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Paratexts and the Hermeneutics of Digital Bibles

1 Introduction

The Christian Bible is increasingly being read in digital form. In 2018, YouVersion's Bible App had been installed more than 340 million times on "unique devices" worldwide.[1] Some of its more than 1,753 Bible versions in 1,134 languages are likely the most read digital Bibles in the world.[2] A 2014 survey commissioned by communications giant AT&T estimates that one in four Americans who regularly attend a worship service have "used a mobile device/internet to connect with faith or inspiration during worship services."[3] Of those who report connecting to faith-based organisations through a mobile device, twenty-nine percent have used mobile devices to "access electronic holy books and/or song books."[4]

The proliferation of digital technology for reading the Bible raises the question: *What hermeneutical difference does it make when the Bible is engaged digitally?* This question might be answered from a number of perspectives, but for the purposes of this chapter, I want to focus specifically on what we might call the hermeneutical effect, or illocutionary effects, of the Bible's *technology*, print or digital. How might the meaning of the texts and/or the Bible as an object be perceived differently because of the medium? To help answer this question, we will look through one primary lens, *paratextuality*, supplemented by another, material culture – each explained in turn below.[5]

1 Available online at https://www.youversion.com/the-bible-app/ [accessed 18 Sep 2018].

2 I note that in early 2016, youversion.com was reporting just over 1,200 Bible versions in nearly 900 languages, suggesting that in just over two years, around 500 Bible versions and more than 200 languages have been added. https://www.youversion.com/ [accessed 14 Jan 2016].

3 "Inspired Mobility Survey Results" (AT&T), 4, accessed October 10, 2018; online: https://about.att.com/content/dam/snrdocs/Inspired_Mobility_Research_Report.pdf.

4 "Inspired Mobility Survey Results," 5.

5 Much of my work on paratexts and digital Bibles originated in a blog musing I wrote in 2013 and was developed into seminar presentations in 2015 (see: Joshua L. Mann, "Print vs. Digital: The Effect of Pagination on Interpretation," *Joshua L Mann* (blog), March 21, 2013, https://josh.do/print-vs-digital-the-effect-of-pagination-on-interpretation/). Some of the material has been published in an article exploring the hermeneutical effects of a mobile liturgical app (Joshua L. Mann, "Mobile Liturgy: Reflections on the Church of England's Suite of Digital Apps," *Online – Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet* 12 [2017]: 42–59); see also, Joshua L. Mann, "How

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2 Paratextuality

One way to compare digital and print forms of a given text is to compare *paratextual* differences. Gérard Genette, who is responsible for the literary use of the term *paratext*, explains:

> A literary work consists, entirely or essentially, of a text, defined (very minimally) as a more or less long sequence of verbal statements that are more or less endowed with significance. But this text is rarely presented in an unadorned state, unreinforced and unaccompanied by a certain number of verbal or other productions, such as an author's name, a title, a preface, illustrations. And although we do not always know whether these productions are to be regarded as belonging to the text, in any case they surround it and extend it, precisely in order to *present* it, in the usual sense of this verb but also in the strongest sense: to *make present*, to ensure the text's presence in the world, its "reception" and consumption in the form (nowadays, at least) of a book. These accompanying productions, which vary in extent and appearance, constitute what I have called elsewhere the work's *paratext*.[6]

Thus paratexts are hermeneutically significant, exercising illocutionary force on the reader: "Far from being an issue that preoccupies only the theoretically minded, the matter of the paratext is always – albeit often imperceptibly – already at work in the hermeneutic process."[7]

In contrast to Genette's conception of paratextuality, which seemed to focus on the print medium, I offer the following qualifications, which I have made elsewhere,[8] in order to accommodate what might be called *digital* paratexts:

> (1) It matters very little in the following analysis whether or not the "author" legitimates (or accepts responsibility) for a paratext[9]; and (2) the *para* of *paratexts* receives the emphasis, not the *texts*. In other words, paratexts are framing features of the text but not necessarily texts themselves.[10] ... I consider paratexts to be productions that accompany, present, or

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Technology Means: Texts, History, and Their Associated Technologies," *Digital Humanities Quarterly* (2017). Material from both of these articles has been revised and included below.

6 Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. Jane E. Lewin, Literature, Culture, Theory 20 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 1.

7 Laura Jansen, "Introduction: Approaches to Roman Paratextuality," in *The Roman Paratext: Frame, Texts, Readers*, ed. Laura Jansen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014): 1.

8 The following passage is quoted from Mann, "Mobile Liturgy," 44.

9 Cf. Genette *Paratexts*, 2: "By definition, something is not a paratext unless the author or one of his associates accepts responsibility for it."

10 Whereas Genette seemed to envision that most paratexts were themselves textual (e.g., table of contents, publisher's name, etc.). For a similar approach as I take for digital paratextuality, see Yra van Dijk, "The Margins of Bookishness: Paratexts in Digital Literature," in *Examining Paratextual Theory and Its Applications in Digital Culture*, ed. Nadine Desrochers and Daniel Apollon, Advances in Human and Social Aspects of Technology (Hershey, PA: IGI Global, 2014): 24–45.

> contain a text, including productions that facilitate the engagement of a reader.[11] Paratexts may be produced by an author, publisher, software developers, editors, and the like. Paratexts also include visual features associated with typography, page layout, book design or, in software, the interface and its manifold features.[12]

With this in mind, consider the paratexts of a modern, printed Christian Bible, generally a collection of sixty-six or more ancient documents in a single volume. Note that the binding itself is a hermeneutically significant paratext suggesting to the reader or user that these documents *belong* together. This sense of unity is reinforced by other paratextual features, such as uniform typography, page layout, and consecutive page numbering across the bound collection. (It might also be said that these are paratexts inherent to print technology, though not exclusively so). Consider, however, in terms of the text's history, these paratexts potentially obscure the fact that the documents within were completed at various times over the course of a millennium by authors who very likely did not envision that their work would be read alongside all of these other works. Imagine the difference of a user's perception of these texts if, instead, these documents were each individually bound – perhaps 66 thin volumes arranged on a shelf. This is not unlike the arrangement of previous collections of biblical texts as collections of scrolls.[13]

To illustrate further, even a paratextual feature as simple as pagination can have a significant hermeneutical effect. In fact, it was because I had to *turn a page* that I first set off on researching paratextuality and digital Bibles in the first place.[14] In the Gospel of Luke, I came to Jesus' "Triumphal Entry" into Jerusalem which takes place not long before his crucifixion. I came to Luke 19:41 in a Greek New Testament[15] – the last line of the page, a new paragraph, that might be translated into English as: "And as he [Jesus] came near, when he saw the city, he wept

11 Compare a recent narrow definition in reference to the paratexts of biblical manuscripts: "all contents in biblical manuscripts except the biblical text itself are a priori paratexts." Martin Wallraff and Patrick Andrist, "Paratexts of the Bible: A New Research Project on Greek Textual Transmission," *Early Christianity* 6 (2015): 239.

12 Compare similar approaches to applying categories from traditional bibliography to digital texts, including considerations of hermeneutical significance, in: N. Katherine Hayles, "Translating Media: Why We Should Rethink Textuality," *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 16 (2003): 263–90; Matthew G. Kirschenbaum, "Editing the Interface: Textual Studies and First Generation Electronic Objects," *Text* 14 (2002): 15–51; Marlene Manoff, "The Materiality of Digital Collections: Theoretical and Historical Perspectives," *Portal: Libraries and the Academy* 6 (2006): 311–25.

13 See Jocelyn Penny Small, *Wax Tablets of the Mind: Cognitive Studies of Memory and Literacy in Classical Antiquity* (London: Routledge, 1997), 43, 48.

14 Mann, "Print vs. Digital."

15 Nestle-Aland 28th Edition.

over it…". This is a complete sentence grammatically, an independent clause. No punctuation appears at the end of the line, however, and it appears at the end the main text on the page. The sentence continues, but to move from the last word of verse 41 (αὐτήν) to the first word of verse 42 (λέγων), the reader must *turn* the page. Coming to the end of the page created an extra moment for my mind to process what I had just read, with the result that the line about Jesus weeping became all the more dramatic. It is the note that ends the page, as it were. This brief pause of having to turn the page contributed to the meaning that occurred to me during this reading. The text *struck* me in a new way. And one of the key features that gave rise to this meaning is the layout of the page, a property of the codex book form which we might classify as a *paratextual* property. Imagine for a moment that I was reading the text on a mobile device, scrolling through lines of text rather than turning pages. I would never have come to this moment of pause, this moment of page turning.

What then might be a feature unique to a digital biblical text? Consider how the finality of the Bible is far less acute in its digital form compared with its print counterpart. One can hold a printed book – it is bound and not easily modified.[16] A Bible app, on the other hand, is periodically updated with new features, corrections, etc. In short, the paratextual messages of a printed book and its digital counterpart are in some ways distinct. These and other examples will be elaborated more fully below, but first let us introduce how material culture can provide another angle for understanding the hermeneutical impact of digital technology on the biblical text.

3 Material Culture and Digital Texts

A second angle from which to consider the hermeneutics of technology is provided by material culture scholars, who have maintained and interpreted the significance, including hermeneutical effects, of "things" (as opposed to ideas), including religious objects. S. Brent Plate offers a "working definition" of the discipline of material religion:

16 On the physicality of reading in general, see Naomi S. Baron, *Words Onscreen: The Fate of Reading in a Digital World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 131–56. On the Bible in particular, see: Katja Rakow, "The Bible in the Digital Age: Negotiating the Limits of 'Bibleness' of Different Bible Media," in *Christianity and the Limits of Materiality*, ed. Minna Opas and Anna Haapalainen, Bloomsbury Studies in Material Religion 1 (London: Bloomsbury, 2017): 101–21.

> (1) an investigation of the interactions between human bodies and physical objects, both natural and human-made; (2) with much of the interaction taking place through sense perception; (3) in special and specified spaces and times; (4) in order to orient, and sometimes disorient, communities and individuals; (5) toward the formal strictures and structures of religious traditions.[17]

We are interested in the hermeneutical significance of those "interactions" to which the first part of the definition refers. As Colleen McDannell says in *Material Christianity,* "The material world of landscapes, tools, buildings, household goods, clothing, and art is not neutral and passive; people interact with the material world thus permitting it to communicate specific messages."[18] Investigating these *messages* – what a digital Bible communicates by virtue of its technological medium, the technology through which it presents itself to a user – is what we seek to do, and that primarily through the lens of paratexts.

It is important for our purposes not to equate "material" strictly with what is physical in a way that excludes *digital* technology.[19] In fact, as a starting point, let us define technology in its broadest sense. Helpful in this regard is Ferré's definition: "...technology involves (i) implements used as (ii) means to practical ends that are somehow (iii) manifested in the material world as (iv) expressions of intelligence."[20] By referring to technology as "implements...manifested in the material world," the definition applies equally to print and digital media, books and apps, all of which can then be situated comfortably in what we might call *material* culture.

How similar approaches might handle print-digital comparisons of a religious text can be illustrated by the recent respective analyses of Katja Rakow[21] and Tim Hutchings, the latter of whom says, "A material approach to digital religion must consider the differences between digital and physical objects, as well as what

17 S. Brent Plate, "Material Religion: An Introduction," in *Key Terms in Material Religion*, ed. S. Brent Plate (London: Bloomsbury, 2015): 4.

18 Colleen McDannell, *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 2.

19 For a critical summary of how scholars of material culture have treated digital media (as either "essentialist," where materiality applies to what is more-or-less physical, or "binary," where materiality is defined in contrast to what it is not) contrasted with theorists of digital media (who take a "functionalist" approach where "material" extends to whatever "acts like a physical object") see Tim Hutchings, "Augmented Graves and Virtual Bibles: Digital Media and Material Religion," in *Materiality and the Study of Religion: The Stuff of the Sacred*, ed. Tim Hutchings and Joanne McKenzie, Theology and Religion in Interdisciplinary Perspective (London: Routledge, 2017): 87–91.

20 Frederick Ferré, *Philosophy of Technology* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1995), 25.

21 Rakow, "The Bible in the Digital Age."

they have in common."[22] Along these lines, next I will consider what appears to set a digital Bible apart from a printed one, paying special attention to paratexts.

4 Mobile Bible Apps: An Analysis

In what follows, first are general considerations of the hermeneutical significance of the paratexts of digital Bibles relative to their print counterparts. Second are observations and reflections of one specific example, YouVersion's Bible App.

4.1 Significant Paratexts of Digital Bibles Compared to Print

As explored above, in Bible software, paratexts might be produced by agents such as authors, developers, editors, or publishers, and include features of the interface, text layout, and even functionality. Unlike print books, some paratextual properties may be manipulated by the user in real time (e.g., changing font and spacing, removing verse numbers, subtitles, and page numbers, etc.). Further, some paratexts may be dependent on the user's technical environment (especially the operating system and other features of the device, including hardware).

Consider again that the printed Bible in codex form carries a strong paratextual message of canonicity – that the sixty-six (or more) ancient documents bound together *belong* together.[23] The literal binding conveys a message of a canonical binding. We might ask, what is the "binding" paratext – the boundary paratext – of a *digital* Bible? Technically, a computer file containing the text exists, usually marked (or tagged) at document boundaries. Since a reader is generally unaware of this technical boundary, its hermeneutical significance is more difficult to discern.[24] In terms of the electronic display of a biblical text, boundaries might include titles, title pages, chapter or page numbers that indicate a beginning, or a scroll bar that indicates the user's relative location within the document.[25] One

22 Hutchings, "Augmented Graves," 93.

23 Cf. Jeffrey S. Siker who, although not employing paratextuality as I have here and elsewhere, likewise points out potential differences between digital and printed Bibles: *Liquid Scripture: The Bible in a Digital World* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2017), esp. 125–82.

24 I do not deny that the code underlying the text *is* hermeneutically significant. For the purposes of this chapter, however, I am focusing on the readerly encounter with a text.

25 Note that the interface typically includes a "window" within which one scrolls or otherwise moves through the text, but this boundary is not *binding* in the same way as a printed book's binding.

can imagine – and scholars have – ways in which digital technology makes possible user-modified Bibles, custom "canons", which could contribute to general textual instability.[26] So far, however, mainstream digital Bibles allow little in the way of canonical manipulation. For example, YouVersion's navigational paratext includes a dropdown menu which has the books of the Bible in modern canonical order and, when a book is selected, also displays the number of chapters in each book.

Consider also the uniformity of modern printed books in terms of typography, page layout, and other elements of book design – paratextual properties according to my definition – reinforcing the message that the documents are related and belong together since each document (or "book" within) looks and feels exactly the same.[27] Similarly, printed Bibles typically have consecutive page numbering *across* the bound collection, another paratextual message suggesting the unity and progression of its contents.[28] An additional numbering system is commonly used for referencing larger units of each document (consecutively numbered "chapters") under which are smaller units (consecutively numbered "verses", per chapter). These paratexts invite a reader to make reference to quite small units of text, a subtle paratextual message that even the smallest units of the text are important, have authority, and may need to be referenced. The consistency of this reference system across biblical texts, including various editions, versions, and translations of modern Bibles, and even anachronistically used in online editions of digitized manuscripts, subtly suggests readerly, possibly even authorial, agreement about the unit-delineation, and therefore the argument, of the texts. These numbering systems are intentionally absent in some printed Bibles, often called Reader's Bibles, in order to present to the reader a text formatted like familiar modern books. Some Bible applications likewise allow the user to "hide" verse and chapter numbers (and manipulate certain other visual paratextual features).

26 Siker, *Liquid Scripture*, 125–83; Claire Clivaz, "New Testament in a Digital Culture: A Biblaridion (Little Book) Lost in the Web?," *The Journal of Religion, Media and Digital Culture* 3/3 (May 14, 2015): 20–38; D. C. Parker, "Through a Screen Darkly: Digital Texts and the New Testament," *JSNT* 25 (2003): 395–411.

27 Note that while "early printed copies were not all precisely alike…[t]hey were sufficiently uniform for scholars in different regions to correspond with each other about the same citation and for the same emendations and errors to be spotted by many eyes" (Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early Modern Europe* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979], 81); and further: "[Standardization] also involved the 'subliminal' impact upon scattered readers of repeated encounters with identical type-styles, printers' devices, and title page ornamentation" (82).

28 The covers of a Bible, usually made of durable material like leather, also reinforce that the bound collection is significant and belongs together.

Even so, print and digital versions alike present an extremely *uniform* text with their paratexts.

Similarly, as briefly mentioned above, there is finality to a printed Bible, like any printed book – a paratextual message that suggests a pure, original text.[29] That sense of finality is far less obvious in digital Bibles. Accordance Bible Software, for example, periodically alerts the user to available updates, listing specific modules that might include a biblical text – a text that is updated and changed with the click of a button! Not only does this diminish the sense of finality present in a printed text; it also reminds the user that textual transmission of the Bible is perpetual. One is, as it were, standing in it. As David Parker, a New Testament textual critic, once observed after creating an electronic transcription of Codex Sinaiticus: "textual critics, under the guise of reconstructing original texts, are really creating new ones."[30] Parker suggests that as technologies give more ability to the user to manipulate a scholarly edition of a text (like the New Testament), "The result will be a weakening of the status of standard editions, and with that a change in the way in which users of texts perceive their tasks."[31] Note, however, that even in Parker's advanced software, Collate, there is a smoothing over of textual materiality for the sake of the machine, which requires for its input the reduction of a manuscript's text (and any of its physical features) to *characters*, and ultimately 1s and 0s. This "smoothing over" is not only required of the digitization of manuscript, but is the effect of any attempt to produce a critical edition, creating the tension, described by Alan Galey, "between the surface orderliness of scholarly resources and the stubborn irregularity of textual materials."[32]

Another paratext of a digital Bible is the search interface, which might be categorized as a "navigational" paratext (e.g., page numbers, table of contents, page headings, etc.). One of the early promising features of Bible software, and one of the mainstays, is the ability to search the texts within the software. The searching

29 This notion of a pure "original" text persists in many quarters, but many textual critics of biblical texts prefer to speak of the "earliest recoverable text", "initial text", or *Ausgangstext*. See Bart D. Ehrman and Michael W. Holmes, *The Text of the New Testament in Contemporary Research: Essays on the Status Quaestionis*, 2nd ed. Leiden: Brill, 2012).

30 Parker, "Through a Screen," 401. Along these lines, Claire Clivaz (in "New Testament in a Digital Culture") has recently suggested some of the ways that digital texts are challenging modern assumptions about text inherited from the printing press, especially an assumed stability of the text.

31 Parker, "Through a Screen," 404.

32 Alan Galey, "The Human Presence in Digital Artefacts," in *Text and Genre in Reconstruction: Effects of Digitalization on Ideas, Behaviours, Products and Institutions*, ed. Willard McCarty (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2010): 93.

function itself gives meaning, suggesting that these texts are intended to be interrogated, to be studied in deep and complex ways. Further, search interfaces not only do traditional "concordance" work faster (i.e., finding all the instances of a specific word in Scripture), they enable compound searches to be done virtually instantaneously.

In sum, digital and print Bibles contain both similar and distinct paratexts. These paratexts contribute to the meaning derived from the text by a user/reader. Having considered digital Bibles in general, let us now turn to what is very likely the most popular digital Bible in the world.

4.2 Significant Paratexts of YouVersion's Bible App

As stated earlier, YouVersion's Bible App has been downloaded on hundreds of millions of mobile devices worldwide, and it includes more than a thousand Bible versions and languages, respectively. In my own experiences talking with digital Bible users, it is by far the most used mobile Bible app. Rather than simply describe its paratextual features one by one, I want to focus on the user's experience of some specific paratexts when first installing and using the app.[33]

4.2.1 Paratexts During Installation and Initial Use of YouVersion

The first thing one notices is that the app icon depicts a brown leather Bible closed with a red bookmarker ribbon extending from the middle of the pages. Prominent on the cover are the words "Holy Bible". One is presented, then, with a very traditional depiction of the Bible, its sacredness made prominent with the imitation of physical paratexts. The user soon discovers, however, that this "Bible" is also quite *unlike* a traditional printed Bible in many ways.

Upon opening the Bible app for the first time, the user is brought to an initial screen where two options are presented via buttons: the first is the most prominent, filled in with green, and says, "Sign up". The second has no fill (it is transparent) and says "Sign in" (obviously designed for those who have already created an account). Upon selecting "Sign up", the next screen presents three options, the first two filled with color: "Sign up with Facebook" and "Sign up with Google". The third is transparent with the words "Sign up with e-mail". This design arguably encourages the user to sign up with Facebook (as it is the

33 This procedure was carried out on an iPad and an iPhone, each using iOS.

first listed) and corresponds with other ways the app encourages social behavior amongst its users with its features.

4.2.2 Terms of Use and Privacy Policy

Below these three options for signing up is the line, in small print, "By signing up, you agree to our terms and privacy policy" – with the word "terms" hyperlinked to a webpage containing the Terms of Use (hereafter "Terms"), and the phrase "privacy policy" hyperlinked to a webpage containing the Privacy Policy. Whether or not the user actually reads these documents – both are relatively short and simple[34] – the owner and operator of the app, Life Covenant Church, Inc., assumes the user in fact agrees to said terms and policy if in fact (s)he signs up or *uses the app* at all. Importantly, this assumption includes the following: "By using YouVersion, you consent to all actions taken by us with respect to your information in compliance with the Privacy Policy." A responsible user, then, should learn to what terms and policy (s)he is actually agreeing by using the app! The presence of such agreements in using a Bible seems unique in the broader history of the biblical text and worth comment.

In one sense, such legal agreements are hardly surprising to any mobile user who has in fact signed up for other apps and services. Apps usually come with terms that few users actually read.[35] But to contrast this with the use of a print Bible, imagine if a publisher of a printed Bible handed it to someone, saying, "Now if you open this Bible, you are agreeing to the following terms of use... You may do these things; you may *not* do these things." As a matter of fact, most printed Bibles are copyrighted and may even present the reader, albeit briefly, with what is or is not permitted, usually in terms of how many verses may be quoted without written permission. An additional factor complicates the comparison, however: the intellectual property, so to speak, of a Bible app contains a lot of material *other than* the biblical text (e.g., the code that makes the app run, or display text, or allow navigation, etc.). So the question becomes, to what extent is it a *Bible* that one is using – at least in the same sense as a printed Bible? This train of thought is actually quite long and complex, as one can easily ask questions, too, about the mobile device itself and its operating system – *Who owns it, and what are its terms of use, etc.?* Apps, as with all software, have many dependencies. But

34 The "Terms" document is nearly 2,700 words; the "Privacy Policy" is around 5,450 words.

35 David Berreby, "Click to Agree with What? No One Reads Terms of Service, Studies Confirm," *The Guardian*, March 3, 2017; online: https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/mar/03/terms-of-service-online-contracts-fine-print.

given the scope of this chapter, we will simply note the uniqueness in using this digital Bible of an extensive legal agreement, and now limit ourselves to a few of the most interesting Terms to which the user agrees when using the app.

Importantly, the Terms include a section subtitled "Permitted and Unpermitted Use". The first is one of the most significant, prohibiting use of the app "... in any way that violates any federal, state, local or international law or regulation."[36] From a liability standpoint, it seems prudent as an app developer to have such a term; however, to the extent that the app is used as a Bible, it raises an interesting ethical question about whether Christians should encourage the app's use in countries that limit the distribution or use of Christian Bibles (and, in principle, about whether such a prohibition in the Terms is appropriate). Along these lines another section of the Terms state:

> Life.Church, the owner of YouVersion, is based in the state of Oklahoma in the United States. We make no claims that YouVersion or any of its content is accessible or appropriate outside of the United States. Access to YouVersion may not be legal by certain persons or in certain countries. If you access YouVersion from outside the United States, you do so on your own initiative and are responsible for compliance with local laws.[37]

Other terms include the owner's (i.e., Life Covenant Church, Inc.) right to take action against users deemed to be in violation of the Terms, as well as to refer user information to law enforcement. Again, this seems like the sort of thing any developer may include in such a policy to limit their liability. However, it gives the producer of this Bible app significant authority which, given the large numbers of users, is quite alarming.

For the purposes of this chapter, we are really interested in the *hermeneutical* impact of such statements, not the ethical questions, however significant. Thus, to the extent that a user is *unaware* of the Terms, they may make very little difference. However, these terms strongly suggest that the user does not own the Bible on their phone or tablet in any way like they might claim to own a print Bible. Even setting the Terms aside, like any other app on the user's device, it is only ever licensed, not owned. This is technically and legally true, reinforced by reading the Terms of Use, but I think it also *intuitively* true to the user. Although a digital Bible has some of the same paratexts of physical, printed Bibles, one does not *possess* their digital Bible the way they might possess a printed one. The digital Bible user's sense of what the Bible *is* may therefore be impacted by this.

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36 "Terms of Use | The Bible App | Bible.Com," accessed March 23, 2019, https://www.bible.com/terms.

37 "Terms of Use | The Bible App | Bible.Com."

The other important legal document is the Privacy Policy, which centers on how YouVersion uses personal data.[38] Even without using the App, the Privacy Policy makes it clear to the user that a number of social features are built into the app, such as "friends" with whom you can connect and communicate, "events" which one can opt in to see near your location (using location data), and "posts and contributions" which might be public. As will be further discussed below, these paratexts suggest to users that socializing around the biblical text is positive. Relative to other social apps, the Privacy Policy is fairly standard, informing the user that the app collects data to "personalize" the experience, provide services, and enable analytics. Note the following paragraph:

> Device ID and Location. When you access or leave YouVersion, we receive the URL of both the site you came from and the one you go to next. We also get information about your IP address, proxy server, operating system, web browser and add-ons, device identifier and features, and/or ISP or your mobile carrier. We also receive data from your devices and networks, including location data. If you use YouVersion from a mobile device, that device will send us data about your device and GPS location based on your phone settings and access you have granted YouVersion.[39]

Again, all of this is standard in today's web and mobile environment, but when considered in the history of biblical texts, the data collected by the Bible "publisher" is quite remarkable. As before, these paratexts *remind* the user that the owner/developer of the app retains large amounts of control over the experience, minimizing the sense in which this "Bible" within might be thought of as a private possession analogous to a printed book.

4.2.3 Paratextual Features within YouVersion

After signing up, the App opened to John 1 in the King James Version. This choice, which is not made by the user, is a significant one, suggesting to the user that this is a suitable place to begin reading and a suitable translation. Compare this to buying a print Bible with a bookmarker – also a paratextual feature – already placed at John 1 – except in this example the text is automatically "opened" to this location.

Shortly after the app opened to John 1, a notification appeared with the words, "'Bible' Would Like to Send You Notifications," to which the user could

38 "YouVersion Privacy Policy | The Bible App | Bible.Com," accessed March 24, 2019, https://www.bible.com/privacy.
39 "YouVersion Privacy Policy | The Bible App | Bible.Com."

respond with "Don't Allow" or "OK". In iOS (the operating system for Apple's mobile devices), selecting "OK" permits the App to send alerts via sounds/vibrations much like when a user receives a text message. For example, the app has a "Verse of the day" feature, to which the user can agree to be alerted each day. Such notifications, as well the features that use them such as the Verse of the Day or the Bible reading plans, are paratexts suggesting that the user's encounter with the Bible could be (perhaps *should* be) a regular one, an activity important enough to set alerts for.

Along the bottom of the app is a menu bar with five options: "Home", "Read", "Plans", "Search", and "More". In the "Home" area of the App are two tabs. The first is "For You", where a number of sections appear (which can be rearranged). Near the top, "Bible App Activity" is tracked (e.g., it will track how many consecutive days the user has used the app, akin to tracking one's Bible reading consistency). Next is a carousel of Bible reading plans (each plan represented by square images akin to music album covers). The next two sections are "Verse of the Day" which contains the text of a verse and "Verse of the Day images", which is an image upon which the verse is superimposed. There are options to have these verses sent to the user, as well as to share them with others (including via another app the user might have on the mobile device, such as Twitter). The second tab in the "Home" area is "Community", where the user can select a button at the bottom of the screen, "Add Friends". Above the button is the line: "The Bible makes it clear: We need friends – to encourage, inspire, challenge, and love us. And your friends need you too." Most prominently is an image of a person holding a phone – the person surrounded by four floating "bubbles", each with a person inside. Above the image is the phrase "Surround Yourself". This is perhaps the strongest encouragement to the user yet to make Bible reading social, to involve others, and to engage their social network.

The "Read" option in the bottom menu bar takes the user to the biblical text, opening to the translation and verse they last read. The "Plans" menu option takes the user to an area for choosing various Bible reading plans. The "Search" option brings the user to a new area, at the top of which is a search bar where text can be entered, below which are three interesting additional sections. First is a section with the text "What does the Bible say about…" with twenty possible words to search for, the first five of which are visible and read, "Love", "Peace", "Faith", "Healing", and "Marriage". The second section asks, "How are you feeling?", offering a choice of four yellow-skinned emoticons which roughly appear to be happy, angry, sad, and depressed. Selecting any one of these allow the user to further select a more specific emotion, this time by selecting a word (e.g., "Joyful", "Disrespected", "Ashamed", "Abandoned", etc.). Choosing one of these brings the user to a list of Bible verses that apply to that emotion. The third

and final section in the "Search" area is titled "Bible Stories", from which the user can choose one of forty-two Bible stories. The most unique paratext just described may be the emoticon section. This paratext encourages introspection and seeking biblical material to address the way the user feels. The focus on introspection and how one feels may support the argument that the Bible is increasing being used in therapeutic ways.[40] Thus the app encourages both a certain kind of socialization around the Bible as well as an individualized experience, which supports a feature of new media that Heidi Campbell and Stephen Garner call "networked individualism" and "individualized control", where the networked individual is at the centre of the network.[41] In any case, this is one more example of the hermeneutical impact of paratexts.

5 Conclusion

In summary, comparing both the similar and distinct material and paratextual elements of digital Bibles to their print counterparts has shed light on the hermeneutical impact of the Bible's technology upon the reader/user experience. We have considered how this is true for both print and digital technology, and we have examined one specific Bible app, YouVersion, in greater detail. Some of the more significant paratextual properties of this app were: (1) the Terms and Conditions and Privacy Policy, extensive legal agreements that diminish the sense in which the user might feel they "own" this Bible; (2) the social features that encourage certain social behaviors around the Bible; (3) the features that allow the app to communicate to the user (e.g., Bible reading alerts); and (4) the introspective emoticons, encouraging users to explore how the Bible relates to how they are feeling. It is called *You*Version, after all, and upon opening the app, the user is brought to the "Home" page and a tab that reads "For You". A personalized experience, a personalized Bible that nevertheless does not belong to "you", as the Terms of Use make clear.

More generally we noted that the sense of finality of a printed Bible, as well as canonicity, may be diminished in digital Bibles. Some researchers suggest that digital Bibles could re-open the canon, promote liquidity, and diminish institu-

40 Peter M. Phillips, *The Bible, Social Media and Digital Culture*, Routledge Focus on Religion (New York: Routledge, 2019).

41 Heidi A. Campbell and Stephen Garner, *Networked Theology: Negotiating Faith in Digital Culture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016). These concepts are introduced near the beginning of the book and appear throughout.

tional authority. To date, widely used digital Bibles have not. However, their technology is full of meaning and is influencing how readers understand the Bible and its texts. As time goes on and more research is done – and as hindsight produces a clearer view of the changes currently taking place – how digital media affect Bible readers will become clearer. In the meantime, consider the significance of paratexts.

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