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Religion to Go!

Religion in Mobile Internet Environments, Mobile Apps, Augmented Realities and the In-Betweens

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Mobile Liturgy

Reflections on the Church of England's Daily Prayer App

Joshua L. Mann

Abstract

Technologies used to represent texts are not hermeneutically neutral. Since technologies have illocutionary force, we should ask of any text, whether print or digital, *In what ways are the associated technologies conveying meaning?* In this article, the question will be asked of liturgical texts. For the past few years, the Church of England has published some of its *Common Worship* liturgical resources, including *Daily Prayer* and the *Common Worship Lectionary*, as mobile Android and iOS apps. While the content of the resources is generally the same in its printed and digital forms, a number of interesting differences in how the resources can be used in these respective formats are apparent. Further, it is the contention of this article that these differences have discernable hermeneutical effects on the reader/user experience. After offering a framework for understanding the ways in which technologies influence the interpretation of their texts, this article will describe and interpret the differences between the print and digital versions of *Daily Prayer*. Finally, implications for users/readers and various other stakeholders in the religious apps space will be offered.

Keywords

Church of England, prayer app, liturgy

Technology is not hermeneutically neutral; it has illocutionary force. That is to say, technology itself contributes to the meaning we derive from the texts and objects it mediates. In this article, I wish to focus on the technology used to mediate liturgical resources (i.e., books or apps containing texts for prescribed worship). Specifically, I will consider the modern print and digital versions of *Common Worship: Daily Prayer* (2005), authorised for use by the Church of England.[1]

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1   The *Daily Prayer* app I am using is the iOS version, installed on an Apple iPhone.

In Anglicanism, as in some other Christian traditions, a strong relationship is thought to exist between prayer and belief, public worship and church doctrine, sometimes expressed *lex orandi lex credendi*. "[F]or Anglicans, what we do when we worship expresses what we believe" (Stevenson, 2006: 133). What is more, worship in the Anglican tradition is prescribed in a prayer book:

> Whenever a priest embarks upon a new post anywhere in the Anglican Communion, he or she must promise to use the church's authorized forms of service. In the Church of England, such a declaration is made publicly, and the words that are spoken refer both to the 1662 Prayer Book and to other forms that are "authorized or allowed by canon"—which means *Common Worship* (2000), as well as the various seasonal and occasional forms of service that are from time to time agreed upon." (Stevenson, 2006: 133)

If technology *is* hermeneutical significant, what difference does it make to the meaning derived from such a prayer book? That is the primary question this article intends to answer, using *Daily Prayer* as an example. First, however, I must begin by briefly expanding and illustrating the opening point—that technology *itself* means—from two angles, paratextuality and material culture.[2]

1   The Significance of Paratexts

Roughly, paratexts are to texts what a frame is to a picture. Gérard Genette, who has coined the literary use of the term, 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

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2   Note that liturgical scholars and theologians have considered similar questions about the effects of media on liturgy from explicitly theological perspectives. One recent example is Teresa Berger's @ *Worship: Liturgical Practices in Digital Worlds*—perhaps the first book-length treatment of liturgy with respect to digital technology—which she says "is best read as a theological reflection on liturgical practices in digital worlds" (Berger, 2017: 36). Cf. Stefan Böntert (2005, 2012). By contrast, this article does not seek to use theological tools or methods in its inquiry, though observations and conclusions drawn may well impact upon the work of those who do.

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…* (1997: 1)

The crucial point is that paratexts themselves have meaning; they are hermeneutically significant: "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" (Jansen, 2014: 1).

In considering *digital* paratexts, I deviate from Genette's definition in two respects: (1) It matters very little in the following analysis whether or not the "author" legitimates (or accepts responsibility) for a paratext;[3] 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.[4] In this article, then, I consider paratexts to be productions that accompany, present, or contain a text, including productions that facilitate the engagement of a reader.[5] 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.[6]

To illustrate, let us briefly consider a book perhaps more familiar than any other, the printed Bible in the form that most people encounter today. Such a book is generally a collection of 66 or more ancient documents bound together in a single volume (Figure 1).[7]

Figure 1

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3 Cf. Genette (1997: 2): "By definition, something is not a paratext unless the author or one of his associates accepts responsibility for it…".

4 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 (van Dijk, 2014).

5 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" (Wallraff and Andrist, 2015: 239).

6 Compare similar approaches to applying categories from traditional bibliography to digital texts, including considerations of hermeneutical significance, in Drucker (2002), Hayles (2003), Kirschenbaum (2002), and Manoff (2006).

7 The number of documents or 'books' vary by tradition, e.g., Hebrew (Jewish Rabbinic) Canon (24), Protestant Canon (66), Roman Catholic Canon (73).

Note that the binding itself is significant; it is a paratext that conveys the message that these documents *belong* together, reinforced by uniform typography, page layout, and consecutive page numbering across the bound collection. But 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 1,500 or more years by authors who almost certainly did not envision that their work would be read alongside of these other works. Imagine the difference 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.[8] How then do paratextual messages change in a *digital* biblical text? Consider how the finality of a printed Bible is far less acute in its digital counterpart. One can hold a printed book—it is bound and not easily modified.[9] 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 distinct.

2   The Significance of Material Culture

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

> (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. (2015: 4)

Further, as Colleen McDannell says in *Material Christianity,* "The material world of landscapes, tools, buildings, households goods, clothing, and art is not neutral and passive; people interact with the material world thus permitting it to communicate specific messages" (1995: 2). This article is especially interested in investigating these *messages*—what a printed or digital liturgical text communicates by virtue of its technological medium, the technology through which it presents itself to a user.[10]

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8   See Small (1997: 43, 48).
9   On the physicality of reading in general, see Baron (2015: 131–56), and on the Bible in particular, Rakow (2017).
10   I will refer to the reader/user of both versions as the 'user' for convenience.

It is important for our purposes not to equate "material" strictly with what is physical in a way that excludes *digital* technology.[11] 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" (1995: 25). 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, then, might the "messages" of material objects be discovered, from a material religion point of view? David Morgan suggests it may be done through an analysis of three areas, production, classification, and circulation—an approach he describes as

> …a series of inquires that move from consideration of the concrete features of an individual object to comparison with other objects like it to its circulation and use and finally to what the object does and how it may be understood to perform different kinds of work. (2017: 15)

How similar approaches might handle print-digital comparisons of a religious text can be illustrated by the recent analyses of Katja Rakow (2017) and Tim Hutchings (2015, 2017). Hutchings summarises:

> A material approach to digital religion must consider the differences between digital and physical objects, as well as what they have in common. I have interviewed and surveyed users of digital Bible apps like YouVersion, and many of them expressed reservations about material consequences of shifting from print to screen (Hutchings, 2015). Some argued that a digital Bible made it harder to remember where a particular passage lay in the overall structure of the canon, and reported that they were more likely to skim-read and jump between texts. For others, the loss was more emotional. One respondent reported that 'I feel more distanced from it' on screen, 'frustrated at not having the personal contact of the paper and print'. Their paper Bibles had built up memories and associations, as an object that they had received as a gift and carried with them through life. The physical form of Uncover has been designed by UCCF to encourage these kinds of material relationships with and through the book, dimensions that the organisation feared a digital-only Bible might struggle to generate.

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11 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 Hutchings (2017: 87–91).

In Morgan's terms, the analysis that I will carry out in the next section will primarily fall into his first area, production, though some observations will be made that could impact upon the others.

3   An Analysis of *Daily Prayer*

For the past few years, the Church of England has published some of its *Common Worship* liturgical resources, including *Daily Prayer* and the *Common Worship Lectionary*, as mobile Android and iOS apps. While the content of the resources is generally the same in its printed and digital forms, a number of interesting differences between the two are apparent. In light of the way paratexts and materiality have been shown to contribute to meaning, the following analysis will consider how observable differences may create hermeneutical effects on the reader/user experience. Specifically, I will focus on describing and interpreting the differences between the print and digital versions of the Church of England's *Common Worship: Daily Prayer*.

3.1   Material and Paratextual Descriptions of *Daily Prayer*

As mentioned in the opening of this article, *Daily Prayer* reflects an authorised alternative service to the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer* that prescribes patterns of (typically public) worship for services within the Church of England. The pattern subtly changes according to the season set within the church calendar, as outlined in the same book. Services typically include the reading of Psalms—in the back of printed edition, included in situ in the app—according to the calendar. However, set Scripture readings for each service are determined by a lectionary—itself following a calendric cycle—printed separate to the print edition, but included in situ in the app.

The printed edition of *Daily Prayer* is typically printed in dark red hardback with two or more bookmarking ribbons. Its binding suggests durability, anticipating sustained use (reinforced by the ribbons), and carries the paratextual message of authority and finality, as described in the example of the printed Bible earlier.[12] Reinforcing its authority is the first page following the table of contents, titled "Authorization," with relevant details. The app appears to have no such equivalent, although buried in its introductory material (on which see below), it mentions the two forms of service "authorized for use in the Church of England."[13]

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12   Interestingly, Teresa Berger describes a different app, the Divine Office, which includes a digital representation of bookmarking ribbons which have no navigational function within the app. Rather, she says, "…they function as visual signs, signaling that this digitally mediated Divine Office seeks to 'follow in the ancient traditions of the Church,' as its Facebook page puts it" (2017: 77).

On the printed front cover in glittering gold letters appears a cross, the horizontal beam of which is made with the words "Common Worship," intersected by a vertical beam made with the italicised words "Services and Prayers for the Church of England" (Figure 2).[14]
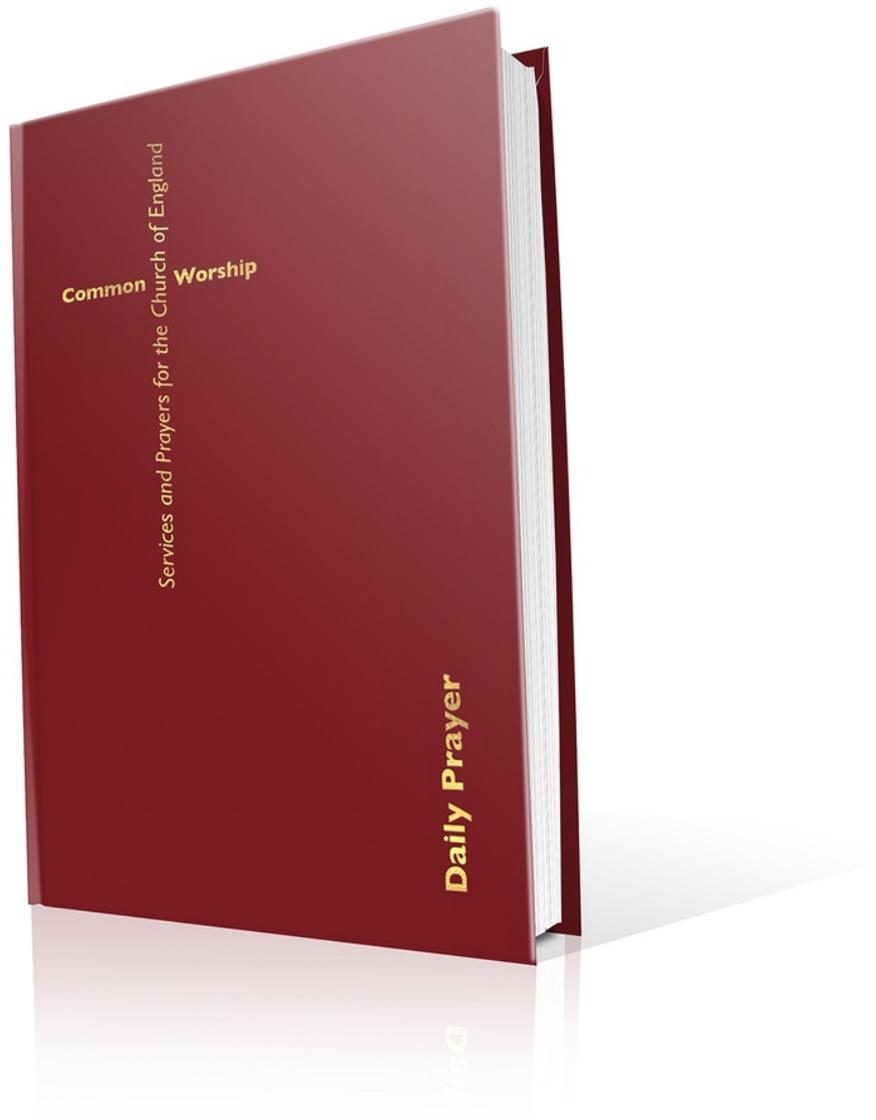

Figure 2

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13 A subtle clue is also found in the copyright material, which includes "The Archbishops' Council of the Church of England."

14 Other similar editions do not include the cross, but only "Daily Prayer" in large gold letters and "Common Worship" in small letters.

This somewhat ornate feature conveys a sense of sacredness, not unlike similar features of other printed religious books.[15] The *Daily Prayer* app's icon, in contrast, appears light blue with the words "Daily Prayer," similar to the app's splash page (Figure 3) which closely mirrors the printed cover, containing the same sort of cross described above, only with white letters instead of glittering gold.
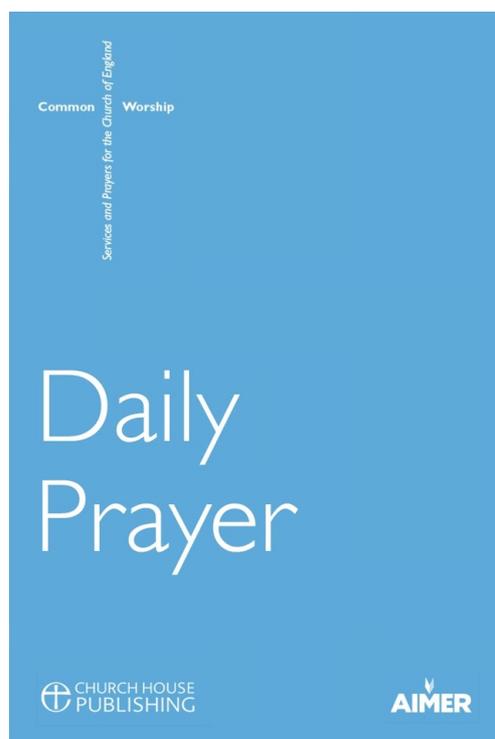

Figure 3

In both versions, headings, subheadings, instructions, and certain reading marks appear in red typeface while the main text otherwise appears in black. The *Daily Prayer* app also contains blue underlined typeface used to indicate a hyperlinked text (where the printed edition may indicate only an optional inclusion via page number). The paragraphing and spacing are similar in both versions, though the printed page layout and equivalent app interface differ greatly in how much text is accessible to the user's vision. In the app, the amount of visible text depends on the device (i.e., screen size and resolution) as well as on the user settings of font size. But in most cases, the app will display less text with more line breaks compared to its print counterpart.

The printed edition contains the usual navigational paratexts, like numbered pages and a table of contents, along with solid red facing pages before each new section of the book. These paratexts

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15 For many familiar with the printed form of the prayer book, these physical features may contribute to the analogous quality of what Katja Rakow calls the "Bibleness" of a printed Bible, somewhat lacking in its digital counter part (2017).

give the sense of one's relative location within a section and the volume as a whole, features that are absent from the app.[16] Navigation in the app is semi-automated: upon opening, the app automatically navigates to the relevant prayer service according to the day and time, utilizing data from the user's device.[17] From here, the user can also navigate between morning, evening, and night prayer via tabs at the top of the app (Figure 4). This contrasts the way that night prayer is set apart in its own section from morning and evening prayer in the printed edition.

Morning Prayer   Evening Prayer   Night Prayer

¶ *Morning Prayer on Wednesday*
Wednesday, 9 August 2017
Mary Sumner, Founder of the Mothers' Union, 1921 [Lesser Festival]

Preparation

O Lord, open our lips
All **and our mouth shall proclaim your praise.**
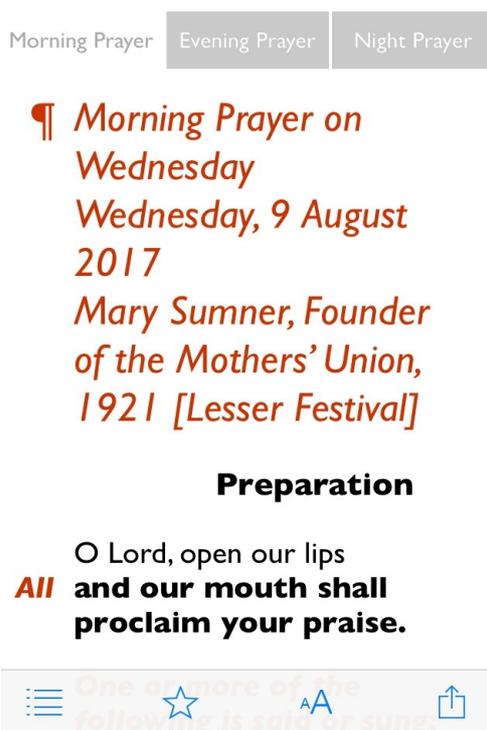
Figure 4

At the bottom of the app is an interface that includes a sharing feature which produces an email invitation, tweet, etc., to download the app (Figure 5).

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16 Interestingly, the app retains references to page numbers in the text.
17 Timings the app uses for switching between morning, evening, and night can be altered in the app's settings.

Cancel   **Daily Prayer!**   Send

To:

Cc/Bcc, From:

Subject: Daily Prayer!

Daily Prayer from the Church of
England

Download the new, official app free:
http://itunes.apple.com/app/id81849
1760
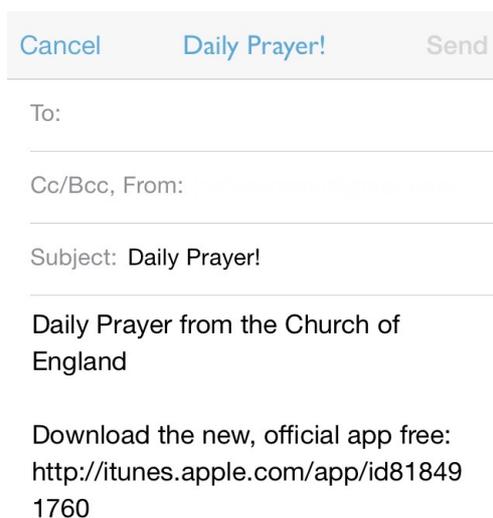
Figure 5

Nearby, another option toggles a menu from which the user can increase or decrease font size, as
well as select between (1) a contemporary or traditional typeface and layout, and/or (2) light or dark
background. The leftmost option on the bottom menu bar brings the user to a kind of table of
contents menu, including such options as "Browse All," from which the user can navigate to other
services by date,[18] "Subscriptions," which offers offline access to 12 months of material for £1.49,
and "Switch to Traditional," which uses the traditional rather than contemporary service (Figure 6).

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18 Note, this feature is a list of dates, e.g., Monday 31 July 2017, etc. It does not indicate the how these dates
   correspond to the liturgical calendar.
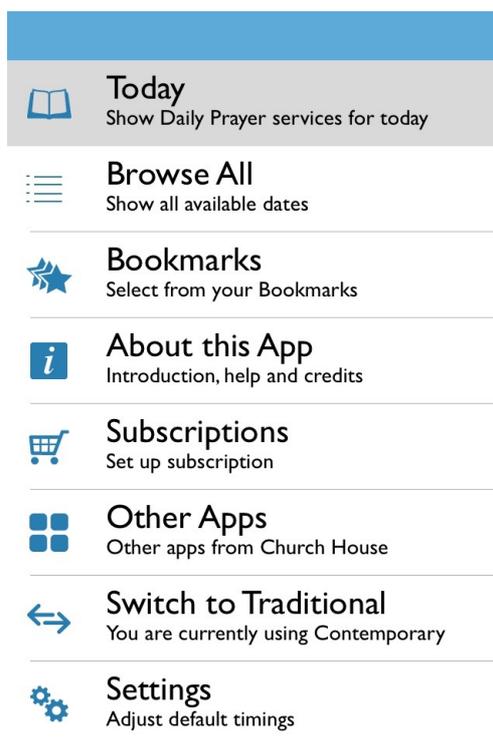
Figure 6

Also among these options is "About this App," the subtitle of which is "Introduction, help and credits." However, selecting this brings the user to a lengthy page of text that begins *not* with the introduction, but with technical help, followed approximately 15–20% down the page by the introduction to *Daily Prayer* (largely the same as in the printed edition), after which are copyrights and acknowledgements, information about Church House Publishing, and finally information about the app developer, Aimer Media. It seems odd not to give the introduction its own separate place. For a novice user of *Daily Prayer* this makes navigating to the introduction difficult, even if the app makes finding the day's service very simple.

3.2　An Example Service Compared in Each Format

Comparing a specific service between the two versions of *Daily Prayer* reveals some interesting differences. The following representative comparison is taken from each respective version for morning prayer on Wednesday 9 August 2017.

Printed *Daily Prayer*	*Daily Prayer App*
Contains generic day of the week in header, "Morning Prayer on Wednseday."	Contains day of the week, date, and festival information acc. to specific date. (Fig. 4)
Appointed psalmody must be located and inserted.	Appointed psalmody for date is automatically inserted.
Scripture readings must be located (outside of book) and inserted as instructed.	Scripture readings automatically inserted acc. to lectionary.[19]
The Benedictus has different refrain: "You show mercy…"	The Benedictus has different refrain: "They were faithful…"
Two optional cycles for prayers are indicated by page number (found elsewhere in the volume).	The cycle for this particular day of the week is inserted (Fig. 7).
The collect of the day may be inserted or a generic one, printed, used.	The collect of the day is automatically inserted and no generic one is mentioned.
Only the first line of the Lord's prayer (in both contemporary and traditional versions) is included.	The entire Lord's prayer in contemporary and traditional versions is included.

Morning Prayer　Evening Prayer　Night Prayer

Prayers may include the following concerns from the cycle on pages 362–363

¶ The social services
¶ All who work in the criminal justice system
¶ Victims and perpetrators of crime
¶ The work of aid agencies throughout the world
¶ Those living in poverty or under oppression

**One of the forms of prayer found on pages 362–363 may be used.**
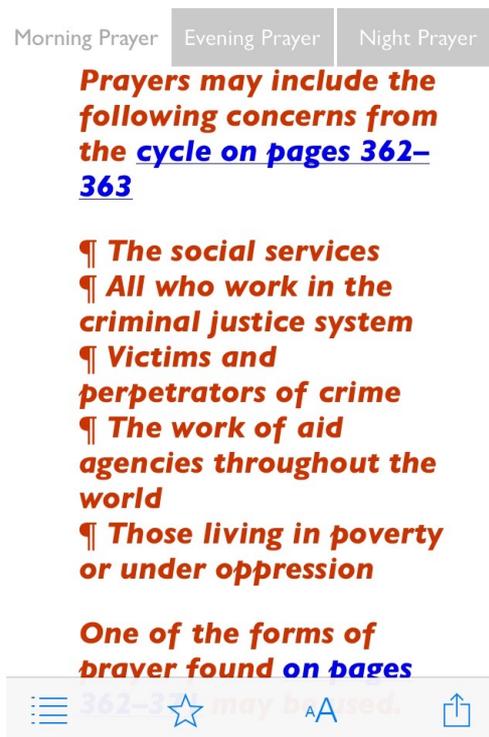
Figure 7

19　The two Scripture readings can be read one after the other, or the second can be read after the canticle—as both versions instruct. However, in the digital app, the second Scripture is automatically inserted after the canticle.

Most of these differences have to do with the way the digital app automatically inserts content appropriate for the specific date. This means that the user does not need to find the content elsewhere in the *Daily Prayer* volume or in another resource (or rely on their memory) but may simply follow along in the app. The digital app demands less pre-requisite knowledge, significantly lowering the bar for a novice user. On the other hand, a user unfamiliar with the Anglican prayer book tradition may less quickly come to understand how the prayer book works—the role of the calendar, etc.—and perhaps be less quick to memorise portions of the liturgy, like the Lord's Prayer, provided as it is in full text.

3.3   Reflecting on the Differences

In public worship, where the service has been prepared (i.e., decisions about what readings to use, etc.) and is officiated, some of the differences may become less significant from the perspective the user/reader. Where the service mirrors that of the app, participants will be able to read along in its entirety, including Scripture readings and the collect, which are sometimes only heard by participants who follow along in the printed edition. While the impact of reading (rather than *simply* hearing) may differ according to individuals, reading arguably privatises the experience, even if subtly.[20] For participants holding either the book or the app, however, the reading posture will be similar.[21]

In private use, the app will reduce the preparation required to almost none—the user must simply "tap" on the app's icon, after which *Daily Prayer* opens to the beginning of the appropriate service, with all readings for the day inserted. But the app introduces some other interesting dependencies not present in the print edition. For example, the user's device must be operational, having enough battery life to run the app for the duration of the service. For users without a subscription, *Daily Prayer* will also rely upon an internet connection to periodically update the contents for the days ahead (or else encounter a screen that says, "Download Failed. Could not contact http://churchofengland.org. Check your internet connection") (Figure 8). The process of updating the app also makes the sense of finality less acute than in the print counterpart, similar to the earlier discussion of a Bible app.

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20   Berger (2017: 46) entertains this very point in relation to liturgy, leaning on Ong (1982). Neil Hurley (1965), in one of the earliest articles considering the impact of electronic communications on liturgy, raises a similar point, namely that print and satellite technology, respectively, alter the "ratio of man's senses" and, as a result, aspects of culture , both of which are relevant to liturgy.

21   Although I assume that users of the printed *Daily Prayer* will be more likely to use two hands to navigate and read than users of the app on smaller mobile devices.

Morning Prayer Evening Prayer Night Prayer

Download Failed. Could
not contact
http://www.churchofengland.or
Check your internet
connection.
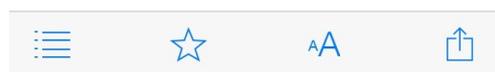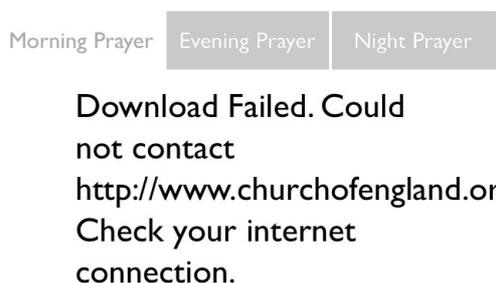
Figure 8

Other technical dependencies beyond those of the user are apparent in the app. Who, after all, is *technologically* responsible for the app's production, the quality of its texts, its conformity to the canons of the Church? At least two entities can be identified distinct from its print counterpart: (1) the app developer, Aimer Media, who must maintain the software for supported platforms (iOS and Android); and, less obviously but more significantly, (2) Simon Kershaw, an independent software developer, book designer, and typesetter, who specialises in liturgy and has collaborated with the Church of England. In fact, it appears that the web software of Kershaw does the "heavy lifting" of providing the date-specific content that feeds the *Daily Prayer* app.[22] Kershaw's software, the copyright of which he solely owns, therefore, appears to be a single-point-of-failure (or single-point-of-alteration!) for the mobile app. Historically, standardisation of the prayer book has been a significant goal in the Anglican tradition. From at least 1892, for example, the Episcopal Church in America would keep one bound copy of each new edition with the Custodian of the Prayer Book: "All the limited Standard Books, and the less expensive copies made for pulpit, pew, and personal use, bore a Certification from the Custodian of the Prayer Book, indicating that it is word-for-word and page-for-page correct" (Hutner, 2006: 132). Only in the digital age, however, might one

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22 Kershaw's web app is available on a subdomain of his own website (http://cwdp.oremus.org/daily.cgi), mirrored on a subdomain of the official Church of England website (https://dailyprayer.churchofengland.org/daily.cgi) and included on another of the Church's Daily Prayer pages (https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-worship/join-us-in-daily-prayer.aspx).

conceive of a situation in which thousands of (digital) prayer books might be collectively altered *after* distribution by a single developer (or hacker).

Of course, one does well to remember that a standardised prayer book has always been an ideal rather than a reality throughout its history. In the earliest days of the *Book of Common Prayer*, unofficial printings were carried out by unauthorised presses, and truly consistent order and pagination were not realised until at least the late nineteenth century (Hutner, 2006: 120, 132). Further, Kenneth Stevenson, writing on the sacredness of the prayer book, demonstrates that concerns with stability continue into the twenty-first century:

> In an age that sees the production of a new liturgical text almost by the year, what we perhaps need to discern is where the patterns of future stability are to be found, how we can use responsibly the [Anglican] "communion" that we already share, and where it is that we can perceive the hand of God in the new cultures that are springing up around us. Since the Lambeth Conference of 1958, there has been a growing recognition that we are now no longer dealing with one 'sacred text', but rather with texts that at their best have a judicious flexibility. Perhaps the development of precisely the three ways of writing about Anglican liturgy noted here—defending, expounding, and doing theology around it— may go some way towards providing a new kind of stability, a new measure of communion, a new culture of diverse but coherent prayerfulness. (2006: 139)

Clayton Morris, who considers the consequences of the "prayer book in cyberspace" and expresses concerns about the "maintenance of orthodoxy," nevertheless maintains that "While it is obvious that the tradition is always threatened by forces that would adapt it beyond recognition, the extent to which it represents truth and integrity will protect it. The faithful will correct the excess" (2006: 547, 549). Even so, it seems clear that the technology on which the *Daily Prayer* app depends, in contrast to its print counterpart, is less transparent, more difficult to understand, and more vulnerable to change. Further, its vulnerability to change is more than a feature of its digital medium; it is in part a consequence of this particular app's dependency on the software of a single developer who does not appear to be supported by a company or a team.

4   Conclusion

In sum, this article has considered the materiality and paratexts of two versions of *Daily Prayer* in order to reflect on the hermeneutical significance of their respective mediating technologies—print and digital. To review a few examples: The digital app proves easier to use, particularly for the novice, while making how the prayer book "works" in the Church's tradition less transparent. The

app automatically inserts daily readings in their place, also ensuring that a participant may not only *hear* a text read aloud but also *read* along. This creates a different experience for some, particularly those who may not have the Scripture readings or collects printed and ready to hand. Physical features of religious books that devotees have long cherished—hard or leather covers, gold lettering, ribbons, the "feel", etc.—are absent in the digital app and, for those familiar with the printed edition, may diminish the sense of sacredness they assign to it. Further, the app does not sustain the paratextual message of finality and authority in the same way as the printed book, and the app's vulnerability to change—though not obvious to most users and, perhaps, church authorities—reinforces this point. Although offering a theological evaluation of the two versions of *Daily Prayer* lies outside the scope of this article, such an exercise would benefit from paying attention to the hermeneutical significance of the technology itself. This article is but one step in that direction.

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