

# Hamlin's "Eternal Saint" Jacket: Faith, Offense, and Recognition

In January 2023, NFL player Damar Hamlin suffered cardiac arrest during a nationally televised Monday Night Football game. Millions watched as he was resuscitated. In the days that followed, prayers poured in online and Hamlin encouraged them. Forty days later, he appeared at the Super Bowl to thank first responders, wearing a jacket covered in Christian imagery. The public backlash was intense. Hamlin's sartorial intention was woefully misunderstood.

Some vocal Christians saw the imagery as irreverent or inappropriate. Fellow NFL player Adrian Peterson publicly accused Hamlin of blasphemy. Soon after, Hamlin apologized, explaining that the jacket was abstract art and a sincere expression of gratitude to his Savior. Even so, the controversy highlights a deeper question: can we recognize faith when it appears in unfamiliar forms?

The imagery on the jacket challenges expectations. Christ is depicted in a cartoon-like style, with a crucified figure rendered as a paper doll with detachable garments. To some, this trivialized the central symbol of Christian faith by reducing it to something flimsy and disposable. That reaction is understandable.

Yet Christianity has never relied solely on conventional or dignified imagery. The faith's most central symbol—the cross—was originally an instrument of torture and public humiliation. The crown of thorns was intended as mockery. These were violent symbols later reclaimed and transformed through Christian belief into signs of redemption and victory. Even the term "Good Friday" reflects the faith's willingness to see beyond immediate offense toward deeper meaning.

Hamlin's jacket draws on a contemporary artistic tradition shaped by remixing and reinterpretation. Its



*Damar Hamlin's Eternal Saint Jacket, Super Bowl LVII, front/back, 2023*

imagery draws from hip-hop culture, Takashi Murakami's art, and fashion design, where symbols flow between sacred and secular spaces. What began decades ago as a personal expression of faith for the rapper Notorious B.I.G. after his near-fatal car accident became a fashion icon, and in this moment, was reclaimed again as a public expression of gratitude after another 24-year-old man's brush with death.

One phrase embroidered on the jacket—"Without end or beginning there is no Day and there is no Night"—was read by some as contradicting scripture. Yet it can also be read alongside Psalm 102:25-27:

"In the course of my life, he broke my strength; He cut short my days. So I said: "Do not take me away, my God, in the midst of my days; Your years go on through all generations. In the beginning you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you remain; They will all wear out like a garment. Like clothing you will change them and they will be discarded. But you remain the same, And your years will never end."

Clothing wears out. Bodies fail. God does not.

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