. Whilst valuing the text and desiring that it be the ground on which the artwork is created, it is also layered into the art. By subsuming the text into the art, it becomes an integral feature of the art. The text is appropriated as an element of the design, a texture that is altered into the

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<sup>4</sup> Gesso, in its more conventional thicker and opaque white form, is almost invariably applied either smoothly or in a textured, impasto way to canvas and boards before artists begin work on a painting in oils or acrylics. This protects the canvas, adding durability and longevity to the artwork, and allows the paint to go much further, especially if the style is impasto and a thickly textured ground is desired.

artwork. In this sense it functions like a pattern: it symbolises text, its legibility is perhaps slightly obscured, but its iconic function remains to perform the biblical text in the artwork. This approach almost suggests that the text is so familiar that it is no longer required to be completely visible or legible within or beneath the layers of colour.

Paper additions – whether of full page tip ins or tip outs, or the washi-taped edges of pages – have the effect of bulking up the Bible, as do other additions such as adding bits of ribbon and cloth, stickers, and other paper cutouts. Likewise, the use of gesso, paint, fixative – even the covering of pencil crayon – all adds to the thickness of pages and bulk of the Bible and creates a festive, joyful and colourful look to the Bible. Beyond being an appreciation and engagement with the material artefact, these artists also *add their own material*, mostly paper and paint, thereby modifying and extending the material artefact. It is personalised as this extra heft is added to it. This added weight is both literal and symbolic; it signifies a personal investment in this book and its claim on the reader's spiritual life. By adding these material bits, the Bible is invested with personal meaning and value, and a claim is made on the Bible's authority and influence in the reader's life.

The philosopher Lisa Heldke suggests that growing and preparing food are thoughtful practices that both use and generate emotional and erotic energy – not merely as incidentals, but as vital parts of the process.<sup>5</sup> In her challenge to the Western philosophical tradition that valorises “knowing work,” while denigrating “hand work” or practical work, she argues that growing, cooking and eating food should be understood as forms of “bodily knowledge.”<sup>6</sup> Heldke explains:

The knowing involved in making a cake is “contained” not simply “in my head” but in my hands, my wrists, my eyes and nose as well. The phrase “bodily knowledge” is not a metaphor. It is an acknowledgment of the fact that I *know* things literally with my body, that I, “as” my hands, know when the bread dough is sufficiently kneaded.<sup>7</sup>

Similarly, Meredith McGuire makes the point that “lived religion is constituted by the practices by which people remember, share, enact, adapt, create and combine the stories out of which they live. And it comes into being through the often-mundane practices by which people transform these meaningful interpretations

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<sup>5</sup> Lisa M. Heldke, “Foodmaking as a Thoughtful Practice,” in *Cooking, Eating, Thinking: Transformative Philosophies of Food*, eds. D.W. Curtin and L.M. Heldke (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1992), 204–29.

<sup>6</sup> Heldke, “Foodmaking,” 204–229, at 218.

<sup>7</sup> Heldke, “Foodmaking,” 204–229, at 218.

into everyday action.”<sup>8</sup> Bible journalling, which may seem “mundane” to some, is a practice that engages the whole person, body, mind and spirit. In the first instance there is the aesthetic delight that is generated in the use of artistic materials attested to by many artists. Van Gogh famously ingested a tube of his favourite yellow oil paint so enraptured was he with the beauty of its colour and texture. We see it too in the ecstatic, bright, paper cut-outs of Matisse’s later work, no longer able to paint but still obsessed with the beauty of colour and form. There is a thrill for many in the materials alone before any encounter with the biblical text has even begun. Moreover, sitting hunched over a Bible with a pile of papers and paints, cutting, pasting, rubbing, smoothing are all physical acts that linger in the fingertips. Drawing, colouring and painting are highly tactile processes that involve holding specialised instruments in different ways and making diverse marks with them. The feeling of gently building up colour with a pencil crayon by repeatedly going over the same small area is unlike laying a wash of watercolour over a page. Likewise, cutting with scissors or a craft knife are different processes, they feel different in the hand and produce different results. Gouache has its own distinctive smell, as do oil pastels. This form of journalling is an embodied process that weds an intellectual and spiritual knowledge with a “bodily knowledge.” McGuire says of such embodied practices: “their potential to involve integrally a person’s knowing body, knowing mind, sensations, memory, emotions, and spirit is evident.”<sup>9</sup>

The how-to websites and books are replete with contemporary graphic treatments of certain verses from a biblical text that may be traced over in the margin. These are text-based designs that may be embellished with other graphic symbols, candles or stars, for example. Hearts, butterflies, birds, flowers and other plants, clouds, rainbows, seeds, fish, sea, angels, bunting – these make up the conventional repertoire of visual symbols that have been illustrated as attractive line art for tracing and copying by beginner journallers. Some pages, displayed publicly, contain what appear to be incongruous symbols in the context of the Bible: a VW camping van or a moped, for example. Some appear to be rather bizarrely out-of-place – but is a bear on a bicycle really any more frivolous than a cat running off with a communion wafer, as we see in the Book of Kells and other such delights of medieval illumination – or is it simply a similar sense of humour expressed in a different time and place, and therefore though new visual tropes?<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Meredith B. McGuire, “Why Bodies Matter: A Sociological Reflection on Spirituality and Materiality,” *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality* 3/1 (2003): 1–18, at 2.

<sup>9</sup> McGuire, “Why Bodies Matter,” 11.

<sup>10</sup> Fink and Yoder, *Complete Guide*, 110. The bear on a bicycle in this example illustrates Prov 3:5–6 “Trust in the Lord ... and he will make your paths straight.” See Amanda Dillon, “The Book

### 3 Bible Journalling and Bible Publishing

Much has been written about the multiplicity of Bibles being published and the niche marketing of Bibles to appeal to every conceivable reader, often aligned with hobbies or personal interests.<sup>11</sup> These types of niche Bibles are frequently designed around gender roles, such as motherhood or fatherhood, and given a thoroughly gendered graphic treatment. There has been little research as yet about what actually happens to these Bibles once bought or received as a gift. How many Bibles does the “average” Christian own and how many do they make use of regularly? What are the emotional relationships a reader might have with the many Bibles in their possession?

I suggest that Bible journalling is, in many ways, an almost natural consequence of this proliferation of material Bibles. For those who hold the Bible to be a sacred book, owning many Bibles means that they may hold less value individually whilst simultaneously offering – or demanding – to be put to use in some way, rather than being allowed to gather dust. Owning many Bibles frees the owner-reader to place less value on the individual, material artefact and therefore to make an intervention to the book. Owning multiple copies of the Bible also means that there are others available and so creative incursions on the text that make it less legible do not matter because there is always another Bible to read if this one is no longer legible. Conversely, I suggest, Bible journalling is *also* precisely about investing a Bible with personal, and significantly, *material* “added value.” It’s a personal embellishment that individualises a Bible beyond stereotypical niche marketing. It may in some instances be a subtle form of resistance to clichéd designs.

Bible journalling has become a significant driver of Bible sales, and journalling Bibles are a lucrative business. Tyndale Publishers produced their first journalling Bible in 2016. “Our first three journalling Bibles that we published – a leatherlike, hard cover, and soft cover – were all extremely popular from the very beginning, and the first printings sold out quickly, and then over the first year, each additional printing was sold out before the new stock arrived. We have since then expanded to additional designs and features, including *Inspire Psalms*, *Inspire Praise*, and we will be releasing a girl’s edition later this year.

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of Kells and the Visual Identity of Ireland,” in *Ireland and the Reception of the Bible, Social and Cultural Perspectives*, eds. Bradford A. Anderson and Jonathan Kearney (London: Bloomsbury, 2018): 295–312, at 299.

<sup>11</sup> Timothy Beal, *The Rise and Fall of the Bible: The Unexpected History of an Accidental Book* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012). Jeffrey S. Siker, *Liquid Scripture: The Bible in a Digital World* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2017).

We also have several other popular journalling Bibles: *Thrive*, *Expressions*, and *Reflections*.<sup>12</sup> Tyndale's NLT *Inspire Bible* (The Bible for Colouring and Creative Journalling) which came out in March 2016 was ECPA's (Evangelical Christian Publishers Association) Bestselling Bible of 2016 (the year it was published).<sup>13</sup> It was a Christian Retailing's BEST Award Winner (Bible: Journalling category) at the 2017 awards. The *Inspire Bible* is doing extremely well in the Christian marketplace, retailing at the time of writing at between \$33–\$40 USD; it has a trendy and colourful illustrated cover. A departure from the formality of black leather and gold lettering, it features a bird and a butterfly collaged alongside large roses and lilies in full colour. Stamped around them are white peonies, over a polka dot patterned background. It has a decidedly "vintage" look, with a hint of typography in the lower third with the French word D'HORTICULTURE standing out. Two other versions of the Tyndale *Inspire Bible* (Silky Vintage and Softcover) featured in the top ten bestsellers for 2016.<sup>14</sup> The NIV Beautiful Word Bible, a journalling Bible published by Zondervan, comes in at number ten on this list, with a further two ESV Journalling Bibles by Crossway in the top twenty.<sup>15</sup> Figures for 2017 show three journalling Bibles in the top twenty, published by Tyndale and Zondervan.<sup>16</sup>

Bible journalling might be said to find its commercial origin in the scrapbooking trend of the last two decades.<sup>17</sup> It was perhaps inevitable that a clever marketer would make the link eventually and something of scrapbooking would find its way into the world of Bible publishing and its seemingly insatiable drive to find ever new ways of selling the best-selling book in the world. "How do you monetise Bibles when so many are freely available?" Timothy Beal asked; his answer being that, "The challenge is to keep reinventing the Bible

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<sup>12</sup> Email correspondence with a Tyndale Publishing marketing executive (25 May 2018).

<sup>13</sup> "Inspire Bible NLT," <https://www.tyndale.com/p/inspire-bible-nlt/9781496413734>.

<sup>14</sup> "Bible Bestsellers, Best of 2016. Compiled and distributed by the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association," <http://christianbookexpo.com/bestseller/bibles.php?id=BO16>.

<sup>15</sup> "Bible Bestsellers, Best of 2016," <http://christianbookexpo.com/bestseller/bibles.php?id=BO16>.

<sup>16</sup> "Bible Bestsellers, Best of 2017," <http://christianbookexpo.com/bestseller/bibles.php?id=BO17#>. Current monthly figures for 2018 show two journalling Bibles in the top twenty: "Bible Bestsellers, September 2018," <http://christianbookexpo.com/bestseller/bibles.php?id=0918>.

<sup>17</sup> Jack Neff, "Scrapbooking Gets Reinvented to Suit New Digital Reality," 25 July 2011. <http://adage.com/article/news/scrapbooking-reinvented-suit-digital-reality/228856/>. "A study by Scrapbooking.com, an online magazine serving the industry, found industry sales peaked at under \$2.6 billion in 2004 and 2005 and then began declining slowly to \$1.7 billion by 2009." Current estimates are that there is still a healthy \$1.5 billion scrapbooking-supplies industry in the United States.

in new got-to-have, value-added forms.”<sup>18</sup> In the instance of journalling Bibles, the added-value far exceeds “innovative packaging and physical format,” as it extends its reach into the expansive parallel world of hobby arts and crafts stationery and materials. The combining of these two economic phenomena is explosive indeed.

Interestingly, at the time of writing, the number one bestseller on Amazon in the Christian books and Bibles section is not a Bible but a book about *how to do Bible Journalling*.<sup>19</sup> This is a critical aspect in the marketing of Bible journalling. The journal Bible, with its wide margins, sometimes left blank but usually lined, and designed with the intention that the reader embellish the margin with their own written or drawn notes and doodles, is the core product around which there are a plethora of other “spin-off” or peripheral products. In the main this other merchandise might be termed “stationery” and consists of everything from designed patterned papers, stickers, washi tape (sellotape with either patterns or texts), a phenomenal array of coloured pencils, pens and markers, watercolour kits, gesso, paints, glues, tracing papers, and templates. A quick look at the blogs reveals that those blogging on these matters are in turn working closely with many of the journalling materials companies to promote their products – as they blog their experiments with different gel pens and gessos. Bookshops hold Bible journalling workshops and in-store events with designers, bloggers and authors giving demonstrations on how to use different products.

## 4 Bible Journalling: Women’s Spirituality and Agency

One striking dimension of Bible journalling that is revealed in the public presentation on social media such as Instagram and Pinterest is that it appears to be almost universally practiced by women.<sup>20</sup> The blogs and vlogs that teach people how to begin Bible journalling are produced by women for women. The same may be said for much of the merchandising that has been developed: the stationery,

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<sup>18</sup> Beal, *Rise and Fall*, 49.

<sup>19</sup> Fink and Yoder, *Complete Guide*, with 4.7 stars and 365 customer reviews. This paperback book includes “270 Full-Color Stickers, 150 Designs on Perforated Pages, 60 Designs on Translucent Sheets of Vellum” and presently retails new at between \$10–\$20 USD online.

<sup>20</sup> In my research I found only a few male Bible-journalers who display their pages publicly (James Presley, Alvin Keyte and Andrew Coates).

washi tapes, stickers, lettering, and templates are clearly oriented towards female consumers, and designed and developed by female artists.<sup>21</sup>

Traditionally, in the history of the Christian (and indeed, Jewish and Muslim) illumination of sacred Scriptures the scribes were men, usually clerical men within the ecclesiastical hierarchy.<sup>22</sup> However, recent research has shown that women of the Middle Ages, especially those in convents, were prolific in their artistic output, and this included beautiful, high quality illumination of Bibles, Books of Hours, psalters and prayer books, but received almost no scholarly attention until the last few decades.<sup>23</sup> The nature of their work, which often included embroidered textiles or miniature illustrations, was deemed insignificant and of little interest.<sup>24</sup> Wealthy medieval laywomen are now also understood to have commissioned and owned books and through such patronage played a vital role in the development of new iconographic forms. Excluded, as they were, from most public religious life and usually literate only in the vernacular, these female patrons stimulated the growth of vernacular language devotional literature.<sup>25</sup> When read in light of these historical precursors, Bible journalling can also be seen as the development of a contemporary, vernacular, devotional, visual language.

Despite the rich history of illuminated Bibles in the Christian tradition, many women beginning Bible journalling express anxiety about drawing directly into a printed Bible. One guide speaks of Valerie, who “was at first unsure about working directly in a book that contains the Word of God.”<sup>26</sup> Shanna Noel, now owner of one of the most successful online fora and shops for Bible journalers

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**21** Examples include “Print and Pray Shop,” online at <https://www.illustratedfaith.com/shop/>, and “Bible Journalling,” online at <https://www.dayspring.com/bible-journaling>, featuring the artwork of many female artists.

**22** Keith Houston, *The Book: A Cover-to-Cover Exploration of the Most Powerful Object of Our Time* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2016), 155–174.

**23** See: *Sermologium*, MS Douce 185. c. 1320–50. Bodleian Library, Oxford. This is an exquisite book of homilies illuminated by a group of nuns in northern Germany.

**24** A review of the literature in this regard may be found in Lila Yawn Bonghi, “Medieval Women Artists and Modern Historians,” *Medieval Feminist Newsletter* 12/1 (1991): 10–19.

**25** Susan Croag Bell, “Medieval Women Book Owners: Arbiters of Lay Piety and Ambassadors of Culture,” in *Women and Power in the Middle Ages*, ed. Mary Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2004): 149–87.

**26** Fink and Yoder, *Complete Guide*, 64. Brian Malley writes, “Specific biblical texts are, for the most part, influential because they are part of the Bible, part of ‘God’s word.’ Expressions like ‘the word of God,’ ‘God’s word,’ and ‘the word of the Lord,’ refer to a kind of authoritative discourse that includes the Bible, but is seldom limited to it.” See: “Understanding the Bible’s Influence,” in *The Social Life of Scriptures: Cross Cultural Perspectives on Biblicism*, ed. James S. Bielo (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2009): 194–204, at 196.

wrote about being worried about being judged for drawing in her Bible: “I was extremely nervous to share my new form of worship as I wasn’t sure how people would react to it.”<sup>27</sup> Since the demise of the illuminated manuscript over five centuries ago, the densely-printed sacred page has held a particular authority. Whilst verbal additions – the writing of notes in the margin – to this sacred page have been largely sanctioned, especially in personal Bibles, until recently visual additions have been viewed with some suspicion. The hegemony of the verbal mode and the densely-printed page is well documented. This move towards the mode of the visual is consistent with the “visual turn” that is taking place in society generally emerging largely from the digital revolution and its multimodal use of the visual mode. Wide-margin journaling Bibles were initially intended for written notes, inspired by Sunday service sermons, the fruit of Bible Study sessions and personal reflection.<sup>28</sup> The move towards the visual has been initiated by women from within the Bible-reading community and the uptake has been exponential, facilitated largely through online sharing on Instagram and Pinterest. Most of those now posting, writing, blogging and vlogging about Bible journaling became aware of and began to journal themselves as recently as 2014 in most recorded instances.<sup>29</sup> This is a highly significant development in the practice of Bible-reading and the reception of the Bible among “lay” women because women are claiming agency in their practice of Bible-reading and their authority to make visual and material interventions in their Bibles. It is significant that for the first time in over five hundred years women are illustrating and illuminating Bibles. This is a visual reception of and engagement with the Bible that it is led by women and almost exclusively (at this time) practiced by women. Unlike the illuminations of the scribes of the past, these drawings and paintings are about a personal interpretation of the text.

Agency has been facilitated to some extent through the creation of these wide margins in Bibles. Nonetheless, it is a minimal change to the traditional page layout conventions of the Bible as a printed book. The agency claimed by the

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<sup>27</sup> Shanna Noel, “Our Story,” online at <https://www.illustratedfaith.com/our-story/>.

<sup>28</sup> James S. Bielo, *Words Upon the Word, An Ethnography of Evangelical Group Bible Study* (New York: New York University Press, 2009). Bielo has written a substantive account of Evangelical Bible-reading practice. “Evangelicals throughout the United States emphasise the need for Bible study in their individual and collective lives. [...] Bible study contends strongly for being the most consequential form of religious practice to the ever-evolving contours of American Evangelicalism. From a sheer numerical perspective, it is the most prolific type of small group in American society, with more than 30 million Protestants gathering every week for this distinct purpose. As a matter of substance, it provides individuals a unique opportunity to engage in open, reflexive, and critical dialogue” (3).

<sup>29</sup> Fink and Yoder, *Complete Guide*, 54–96.

artists, on the other hand, is extraordinary, as is their creativity. Breaking out and beyond the prescribed blank margin they make incursions into and over the printed text, frequently claiming the full page in their design. This emerging practice is indicative of a wider, personal authority over biblical interpretation being claimed by women readers and most especially “lay” readers, those with no pastoral or teaching role in a church, nor formal education in Biblical Studies. They are, in ways not dissimilar to the readers of Biblezines – as studied by Susan Harding, “in some fundamental ways making themselves as religious subjects and prying open living spaces for themselves.”<sup>30</sup>

Theologian Nicola Slee writes: “As many feminists have argued, one of the key struggles for women in our time is to find a voice and a language to name our experience in terms which are authentic and empowering, against a patriarchal culture in which women’s silence and invisibility have been normative, women’s experience systematically occluded, and where the only language available for naming has been codified in terms of male meanings.”<sup>31</sup> One method that emerged in women’s spirituality over recent decades as a way of claiming back this power and of exercising the agency to name spiritual experience has been the process of journaling.

The keeping of a diary or journal is a tradition that dates back at least a thousand years, to the “pillow books” kept by the women of the Japanese court during the tenth century.<sup>32</sup> While most known journals published in the past were written by men, there is reason to believe that women were writing them in equal if not greater numbers. Marlene Schiwy explains: “Often denied a voice in the public realm and the possibility of publication, women have kept diaries in order to communicate with themselves, to explore the meaning of their lives, and to

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**30** Susan Harding, “Revolve, *the Biblezine*: A Transevangical Text,” in *The Social Life of Scriptures: Cross Cultural Perspectives on Biblicalism*, ed. James S. Bielo (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2009):176–193, at 189. Harding argues that the implied “listening position” (of the girl readers) in *Revolve*, a Christian Biblezine published by Thomas Nelson, is not “passive.” “The girls have voice and voices” (189).

**31** Nicola Slee, *Women’s Faith Development* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 67.

**32** Jennifer New, *Drawing from Life: The Journal as Art* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2005), 16. One of the most renowned is the “*The Pillow Book of Sei Shonagon*,” by a member of the Japanese court in the Heian period at the end of the tenth century. The author of the pillow book described her activity thus: “I set about filling the notebooks with odd facts, stories from the past, and all sorts of other things, often including the most trivial material. On the whole I concentrated on things and people that I found charming and splendid; my notes are also full of poetry and observations on trees and plants, birds and insects.”

give form to their creative impulses.”<sup>33</sup> In their important study of women’s psychological development, *Women’s Ways of Knowing*, Mary Field Belenkey and her coauthors cite journal writing as a powerful tool in the evolution of a woman’s self, voice and mind.<sup>34</sup> The diary is a place where women think and feel their way through key concerns and issues that determine their lives. “Nowhere is the true nature of our psychic development more clearly evident. In journals we see emotion and thought, intuition and experience fused into something quite different from our usual attempts to be logical. What we write and read in diaries is a language of the heart.”<sup>35</sup> Schiwy continues:

Women have historically had a different relationship with literature and language than men. We have provided the admiring audience for male linguistic performance; only rarely have we possessed pen and paper of our own. Even when we have, the language hasn’t fit our experience; the words have not come out right. But now, more than ever, claims the literary critic Nicole Brossard, “The question for women in playing with language is really a matter of life and death. We’re not just playing for fun in a kind of game. We’re finding our own voice, exploring it, and making new sense where the general sense has lost meaning and is no longer of use.” Through keeping a diary, we begin to find our own words, our own language, our own voices. We start to tell our own stories.<sup>36</sup>

Bible journalling is far from a feminist movement. Wide margin Bibles predate this visual development in Bible Journalling. They were initially designed to facilitate the taking of notes during sermons and Bible Study classes and groups. And, indeed, this is how they were used, the freehand written text of the reader supplementing the printed text with notes and insights gleaned often under the instruction of others, frequently male pastors. No doubt many Bible journallers would resist this feminist understanding of their contemporary journalling practices. The majority of Bible journalling shared online takes place in what are perceived to be religiously conservative social groups where male elders and pastors continue to hold authority over the interpretation of the Bible (and may claim a biblical mandate for doing so). In many ways these are the most unlikely and incongruous settings for a reflexive practice to emerge that facilitates women claiming agency over their own spiritual experience. And yet, this burgeoning movement enables women to engage with the Bible in a personal, intimate way

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**33** Marlene A. Schiwy, *A Voice of Her Own: Women and the Journal Writing Journey* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), 16.

**34** Mary Field Belenkey, et al., *Women’s Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind* (New York: Basic Books, 1986).

**35** Schiwy, *A Voice of Her Own*, 22.

**36** Schiwy, *A Voice of Her Own*, 23.

and then journal visually back into the Bible something of their own spiritual appropriation of that text in the light of their own life experience. Gleaned from her research into women's written journalling, Slee notes their creative use of metaphor:

Struggling to overcome the stultifying effects of silencing or false naming which renders their experience and meanings impotent, they reach for images, metaphors and combinations of metaphor which can evoke the reality of their lives. The potency of their metaphoric language is testimony to their linguistic creativity and to the ownership of their lives towards which they aspire. Even when their words assert a sense of spiritual powerlessness, the originality of the images they use to describe this reality gives the lie to its ultimate thralldom. By its very presence, metaphoric creativity – when it is not merely the repetition of stock imagery or unthinking assent to “dead metaphor” is indicative of women's spiritual vibrancy and engagement in the claiming of experience and the naming of the powers that be.<sup>37</sup>

The templates and design ideas presented to beginner journallers are designed to fit, to be contained within the margin given in the page layout. The supplied graphics may also be said, on occasion, to conform to “stock imagery,” perhaps even a kitsch sentimentality. Many of the women who engage in Bible journaling may well assent to the patriarchal structure of their religious practice but what is emerging in their artistic journalling practice is frequently striking in its originality and “spiritual vibrancy.” One fascinating example is an online community of Bible journallers who have engaged with the female characters in the Bible, selecting one per day for a month, and producing a journal entry, in the relevant place, featuring that female biblical character.<sup>38</sup> Whilst the explicit objective of claiming a voice may not be remotely in the minds of female Bible journallers, that is in fact what is emerging; a new visual illumination of biblical texts that illustrates the interpretation and appropriation of the Bible by female readers for their own personal spiritual growth. This is expressed multimodally, through both image and word, in the most apt metaphors and symbols available to these groups of female Bible readers. As such it is a highly significant development in female Bible reading and reception and, like the illuminated manuscripts of the Middle Ages, is worthy of scholarly attention and analysis.

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<sup>37</sup> Slee, *Women's Faith Development*, 67.

<sup>38</sup> A group of Dutch Bible journallers took as a project amongst themselves in their online group to focus on a different female character of the Bible every day for a month, under the collective hashtags: #woordvrouw and #31daysofbiblicalwomen. These they then share on Instagram.

## 5 “Red Rain Boots” and “War in Syria”: An analysis of two Bible Journal designs

A journalled entry in a Bible that is a good example of a “newly made sign”<sup>39</sup> is a full-page, watercolour painting over a page of text that features Deut 11:4–32 (Fig. 1) by Carol Belleau. From this page a section of text is highlighted within a red border. This is the ESV text for Deut 11:11–14:

But the land that you are going over to possess is a land of hills and valleys, which drinks water by the rain from heaven, a land that the LORD your God cares for. The eyes of the LORD your God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year to the end of the year. “And if you will indeed obey my commandments that I command you today, to love the LORD your God, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul, he will give the rain for your land in its season, the early rain and the later rain, that you may gather in your grain and your wine and your oil.”

The final phrase of 11:14b: “that you may gather in your grain and your wine and your oil” is omitted from the bordered selection in this journalled page. The border is red, like the rain boots, and this text is not painted over, it is kept clear and easily legible. It is foregrounded in front of the left boot. There is a further, personal reiteration of Deut 11:14a in black handwritten pen under the boots in a puddle: “*He will give you rain for your land in its season, the early rain and the later rain.*” This is followed by a reference to the longer, bordered section above, from whence it is quoted: *Deut 11:11–14* and dated: *10·24·16*.<sup>40</sup> There is also a digital watermark, *carol@belleauway.com*, which serves both as a signature and contact email address for the artist when she uploads her images to the various online

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<sup>39</sup> This will be a social semiotic analysis. See: Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen, *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2006) for a full explication of this analytical approach to multimodal communications. Kress and van Leeuwen explain, “We see representation as a process in which the makers of signs [...] seek to make a representation of some object or entity, whether physical or semiotic, in which their interest in the object, at the point of making the representation, is a complex one, arising out of the cultural, social and psychological history of the sign-maker, and focused by the specific context in which the sign-maker produces the sign. [...] In social semiotics the sign is not the pre-existing conjunction of a signifier and a signified, a ready-made sign to be recognised, chosen and used as is.... Rather, we focus on the process of sign-making, in which the signifier (the form) and the signified (the meaning), are relatively independent of each other until they are brought together by the sign-maker in a *newly made sign*” (7–8, emphasis mine).

<sup>40</sup> The dating of journal entries is recommended by those who write in this area.



Fig. 1: Carol Belleau: *Deut 11:11–14*. With kind permission of the artist.

fora, most notably Pinterest, where she has her artwork on display for others interested in Bible Journalling.<sup>41</sup>

There is a narrowing selection of text operating throughout the page. The text of Deut 11:4–32 appears in the galley of type from top left to bottom right. From this, Deut 11:11–14a has been selected for special attention, surrounded with a bold, red border and further highlighted through the contrast set up with the bright red boot it now appears to overlap. This particular couple of verses is deemed so important it is not painted over – as is the rest of the text in the centre

<sup>41</sup> The online sharing of these images raises its own questions about motivations, intentions and privacy. It is repeated vigorously in the books and online fora that no comparison should be entered into at all. There is no competitive element intended and that the online sharing is for mutual enjoyment, inspiration and upliftment. This would be consistent with Bielo's findings of a "collaborative, positive atmosphere" from his observation of Bible study groups, an experience familiar to many, if not most, Bible journalers: "All maintained a good relationship among the members, resulting in a group dynamics that were familiar, amiable, and committed to cooperation. This norm of congeniality does reflect a foundational goal of Bible study – to have a constructive spiritual experience as a group." Bielo, *Words Upon the Word*, 161.

of the page. The red border strongly links the selected text with the red boots and begins the separation and appropriation of this text. Finally, in a further narrowing down, Deut 11:14a, is personally written by hand on the page. It is a quotation taken from the larger text and given special focus. These lines of text are written along, and therefore subtly underlined by, the ripples of water displaced by the boots walking through the rain. A slight change is made to the text by the artist: “he will give *the* rain” becomes “he will give *you* rain.”<sup>42</sup> The personal appropriation of the promise made in the text is complete. The promise of rain has literally shifted from the established printed text, the dialogue of Moses with the Israelites in the desert, to the personal life of the reader and artist who has now visually and verbally appropriated this promise of God into her own life and context, here and now.

The scriptural text speaks of the blessing of rain, “*in its season, the early rain and the later rain,*” – both at planting and before harvesting, an ongoing, seasonal blessing. The rain boots strengthen this idea – there will be much rain, puddles; “wellies” will be required. Rain boots are also about comfort in the rain, the rain does not overwhelm, the wearer stays protected and dry in the rain. This is a positive relationship with the rain. The red colour is highly saturated, bright, strong and suggestive of positivity and energy. A link is made between rain and being energised for action. The right foot is slightly raised, indicating movement, a walk or a dance in the rain – the rain is celebrated.

This is an intriguing work of art. A pair of highly salient red rain boots walk through the rain drops plopping around them into puddles on the ground. The viewer is placed up close to the boots, depicted frontally, at the level of the knees, which suggests an intimate and indeed personal experience or appropriation of the legs in the boots. In this way, the viewer is enabled to imagine one’s own legs within the boots. There is a high level of engagement facilitated with the shiny boots. There is no perspective or distance or landscape to distract the viewer away from the boots.

There are two primary puddles on the left, a larger and a smaller – perhaps suggestive of the two rains: “early” and “later” mentioned in the text. They appear on the left hand side of the composition, and are closely identified with the scripture passage, layered over the printed text. In visual semiotics, the left hand side of a composition is taken to signify that which is established, or “given”, contrasted with the new information or element on the right hand side.

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<sup>42</sup> This is, in fact, the translation that appears in the NKJV, however, it is not the version that appears on the page here. The NKJV translation of Deut 11:14 is “I will give *you* the rain for your land in its season.”

Here, both the biblical text and its visual illustration in the rain is depicted in this “given” position in relation to the receiver of the blessing/rain, wearing the boots on the right, in the “new” position. The promised rain falls and gathers most predominantly over the printed text, the “Word of God,” reiterating visually that it is the fulfilment of God’s word. These puddles are connected through an “S” shape that spirals around both. Concentric circles ripple outwards, and an underlying spiral dynamism is created through the stronger lines and washes in the painting. The intrinsic symbolic properties of a circular or spiral pattern are indicative of eternity. This is known as a *helical* vector, an “infinity” sign.<sup>43</sup> The rain shall continue; the later rain shall follow the early rain, and this shall repeat and repeat. God’s favour has begun and is ongoing. The wearer of the red boots walks in this blessing.

The extremely shallow perspective renders this artwork almost abstract in terms of space and time. The blue, watery wash of the rain fills half the page and appears to run off the edges, as it is free flowing. We are in the “here and now.” There is no horizon line, the image bringing us right down to earth and the very immediate area around the boots. The time is this immanent, present moment of raining. It is visually implied, through the strong “S” spiral, that this shall continue. Within the naturalistic coding orientation, the absence of setting lowers modality. In other words, the rain and the boots are treated in a naturalistic way; they are not abstract, yet the absence of a clearly defined environment around them lessens the sense of realism and opens up the possibility of a symbolic interpretation to the rain and boots. The lack of spatial perspective and any context of place imply an interpretation beyond simply the literal meaning. Indeed, this is borne out in the artist’s commentary on this work:

In a spiritual sense my husband and I were ordained as Pastors over the marriage and family ministry at our church in the summer of 2016. That fall we found ourselves praying something similar to this as we were “planting” new “seeds” in our new ministry and asking for God’s blessing (rain) over the growth of the ministry and future harvest of restored marriages and families as we tried to serve Him diligently. We want to walk in the direction He is guiding us and in His blessing; feet seemed the appropriate picture as I reflected on this scripture and it’s meaning in my life. **The puddles and rain depict His abundant blessing and the red rain boots symbolises our faith to expect and be ready to receive His blessing. You only wear rain boots when you are expecting rain, right?**<sup>44</sup>

The artist’s commentary bears out indeed that a rich, personal, metaphorical interpretation has been made; the “land” is their new pastoral ministry, that they

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<sup>43</sup> Kress and van Leeuwen, *Reading Images*, 70–71.

<sup>44</sup> Carol Belleau in personal correspondence by email, with kind permission. Emphasis mine.

understand and describe in terms of agricultural metaphors: “planting” and nurturing its growth to the fullness of “harvest”. The rain is God’s blessing over this work. Neither land, as such (certainly not the “land” referred to in the biblical text) nor their ministry appear in the illustration. The boots symbolise their faith in expectation of God’s blessing and their willingness to actively and energetically engage with it. The sense of expectation and immediacy is heightened by the extremely shallow depth and perspective depicted and the viewer’s placement right up close to the boots walking in the rain.

The second illumination (Fig. 2) I wish to explore comes from a Dutch Bible-journaler Salomé Vleeming, who uploads her artwork to Instagram, but does not appear to be on Pinterest. It is a good and rare example of a page that moves outside of the personal relationship with God towards those who suffer in the world. This page is labelled “- war in Syria -” (lower left corner) and dated “Jan’18” (lower right corner). The reference “Psalm 112:4” appears under the main lettering element. The biblical text featured extends from Psalm 110:2b to Psalm 112:8. One sentence (112.4) is highlighted, by having an incomplete border, like brackets on either side, placed around the outer edges of the printed verse and no colour wash painted in behind it. It is worth noting that the Bible itself is in Dutch, while the artist has chosen to use English for her designs over the Dutch text. In her descriptor on Instagram, she describes briefly in English and then in Dutch what this journal art is about for her. She also notes in the Dutch explanation that this is her first Bible journalling artwork of 2018, “Mijn eerste pagina van 2018.”<sup>45</sup> She writes:

The LIGHT dawns in the DARKNESS for the upright... i [sic] wanted to do something in my bible with this picture in my head of the war in Syria. So much pain and suffering but in the midst of it all there are people who help and love others, there are children who play like ours... God loves them and He will be with them.<sup>46</sup>

In Dutch she writes: “I had this image in my head for days, but found it difficult to reproduce a picture of war in my Bible.”<sup>47</sup> This, along with “My first page of 2018,” suggests that this picture may have appeared in the news media around Christmas, a time when a Bible-reader might have been particularly sensitive

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<sup>45</sup> Salomé Vleeming, “salomebiblejournaling,” Instagram post, 9 January 2018, <https://www.instagram.com/p/BdvjcZzgqOl/?taken-by=salomebiblejournaling>. Salomé Vleeming is a Dutch Bible-journaling artist and may be found on Instagram at Salomebiblejournaling.

<sup>46</sup> Vleeming, “salomebiblejournaling,” <https://www.instagram.com/p/BdvjcZzgqOl/?taken-by=salomebiblejournaling>. Accessed 6 February 2018.

<sup>47</sup> Vleeming, “salomebiblejournaling,” <https://www.instagram.com/p/BdvjcZzgqOl/?taken-by=salomebiblejournaling>.

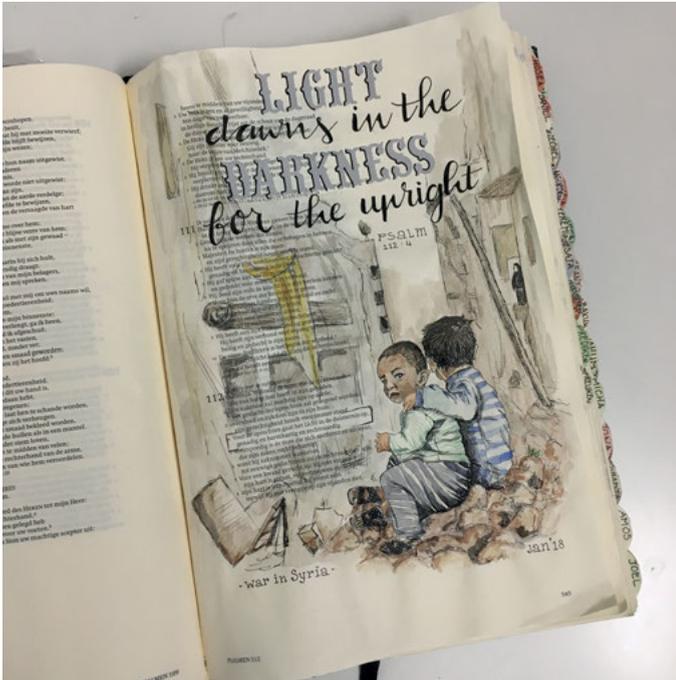


Fig. 2: Salomé Vleeming, *Psalm 112:4*. With kind permission of the artist.

to the plight of children, particularly in the Middle East. This is an interesting statement from the artist, reflecting the emotional impact of the original, news-reportage photo upon her, staying with her “for days.” Some scholars might find her reluctance to depict an image of war in her Bible a strange and ironic concern considering how much violence and war, often sanctioned or even commanded by God, and indeed in that geographical region, is already present in the text, most especially in the Hebrew Bible.

The font chosen for the words Light and Darkness is a bold, thick, slab-serif letter with a spur (Fig. 3).<sup>48</sup> It has the look of nineteenth century woodcut or hand-stencilled lettering, most readily associated with American pioneer life (cowboy saloons and “Wanted” posters in Westerns). It is also a “display”

**48** A slab serif font is characterised by thick, block-like serifs that may be either blunt, angular or rounded. Slab serifs were invented in and most popular during the nineteenth century. A spur is an added serif that projects out horizontally at the midpoint of the height of the letter, or on the curve. Spur slab serif typefaces are also referred to as “Western” typefaces because of their popularity in the US in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.



the other faces away into the distance behind towards a female figure dressed in black, standing in a doorway or on a ledge of a partially collapsed building. The destruction of Syrian cities such as Homs and Aleppo, as brought to us by the media, comes instantly to mind when we see this image. Although not a lot of detail is given, the pile of rubble, the dilapidated building in the distance, and exposed beam, shred of curtain, broken window and crumbling wall all imply the site of recent bombing that has brought down buildings and left peoples' homes without external walls – if they still exist at all. It is an image of chaos and destruction. The figure in the distance may or may not be their mother. Again, we have no way of knowing what social relationships exist between these three figures. The woman appears to stand on a ledge. Possibly, she has no way down to ground level to reach the two little children. Except for this figure, the children are lost and alone, looking anxiously about them, sitting isolated in this devastated city.

The foregrounded boy looks directly out of the centre of the composition at the viewer. He makes eye contact with the viewer and therefore establishes an emotional connection with viewer. Bearing in mind the real-life context of this image, derived from real news coverage of the war in Syria, this may well explain why this image affected the artist and was “in my head for days” – a psychological demand, an emotional connection was established, through the power of the direct gaze, between herself and the little boy in her original viewing of this photograph. The second child engages with the woman in the distance, the only other human being in this picture.

The compositional layout of the various elements in this design are of particular interest. There are three elements worthy of closer consideration. First, the large, vertically diagonal beam on the right. The placement of this beam, leaning against the wall, suggests that the front of the woman's home has been blown away. It also makes it clear that she is not on the ground floor and may herself be stranded in this bombed building. Visually, the beam serves as a divider that separates the children from the woman. It appears they are not physically able to reach one another. Secondly, the beam acts as a vector that connects the last word of the scripture quotation “upright” with the woman. The beam points to the word “upright” and leads the eye to the woman.

Thirdly, the composition is divided up into three clear areas in both horizontal and vertical directions. On the vertical axis, these are: the building overlapping the biblical text; the gap between the buildings; and the buildings in the

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Waleed, 3, and in Aleppo. The artist has created an original composite image from a selection of media images of the bombing of Aleppo.

distance on the right. A three-way distinction may be observed in the horizontal layout too. The upper third contains the lettering; the middle third, a shred of curtain in front of a horizontal beam; a blank space in the centre; and the buildings with the (almost) silhouetted woman on the right. Finally, the children are in the lower third. This three-way, type of composition sets up zones that recognised as “mediatory”, as what happens in the centre mediates between the two outer zones.<sup>50</sup>

The artist has chosen to write her scripture passage in the top third of the composition, referred to in this type of social semiotic analysis as the “heavenly” or divine realm (Fig. 3). She opens her quotation with the word “Light”, which she has portrayed with pale grey lettering. Significantly, she has also used the exact same colouring and lettering for the word “Darkness”, reiterating the concept carried in the actual meaning of the phrase, “LIGHT dawns in the DARKNESS.” The word is spelt “Darkness” but visually it says Light. In this way she shows that the “Light” has literally dawned in the “Darkness”, the Darkness is no more, it is now the same as Light. This lettering occurs against a white background with little colour behind it – the lightest area of the page. The white of the paper is largely untouched and also acts as light.

It is not immediately apparent why the journaller chose this particular psalm as it is not a “psalm of lament”, nor does it explicitly refer to war, oppression or justice for the innocent victims of such. The psalm recognises that good people may be afflicted and promises God will support and deliver nonetheless. It praises the “upright”, and the artist’s use of it infers an inclusive understanding of the people depicted as recognised by God as righteous (regardless of their politics). Her choice of and creative rendering of the words “Light” and “Darkness” echo a verse from John’s prologue: “The *light shines in the darkness*, and the darkness can never extinguish it” (John 1:5). An intertextual connection is made, I suggest, between this line from Psalm 112:4 and John 1:5a. The “light” is Christ in the latter suggesting that perhaps the reader-artist has intended a Christological inference may also be read in her painting. The psalms are understood as the prayers of believers directed towards God.<sup>51</sup> Here, the use of the psalter, as the ground, the text over which she makes her illustration, relates directly to her personal prayer for these people of Syria and using this text to do so. Apart from a few contemporary details, it is an image that is timeless to many of the conflicts described in the Hebrew Bible – and this deepens its textual resonance in many ways.

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<sup>50</sup> Kress and van Leeuwen, *Reading Images*, 194–201.

<sup>51</sup> This is an acrostic psalm in the Hebrew but it is not a psalm of lament.

This treatment of a biblical text is unusual in the general body of Bible-journaling art to be found online, as it engages with a major human catastrophe in our time. It looks outward, beyond the self, and reveals a deep compassion for those suffering in the world. The artist has brought the mediated news of the world right into her Bible, committing these particular children and the people of Syria to prayer, placing them “under the word of God,” in a literal, but also very moving way. For all its apparent devastation, it is an image of hope.

## 6 Journaling Sacred Scriptures in Jewish and Islamic Practice

One of the most famous female diarists of all time was, of course, a young Jewish girl: Anne Frank. As it happens, of all the three Abrahamic religions, Judaism is the one with the least apparent take up of the journaling trend at this moment. A search through the online fora of Instagram and Pinterest reveal barely a handful of journalers posting images of their journalled pages.<sup>52</sup> What is certain is that they are not journaling into a material, printed edition of the Torah. There is a small selection of images of scripture passages, being illustrated and “scrapbooked” in blank-page journals – with both English and Hebrew words and verses visible.<sup>53</sup> There is also a growing community of Qur’ān journalers both in the United States and in Great Britain. Again, as is to be expected this journaling happens in separate blank-page journals or diaries and not directly into a printed Qur’ān. These illuminations tend to be text-oriented, as an Arabic Sura is given a beautiful calligraphic treatment with various coloured translations, notes, and reflections written around this featured text. A London-based journaler, Sumayah Hassan, writes of her practice: “All I do is write the date, ayah in Arabic, reference and reflection below that.” (Fig. 4).<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Talia Carbis (@taliamesart) is one Jewish woman, residing in Brisbane, Australia, who is journaling the Torah and using the hashtag #torahjournaling on her Instagram postings.

<sup>53</sup> An example of the scrapbooking-journal trend within Jewish journaling can be found in the guidebook by Janet Ruth Falon, *The Jewish Journaling Book: How to Use Jewish Tradition to Write Your Life & Explore Your Soul* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 2004).

<sup>54</sup> Sumayah Hassan, “What is Quran Journaling? How do you set up your Quran Journal?”, November 27, 2016, <https://www.recitereflect.com/what-is-quran-journaling/>.



**Fig. 4:** Sumayah Hassan, A page of a Qur'an journal featuring Ayah 28 from Surah 21. With kind permission of the artist.

One US-based designer, Ameenah, is developing graphics that can be bought online, downloaded and printed to adorn journal pages with English words and excerpts from Ayah and Sura.<sup>55</sup> Hassan offers courses and workshops in Qur'an journalling in London.<sup>56</sup> Her website states the aim of these is to deepen the reader's relationship with the Qur'an:

The Recite & Reflect workshops, content, and resources are specifically designed to help people connect with the Quran on a personal level, relate it to their everyday lives and develop themselves through its teachings. To help them ask the right questions, derive lessons and come up with action points, that become the first steps of their journey to being transformed by the Quran.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>55</sup> Ameenah, "Quran Journalling: A guide for beginners," <https://www.mariampoppins.com/blog/quran-journaling-a-guide-for-beginners>. She also has accounts on Instagram at @mariampoppins.

<sup>56</sup> Hassan, "What is Quran Journalling?" She also has accounts on Instagram at @ReciteReflect and @imanillustrated.

<sup>57</sup> Hassan, *Recite & Reflect*, "About" page, <https://www.recitereflect.com/about/>.

## 7 Conclusion

Far beyond the illustrative nature of medieval illumination where the illumination related to the text it accompanied on the page, what these women are doing is completely unique. They are engaging in a profoundly deep way with the foundational scripture of their faith, this encounter then personally appropriated, creatively interpreted, expressed and embellished, through its material treatment in the iconic artefact of the Bible. This form of journaling invests the Bible with ever greater materiality – a materiality that is now deeply reflective of personal engagement, time, money, energy and prayer spent contemplating the role and place of these sacred scriptures in the reader’s life. This new experience and understanding is expressed multimodally, in newly made signs, through the embodied labour of the journaler and with other material substances, paints and textiles, patterns and textures, laid into the printed book. Each Bible journal contains a deeply personal account of a spiritual journey – stretching the spine, adding to its heft – a record in the world, not subject to the vagaries of technological advances and redundancies, it stands as a testament to a personal dialogue with the Word of God.

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