CHAPTER 23

THE MATERIAL DIMENSION OF THE BIBLE FROM PRINT TO DIGITAL TEXT

KATJA RAKOW
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGIOUS STUDIES, UTRECHT UNIVERSITY

Introduction

The Bible is often referred to as "the Word of God," "His Word," or "Scripture." All three terms reference the Bible as words to be read or heard and interpreted, as a text to be explored in order to discern God's will and to enable an encounter with God through His Word. To many Christians the Bible is "a material text with immaterial qualities, the latter of which are revealed as signs of God's presence in the act of reading."[1] Signifiers such as "the Word" and "Scripture" point to the textual quality of the Bible while downplaying the material dimension of words, which are made up of letters printed on pages and bound between two covers that make up the material object called a Bible. While conveying semantic meaning, the singular words of a text tend to be unseen in the actual act of reading. Although visible on the page, they tend to disappear in the process of reading. The content mediated through printed words stays with the reader and transports her, moving along a storyline or argument while the image of the words just read are already forgotten. In comparison to illustrations and pictures, the image of words on the page that have just been read is ephemeral. The eyes scan the lines of text, swiftly process the content, and fly over the pages. Sometimes the smoothness of the reading

[1] Matthew Engelke, "Reading and Time: Two Approaches to the Materiality of Scripture," *Ethnos* 74, no. 2 (2009): 151–74, here 151.

process is briefly interrupted when the reader stumbles over a typo and has to read again to fit the misspelled word into context in order to grasp the full meaning. The material religion scholar S. Brent Plate refers to the erasure of words in the process of reading as "words unseen," made invisible by modern typography.[2] Starting with the development of Baskerville type in the eighteenth century, which replaced the then dominant Gothic script, modern typeface was developed to reduce the distance between text and reader and to enhance legibility and readability in order to make the process of (silent) reading smoother.[3] The materiality of words is further diminished by a modernist understanding of words heavily influenced by Protestantism. Protestantism rates words higher than images, the mind higher than the body, and interiority over exteriority.[4] Words are understood as "silent, individual, immediate (i.e., 'without media'), of the spirit," and they are pitched against images, which in contrast are regarded as external, material, and visible and thereby available to a collective.[5] The perceived immediacy of the Word renders the concrete materiality of the Bible negligible to an understanding of Scripture as the immaterial presence of God.[6] But, as Plate reminds us, "regardless of their semantic meaning, words exist in and through their mediated forms and do not exist apart from their materiality. By extension, sacred texts themselves are material forms and engaged in two primary ways: through the ears and eyes."[7]

Evangelical discourse adds to the immateriality of Scripture the unchanging quality of God's Word regardless of the concrete translation or material form through which a Christian accesses the biblical text. Yet, occasionally, the materiality of Scripture becomes an issue for Christian practitioners. Take the following example of Pastor Carl Lentz from Hillsong Church, New York, addressing his audience at Hillsong Conference 2015 in Sydney: "Who has a Bible tonight? Hold it up if you do. Look to your neighbor and say, 'My Bible is so much better than yours. It's heavier; it's real.' And if your Bible is on your phone, I don't wanna see it because if you need a Word from God and, ah, your phone is dead, whatcha gonna do then? Your Bible needs to have pages."[8] Lentz expresses a preference for the printed Bible, which he regards as offering direct access to God's Word. His statement implies that a book can be opened and read at any time. In order to

[2] S. Brent Plate "Looking at Words: The Iconicity of the Page," in *Iconic Books and Texts*, ed. James W. Watts (Sheffield, UK: Equinox, 2013), 121.

[3] Ibid., 124–6.

[4] Colleen McDannell, *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), 2–15.

[5] Plate, "Looking at Words," 121.

[6] Such understandings of Scripture as the immaterial presence of God are not unique to Christianity, but can also be found in Islam, where the Qur'ān is one physical manifestation of divine revelations consisting of the *Kalam Allah*, that is, "the speech or the self-communication of God… [which] exists only in the transcendent world and not here on earth." See C. T. R. Hewer, *Understanding Islam: The First Ten Steps* (London: SCM Press, 2006), 46. Thus, the Koran as the speech of God is where God is regarded as most fully present in this world; cf. William E. Shepard, *Introducing Islam* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2016), 68.

[7] Plate, "Looking at Words," 119.

[8] Carl Lentz at the Evening Rally, Hillsong Conference, Sydney, July 2, 2015. Transcript by the author.

be read, a book is not dependent on battery power or a digital screen. With its unity of pages, printed words, and binding, the book is a "real" thing that can be touched and weighs heavy in the hands of its reader. Compared to the concrete materiality of a book, the electronic text seems rather intangible. Here the printed Bible is seen as a durable and reliable material container for the immaterial Word. In contrast, the digital text on an electronic device is regarded as an unstable material carrier dependent on other external factors and thereby insufficient to act as reliable medium to the presence of God via the act of reading.[9]

At issue is the materiality of the medium through which God's Word, and thereby God, is made present to religious practitioners. It shows us that the concrete materiality of a medium matters. In spiritual questions, *matter does matter*. In this chapter, I address the material dimension of the Bible in the discourse and practice of evangelical and Pentecostal Christians.[10] First, I introduce the frame of material culture studies and the approach to materiality in the study of religion. Then I use an analytic model suggested by the material religion scholar David Morgan that lists nine aspects along which a material analysis of religious objects should be developed, and I apply it to explore the relation between Bible and materiality. The currently observable transition from print Bibles to electronic versions and Bible apps will serve as my main example to illustrate the fruitfulness of a material perspective on the Bible.

The transition from one media format to another often stirs discussions about the appropriateness of the new medium in the context of religious practices. Such discussions signal a departure from and contestation of traditional forms of communication and transmission media and point to an ongoing negotiation between the adaptability of and resistance to new forms. One historical example is the transition from Bible texts printed in Latin and mainly directed at Christian clergy to Bible scriptures published in vernacular languages and directed at common people in the context of the Protestant

[9] 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 (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 101–21.

[10] My usage of the terms "evangelicals" and "evangelicalism" refers to a form of American Protestantism that emerged from the great revivals of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and, according to Randall Balmer, became quite influential to American culture. See Balmer, "Evangelicalism," in *Encyclopedia of Evangelicalism*, revised and expanded ed., ed. Randall Balmer (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2004), 244–8. "Evangelicalism" as an umbrella term encompasses a diverse spectrum of churches, parachurches, organizations, and movements, which are all characterized by the following four elements: Biblicism, a view of the Bible as inspired and God's revelation to humanity; a focus on the atoning work of Jesus Christ on the cross; the centrality of the conversion experience often termed "born again" combined with a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ; and a strong emphasis on evangelism. The terms "Pentecostals" and "Pentecostalism" as used here refer to a specific stream within American evangelicalism that developed in the beginning of the twentieth century. In addition to the aforementioned characteristics, Pentecostals emphasize the workings of the Holy Spirit in today's world and the life of the believer through signs and wonders. These beliefs also find expression through speaking in tongues and prayers for healing, deliverance, and prosperity, among other practices.

Reformation.[11] A more recent example of such a media transition is the adoption of radio and TV to broadcast the Christian message beyond the immediate church auditorium and which led some viewers and listeners to experience conversion or even healing in front of their radio transmitters or TV sets.[12] Contemporary commentators often contested the possibility of such religious experiences mediated by modern technology and media because these did not fit into the communication and practice patterns of face-to-face communication typical of church services.[13] But American evangelicals and Pentecostal Christians have a long history of being at the forefront of adopting new technologies and popular media formats.[14]

For the purpose of this chapter, I will consider digital Bibles and Bible apps provided by Bible publishers and digital content providers—whether those are commercial or nonprofit—as media that fit into the popular-culture frame (understood as referring to cultural products and related practices that are broadly disseminated through modern technology, mass media, and marketing) and that are thus widely used and appreciated by a significant number of people as indicators of their "popular status."[15] Such an understanding is easily applicable to today's ubiquity of all kinds of apps employed to organize different aspects of our daily life, ranging from managing one's bank account to monitoring fitness progress, listening to music, watching Netflix, or following a daily Bible-reading plan. If we take the increase in usage of electronic Bible media over the past years as an indicator, then we can—in extension of apps in general—also consider digital Bibles and Bible apps as popular-culture products.[16]

[11] Even before translating Bible scriptures into German, Martin Luther paved the way for the mass distribution of religious pamphlets and Bible texts to the common people so characteristic of the entwinement of book printing and the spread of the Protestant Reformation. Luther's translations of Psalms into vernacular German were printed as early as 1517 and consciously aimed at a wider audience. His texts were printed in the quarto format (singular sheets folded twice to produce four leaves, i.e., eight pages), which was easy to produce and cheap to acquire. The quarto became the characteristic format for many of the Reformation texts and helped to spread and circulate its theological debates widely. Cf. Mark U. Edwards, *Printing, Propaganda, and Martin Luther* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005), 15–7; Andrew Pettegree, *The Book in the Renaissance* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 91–106.

[12] William K. Kay, "Pentecostalism and Religious Broadcasting," *Journal of Beliefs & Values* 30, no. 3 (2009): 245–54.

[13] Shane Denson, "Faith in Technology: Televangelism and the Mediation of Immediate Experience," *Phenomenology & Practice* 5, no. 2 (2011): 96–122.

[14] For historical examples, see the study by R. Laurence Moore, *Selling God: American Religion in the Marketplace of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); for more contemporary examples, see Heather Hendershot, *Shaking the World for Jesus: Media and Conservative Evangelical Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

[15] This understanding of popular culture is based on a definition provided by Terry Ray Clark, "Introduction: What Is Religion? What Is Popular Culture? How Are They Related?," in *Understanding Religion and Popular Culture*, ed. Terry Ray Clark and Dan W. Clanton (London: Routledge, 2012), 1–12, here 8.

[16] See the section "Bible Users Prefer Print, but Use Other Formats" of "The State of the Bible 2017: Top Findings," which compares the numbers from a survey in 2011 with those of the 2017 survey conducted by the Barna Group for the American Bible Society, April 4, 2017, https://www.barna.com/research/state-bible-2017-top-findings.

Overview of Topic: Material Culture and Material Religion

Materiality refers to matter, something that is concrete, substantial, physical, tangible, and real, as opposed to the immaterial, imaginary, ideal, spiritual, and intellectual dimension of human life. Usually the opposition of material/immaterial implies a hierarchy that ranks the immaterial, the spiritual, and the realm of ideas higher than the world of matter, the physical, and the corporeal. We find this notion inscribed in Protestant models of religion focusing on belief and inner conviction while downplaying religious material culture and religious practice as illustrations or reflections of beliefs and inner states of the mind. The Protestant-inflected notion of religion influenced how the category of religion was conceptualized and how religion was studied in academia. It gave precedence to religious beliefs, ideas, and concepts drawn from the authoritative sources of religious traditions while neglecting the material dimension and popular expressions of religion.[17] The reevaluation of the material dimension of religion happened in the context of a broader paradigm shift within the humanities and social sciences often referred to as "the material turn."[18] Based on the realization that material things are neither just illustrations of social facts and relations nor secondary expressions of ideas, materiality is recognized as an integral part of culture, which is shaped by humans and in turn shapes humans and the experience of their lifeworlds: "Material culture studies in various ways inevitably have to emphasize the dialectical and recursive relationship between persons and things: that persons make and use things and that the things make persons. Subjects and objects are indelibly linked. Through considering one, we find the other. Material culture is part and parcel of human culture in general."[19]

In the past two decades, more and more scholars studying religion in the past and the present have called for a "materialization" of the study of religion to counterbalance the tendency to emphasize the study of textual sources and theological or philosophical debates.[20] These scholars perceive materiality to be a—or even the—crucial element in

[17] See, for example, McDannell, *Material Christianity*, 2–8; Birgit Meyer, "Material Mediations and Religious Practices of World-Making," in *Religion across Media: From Early Antiquity to Late Modernity*, ed. Knut Lundby (New York: Peter Lang International, 2013), 1–19, here 2; David Morgan, "Introduction: The Matter of Belief," in *Religion and Material Culture: The Matter of Belief*, ed. David Morgan (London: Routledge, 2010), 1–12.

[18] Patrick Joyce and Tony Bennett, "Material Powers: Introduction," in *Material Powers: Cultural Studies, History and the Material Turn*, ed. Tony Bennett and Patrick Joyce (New York: Routledge, 2010), 1–21, here 7.

[19] Christopher Tilley, introduction to *Handbook of Material Culture*, ed. Christopher Tilley et al. (London: Sage, 2006), 1–6, here 4.

[20] See, for example, David Morgan, "Religion and Embodiment in the Study of Material Culture," in *Religion: Oxford Research Encyclopedias,* Subject: Religion in America (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), doi:10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.013.32; Birgit Meyer et al., "The Origin and Mission of Material Religion," *Religion* 40, no. 3 (2010): 207–11, here 209.

the making of religious worlds: "All religion is material religion. All religion has to be understood in relation to the media of its materiality. This necessarily includes a consideration of religious things, and also of actions and words, which are material no matter how quickly they pass from sight or sound or dissipate into the air."[21] Following the anthropologist Matthew Engelke, all religion is material because it depends on material media, such as images, objects, clothes, food, incense, liquids, spaces, but also on the acting, sensing, and experiencing human body engaging the material world the religious actors inhabit. Without the "multiple media for materializing the sacred," it would be impossible to "make the invisible visible," as Robert Orsi, a scholar of religion, puts it.[22] All these media are used to render the sacred tangible to the human senses. Media play a crucial role in bringing religious practitioners into contact with the divine and making it "sense-able"[23] in official religious rituals as well as in lived religion in the context of everyday life. Scholars studying religion through the framework of its materiality work with a broad notion of media, which does not reduce media to classic mass media formats or new forms of social media. A broad notion of media encompasses every form of materiality that is employed to mediate religion. Thus media, broadly understood, range from the world of objects to less solid substances such as sound and smell, and they include the human body, practices, performances, and spaces: "Whether as the transmission of a numinous essence to a community of believers, the self-presencing of the divine in personal experience, or the unfolding of mimetic circuits of exchange between transcendental powers and earthly practitioners, 'religion' can only be manifested through some process of mediation. Throughout history, in myriad forms, communication with and about 'the sacred' has always been enacted through written texts, ritual gestures, images and icons, architecture, music, incense, special garments, saintly relics and other objects of veneration, markings upon the flesh, wagging tongues and other body parts."[24]

In the anthropologist Birgit Meyer's conceptualization of religion as a practice of mediation—that is, the process of bringing into contact, making visible or "sense-able" the divine to the religious practitioner—media and mediation processes become the defining moment of religion and the starting point of its analysis. Central to her approach is the concept of "sensational forms," which she describes as "relatively fixed, authorized modes of invoking and organizing access to the transcendental, thereby creating and sustaining links between religious practitioners in the context of particular religious organizations. Sensational forms are transmitted and shared; they involve religious practitioners in particular practices of worship and play a central role in forming

[21] Matthew Engelke, "Material Religion," in *The Cambridge Companion to Religious Studies*, ed. Robert A. Orsi (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 209.

[22] Robert Orsi, "Material Children: Making God's Presence Real through Catholic Boys and Girls," in *Religion, Media and Culture: A Reader*, ed. Gordon Lynch, Jolyon Mitchell, and Anna Strhan (New York: Routledge, 2012), 147.

[23] Birgit Meyer, "Medium," in *Key Terms in Material Religion*, ed. S. Brent Plate (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 141.

[24] Jeremy Stolow, "Religion and/as Media," *Theory, Culture & Society* 22, no. 4 (2005): 125.

religious subjects."[25] Such sensational forms can be communally enacted religious rituals as well as individual devotional practices in which religious actors engage material objects and spaces (images, books, architecture, nature, etc.) through their body, mind, and senses. The idea of sensational forms applies to both the authorized settings of religious institutions as well as the lived religion of the daily life of religious practitioners. In both settings, collective and individual religious practices "address and involve participants in a specific manner and induce particular feelings" whereby religious experiences are enabled.[26]

Reading the Bible to discern God's will for the life of a Christian practitioner is one important sensational form in the context of American evangelicalism and Pentecostalism. This particular sensational form works on two assumptions. The first is that God is present in the Bible and thus accessible via reading His Word;[27] the second is that God's Word is unchanging but timely and thus always applicable to every situation in the life of the believer, regardless of the material container through which His Word is accessed.[28] A different sensational form concerning the Bible can be found in Pentecostal healing rituals, in which a pastor places the book on the head of an afflicted believer and declares healing in the name of the Lord, whose healing powers are mediated through the spoken declaration and the materiality of God's Word, the printed Bible. In the first example, a digital Bible on a smartphone can easily replace the printed book. For many evangelicals and Pentecostals, it does not make a difference through which medium they access the biblical text when the primary purpose is reading and interpreting. However, in the second example of the Pentecostal healing ritual, it is harder for practitioners to imagine holding an iPad above the head of a believer declaring healing in God's name.[29] These two examples illustrate the notion of "relatively fixed, authorized modes of invoking and organizing access to the transcendental" in the concept of sensational forms.[30] Thus not every medium is suitable or regarded as appropriate to mediate the presence of God within specific practice settings, and heated debates might accompany the introduction of new forms or ritual innovations.

The material turn in religious studies has recast our questions and broadened our analytical horizon. Instead of asking how elements of religious material culture such as images, architecture, symbols, and ritual objects represent and illustrate religious ideas and teachings, we now ask how religious actors create and make use of things and objects and how the engagement with things and objects simultaneously creates religious worlds and shapes religious subjects: "Materializing the study of religion means asking how religion happens materially, which is not to be confused with asking the

[25] Birgit Meyer, "Religious Sensations: Why Media, Aesthetics, and Power Matter in the Study of Contemporary Religion," in *Religion: Beyond a Concept*, ed. Hent de Vries (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 707.

[26] Ibid., 708. [27] Engelke, "Reading and Time," 151.

[28] James S. Bielo, "Textual Ideology, Textual Practice: Evangelical Bible Reading in Group Study," in *The Social Life of Scriptures: Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Biblicism*, ed. James S. Bielo (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2009), 157–75.

[29] Rakow, "The Bible in the Digital Age," 113–6. [30] Meyer, "Religious Sensations," 708.

much less helpful question of how religion is expressed in material form. A materialized study of religion begins with the assumption that things, their use, their valuation, and their appeal are not something added to a religion, but rather inextricable from it."[31] Such a material approach applied to the Bible will show that the iconic status of the Bible is "not only generated by the authority of the text and the discourse surrounding the text, but also by the Bible as an image and object employed in diverse practices that generate meaning and authority in other ways besides semantic interpretation."[32]

Specific Examples and/or Foci: Material Culture and the Bible

How can such an analysis of the material dimension of the Bible best be accomplished? David Morgan suggests a material analysis guided by nine aspects pertaining to processes of production, classification, and circulation: medium, design, manufacture, function, comparison, remediation, deployment, reception, and ideology or cultural work.[33] These nine aspects help to address the various facets of the materiality, starting with the object as such, proceeding to the handling of the object by religious practitioners and the object's function in creating and mediating religious worlds.

I will apply Morgan's nine aspects of a material analysis to sketch out the material dimension of the Bible in Christian discourse and practice. I will mainly use contemporary examples from my own research on the Bible and popular Bible media in the intersection of print culture and the digital age in contemporary evangelicalism and Pentecostalism. My observations stem from my fieldwork among evangelical and Pentecostal Christians in megachurches in the US and in Singapore, various Christian conferences in Europe and Australia, as well as an analysis of various Christian media ranging from opinion pieces to newspaper articles and blog posts over the course of the past seven years. Although part of my fieldwork was conducted outside the US, the resulting insights are easily applicable to the US context. Moreover, all churches, actors, events, and the textual products referred to in my analysis circulate within a transnational global network of evangelical and Pentecostal churches, organizations, media outlets, and publishing houses. North American Christian actors and producers of Christian Bible media can be considered important players within this global Christian network. Occasionally I will refer to historical examples, which will prevent us from regarding materiality and processes of production and consumption as characteristic of

[31] Meyer et al., "The Origin and Mission of Material Religion," 209.

[32] Dorina Miller Parmenter, "Iconic Books from Below: The Christian Bible and the Discourse of Duct Tape," in *Iconic Books and Texts*, ed. James W. Watts (Sheffield, UK: Equinox, 2015), 227.

[33] David Morgan, "Material Analysis and the Study of Religion," in *Materiality and the Study of Religion: The Stuff of the Sacred*, ed. Tim Hutchings and Joanne McKenzie (London: Routledge, 2017), 15.

contemporary forms or Christianity in the context of consumer capitalism. Instead, these examples will demonstrate that these processes are always part and parcel of an engagement with materiality in the context of Christian practices in particular and religious practices in general.

Production: Medium, Design, and Manufacture

The medium and its design and manufacture are aspects of the production process. The object in question is a Bible, and it can be embodied in various media formats. For many Christians today, the typical *medium* of a Bible is its iconic version as a leather-bound book. In its iconic form, the medium and the content become undistinguishable. A book with leather binding, cover and spine, and printed pages is just one way to mediate the Word of God. The Bible as such can be classified as a "transmedial" object due to the fact that it can be encountered through a range of different media such as printed book, audio format, and smartphone application. Each medium entails specific affordances, which determine the possible ways of engaging the object. For example, a digital Bible lacks physical properties of its own and exists only in the "lingua franca of bits, of ones and zeros . . . embodied in magnetic impulses that require almost no physical space."[34] Further, the ones and zeros lack intrinsic meaning and need the combination of software and hardware to become accessible and meaningful to the religious actor accessing the content. Electronic devices, such as desktop computers, tablets, eBook readers, and smartphones, provide the material interface between a digital Bible and its human user. The biblical text cannot be accessed without the electronic interface and thus depends on it. The same accounts for audio formats that need additional equipment (an audio player as well as headphones or speakers) to access the biblical text and a capacity to hear in order to listen to the recording. As Tim Hutchings argues, digital objects have their own materiality and exist as images, sounds, and sometimes even vibrations mediated through the materiality of technology, users, and the context of their use.[35]

"Design is the form a medium takes," writes Morgan.[36] *Design* thus refers to the structures and configurations of an object often bearing intentionality. In Morgan's analytical schema, design is the second aspect of production and is closely interrelated with the type of medium in question, which will become obvious if we look at the available plethora of Bibles and Bible media.

On entering a Christian bookstore, one encounters several shelves full of Bibles in different shapes, translations, and brands. Although all these books share the medium of

[34] Roy Rosenzweig, *Clio Wired: The Future of the Past in the Digital Age* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 9.

[35] Tim Hutchings, "Augmented Graves and Virtual Bibles: Digital Media and Material Religion," in Hutchings and McKenzie, *Materiality and the Study of Religion*, 87–91.

[36] Morgan, "Material Analysis," 22.

the printed page, they differ in many details: in their cover design, in the fonts used, as well as in the structure and type area of their page. In some Bibles, Jesus's words are printed in red and thereby easily distinguishable; some Bibles include illustrations or comment boxes in addition to the biblical text; other Bibles forgo the typical medium of the written text and relate the biblical content in the genre of the comic book, using sequential pictures telling the story, although often with the help of short prose descriptions.[37]

Although all these books are referred to as "the Bible," indicating an unchanging essence not bound by time or form, the differences in design are not just embellishments but actually direct and as such structure the processes of perception, reading, and interpretation. According to Walter J. Ong, printed texts in general convey "a sense of closure, a sense that what is found in a text has been finalized, has reached a state of completion."[38] It was print culture that introduced title pages, which function as labels and thereby enable "the feeling for the book as a kind of thing or object" that locks form and content into a unity between two covers connected by a spine and adorned by a title.[39] Thus printed books are supposed to convey textual content in a definite or final form that can be reproduced in the form of thousands of visual and physically consistent copies.[40]

According to Plate, the sense of closure associated with printed pages is visually created by the technology of type: perfectly regular lines and a text evenly justified at the margins to compose a visual image of the page. Thus the visual design of printed and scripted texts is not neutral but affects the emotional interaction with text as well as the cognitive interpretation of words.[41] Visual design processes therefore not only are decorative adornments that could be disregarded but "impact engagement with a text, well before readers grasp its semantic meanings."[42] How information on a page is arranged—both in digital and print media—will have consequences for accessing, seeing, grasping, and interpreting the information displayed in the visual image on a paper page or an electronic screen.

For example, the visual design and the hypertextuality of digital information enable reading, accessing, and digesting information in a nonlinear way that differs from the typical linear way of reading a Bible page from left to right and from top to bottom. Many texts displayed online or in smartphone applications still adhere to these general stylistic guidelines of print culture, although the lines on screen are usually justified on the left, displaying an uneven text on the right side and disrupting the visual sense of tidiness. In comparison, a text justified on both sides of the printed page produces a regular and tidy image of the text. Further, the colored hyperlinks open up the text, disrupt the linear flow of reading, and invite the user to venture beyond the current page. Digital media seem to open up the text and break the perceived final unity of content and form

[37] For an analysis of Bibles rendered into the form of sequential art, see Scott S. Elliott's chapter on graphic Bibles in this volume.

[38] Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologies of the Word* (London: Routledge, 2002), 129.

[39] Ibid., 123. [40] Ibid., 130. [41] Plate, "Looking at Words," 131. [42] Ibid., 129.

by turning it into a "liquid" text filling the digital space only "for a moment," "constantly ready (and prone) to change."[43]

Manufacture refers to the actual physical process of producing an object and the skills, cultural knowledge, technologies, financial means, and human labor involved.[44] An analysis of the production of Bibles can reveal a lot about the socioreligious setting in which the manufacturing of the product happens. The historical example of the production, marketing, and selling of Victorian parlor Bibles will serve as an apt illustration of that aspect.

As Colleen McDannell has shown, the market for Bibles in nineteenth-century America was shaped by the competition between commercial and noncommercial Bible publishers and witnessed a significant growth in sales. Commercial Bible publishing houses operated along the general patterns of the book publishing industry and were similarly influenced by popular fashions shaping the emerging commodity system.[45] McDannell explains the growing Bible market by ideological changes that emphasized the importance of the Bible in the Christian household, transforming it into a precious object. In addition to being a source of religious instruction and moral guidance, the Bible became "a revered possession that activated sentiment and memory."[46] An appreciation for the Bible not just as text but as an object was the base on which the Bible as commodity could flourish.

Due to anticommercial attitudes of many nineteenth-century Christians, the Bible was portrayed as a treasured possession to be gifted or inherited but not to be sold or bought in the marketplace. In fact, Bibles were commodities designed and marketed by secular companies, who knew the tastes of their customers and fashioned their products accordingly. The result was a proliferation of Bibles—Bibles for use in church, Bibles for domestic use, and family Bibles containing supplementary materials such as family record pages, illustrations, and additional information to enhance understanding of the text. To Victorians, the religious and cultural value of the Bible was apparent; thus publishing houses focused on the physical quality of their products, such as the size of the Bible, the good quality of the leather binding, the paper and clasps, or the color and number of the illustrations, in order to entice possible buyers.[47] The choice for and the display of a family Bible in the parlor of the home was thus also a performance of taste and social status.[48]

The example of the Victorian parlor Bible also shows how medium, design, and manufacture are interrelated. Church Bibles needed no additional material and were usually simple in design and easy to carry, whereas parlor Bibles came in huge formats not made to be taken to church but to be displayed at home. In both cases, the medium is a printed book, although different in design and manufacture and ultimately different in their functionality.

[43] Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernities* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006), 2.
[44] Morgan, "Material Analysis," 23. [45] McDannell, *Material Christianity*, 68–72.
[46] Ibid., 73. [47] Ibid., 91. [48] Ibid., 91, 96.

Classification: Function, Comparison, and Remediation

For a material analysis it is important to discern the *function* of an object, which in turn allows the object to be classified: what is the object, what is its purpose, how is it used and by whom, what are the effects of its use, and how is it related to other objects?[49] Coming back to the example of the Victorian parlor Bible, it is obvious that its function was not to act as medium to access the biblical text in church, as was the case with small church Bibles. The parlor Bible served a variety of functions, ranging from reading at home, recording family history, and assembling family mementos to functioning as an aesthetic cornerstone displayed in the parlor to indicate taste, status, and a good Christian home.

With regard to contemporary Bible formats, similar functional differences are observable for different Bible media. Many Christians use digital versions for Bible study and reading, appreciating the added features of electronic Bible media such as different translations of the text within one application, note-taking functions, social media sharing functions, and easy accessibility on the go. Nevertheless different studies suggest that many American Christians across the denominational landscape who engage with the Bible on a regular basis still prefer the printed book to digital devices especially for devotional, ritual, and performative practices.[50] To them, the bound Bible feels "more real" and more personal precisely due to its concrete materiality—the silky pages, the smooth leather, the personal notes scribbled in the margins—and its perceived unity of form and content.

This perceived unity of form and content of the Bible is much more ambiguous when it comes to electronic Bible media. The difference between the two media formats becomes obvious when one compares the function of various Bible media in performative ceremonies such as taking an oath of office. The *comparison* of artifacts in different media formats or of similar objects advances a material analysis significantly. It helps with tracing changes, differences, and innovations and discerning their effects in religious and social practices.

Many American presidents have taken the presidential oath of office on highly personal and symbolic Bibles. In 1989 George H. W. Bush took his oath of office on two Bibles, a family Bible and a Bible used two hundred years earlier by George Washington at his inauguration ceremony.[51] Barack Obama used two Bibles at the inauguration cer-

[49] Morgan, "Material Analysis," 24.

[50] See, for example, the survey "The State of the Bible 2017" and the analysis of American Bible readers by John B. Weaver, "Transforming Practice: American Bible Reading in Digital Culture," in *The Bible in American Life*, ed. Philip Goff, Arthur E. Farnsley II, and Peter J. Theusen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 249–55. A study conducted by Tim Hutchings among evangelicals and my own content analysis of fifty-one comments on a Christian blog about digital Bibles support these conclusions; see Tim Hutchings, "E-Reading and the Christian Bible," *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 44, no. 4 (2015): 424–5; Rakow, "The Bible in the Digital Age," 109–13. For an overview of various surveys on Bible use, see Jeffrey S. Siker, *Liquid Scripture: The Bible in a Digital World* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2017), 97–112.

[51] Video footage of the oath taking of George H. W. Bush on January 20, 1989 is available at AP Archive, "President George H. W. Bush Takes the Oath of Office Administered by Chief Justice William Rehnquist," YouTube, July 31, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HfQBxBCptcE.

emony of his second term as president of the United States: a Bible belonging to Abraham Lincoln and a Bible once used by Martin Luther King Jr.[52] In both cases, the function of the Bibles was performative, highly symbolic as well as "iconic," to use Martin E. Marty's terminology.[53] The chosen Bibles were there to be touched in the context of a ritual, but not to be read. During oath-taking ceremonies, the use of a Bible warrants the truthfulness of the oath taken and the sincerity of the speaker, and occasionally it also acts as an invocation of the divine in order to invest the speaker's status and discourse with sacred authority.[54] The performative power of "America's iconic book" hinges on the perceived unity of form and content.[55] The power of the iconic image of the Bible in which form and content are locked with each other stems from "the slipperiness between the philosophical idea of the Word of God, words on a page that convey meaning, and the Word's/words' relationship to the Book," as Dorina Miller Parmenter writes.[56] The medium of the book transforms these into a unity, a material object that seems to be unmistakably recognizable as a Bible. The same cannot be said about digital Bibles, as the following example shows.

In June 2014 Suzi Levine took the oath of office as US ambassador to Switzerland with her hand on top of a Kindle. The adoption of new technology to an established authoritative ritual of entering into a state office was widely reported in the press, showing a photograph of Levine placing her hand on the e-reader.[57] Prompted by this development, *Fox News Latino* asked, "Is a digital Bible less holy?," and subsequently posted this article on its Facebook page.[58] The author of the article remarked, "The recently tapped U.S. ambassador to Switzerland was sworn in last month with her hand not on a paper Bible but on top of a Kindle" and cites different voices that express concern about officials "choosing tablets over the printed Bible."[59] While valuing digital devices for Bible reading and study, people quoted in the article also expressed their concern about

[52] David Jackson, "Obama to Use Lincoln and MLK Bibles for Inauguration," *State Journal*, January 19, 2013, 19.

[53] Martin E. Marty, "America's Iconic Book," in *Humanizing America's Iconic Book: Society of Biblical Literature Centennial Addresses 1980*, ed. Gene M. Tucker and Douglas A. Knight (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982), 8.

[54] Frederick B. Jonassen, " 'So Help Me?' Religious Expression and Artifacts in the Oath of Office and the Courtroom Oath," *Cardozo Public Law, Politics & Ethics Journal* 12, no. 303 (2014): 364; Albert D. Pionke, " 'I Do Swear': Oath-Taking among the Elite Public in Victorian England," *Victorian Studies* 49, no. 4 (2007): 612.

[55] Marty, "America's Iconic Book," 1–21.

[56] Parmenter, "Iconic Books from Below," 233–4.

[57] Zachary Davis Boren, "US Ambassador Suzi LeVine Sworn In Using Kindle e-reader," *Independent*, June 3, 2014, http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/usambassador-suzi-levine-sworn-in-using-kindel-ereader-9477449.html; Brian Fung, "A U.S. Ambassador Was Just Sworn In on a Kindle," *Washington Post*, June 2, 2014, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-switch/wp/2014/06/02/a-u-s-ambassador-was-just-sworn-in-on-a-kindle/.

[58] Hillary Vaughn, "Is a Digital Bible Less Holy? U.S. Officials Increasingly Sworn In on Tablets," *Fox News Latino*, July 14, 2014, http://latino.foxnews.com/latino/lifestyle/2014/07/14/isdigital-bible-less-holy-us-officials-increasingly-sworn-in-on-tablet/; the content is no longer available but was archived by the author; the related Facebook post is available at https://www.facebook.com/15704546335/posts/10152322470606336, accessed August 31, 2018.

[59] Ibid.

the ambiguity of such devices in public ceremonies. They pointed out that a digital Bible on a Kindle is not instantly recognizable as a Bible. Some critically remarked on the multifunctionality of e-readers, as well as the fact that those most likely store diverse (and most probably secular, trivial, or even offensive) content. Facebook readers of the *Fox News Latino* post discussed similar topics. Some openly expressed their dislike of digital devices for official events, such as assuming a public office. They did not regard the swearing in on a Kindle as valid as an oath taken upon the bound book of a Bible. In this particular case, the e-reader was unable to unambiguously exhibit what Timothy Beal calls the "Bibleness" of the cultural icon, which those commentators thought to be important to warrant the sincerity and efficacy of the oath-taking ritual.[60]

The picture accompanying the *Fox News Latino* article and the related Facebook post does not allow a close-up view of the device in order to discern the text shown on its display and thus enhances the ambiguity of the medium. Shots taken from different angles published in other media reveal the interesting detail that Levine places her hand on a digital version of the US Constitution. The choice of the US Constitution and not the biblical text further supports the ambiguity of digital texts on electronic devices in ritual and performative contexts. The unity of form and content of the bound book is not available in the case of an e-reader or smartphone, which serves multiple functions unrelated to displaying and accessing the biblical text.

The difference in materiality and mediation between printed Bibles and electronic versions relates to questions of *remediation*. Reproducing an object in a different medium often places the object in question in new practice settings and interpretive contexts and thereby entails new functions, practices, and discourses in which the artifact is embedded.[61] Just as the printing revolution opened up new and more individualized ways of engaging with Scripture, the digital revolution might make the Bible more accessible for current generations, create new ways of spreading the Gospel, and result in innovative religious practices and discourses surrounding the Bible.[62] Users of Bible applications point out that the added functions offer guided reading plans with daily reminders and Bible verses popping up on the screen that help them develop and keep up a regular reading practice:

> With the digital bible I can select a reading plan based on my needs at the time and get reminders every day to read it. I also like the fact that every day I get a verse that I can read first thing in the morning when I wake up and can customize the version. I have a regular bible and have tried to read it and to me its [*sic*] not the same,

[60] Timothy K. Beal, "The End of the Word as We Know It: The Cultural Iconicity of the Bible in the Twilight of Print Culture," in *Iconic Books and Texts*, ed. J. W. Watts (Sheffield, UK: Equinox, 2015), 210.

[61] Morgan, "Material Analysis," 25.

[62] Paul Saenger, *Space between Words: The Origins of Silent Reading* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997); Peter Horsfield, *From Jesus to the Internet: A History of Christianity and Media* (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2015).

> specially [*sic*] if I want to start a reading plan. I wouldn't know where to start reading and the times I have tried, I don't follow through because I forget.[63]

One of the most downloaded Bible applications is YouVersion's freely available Bible App, which was dubbed the "digital Gideon's Bible" by *Publishers Weekly* in 2011.[64] The application was developed and funded by LifeChurch.tv in Edmond, Oklahoma, and financially supported by various donors. According to their website, YouVersion advertises its Bible app with 1,753 Bible versions and the support of 1,134 languages. The company counts every new installation of its application, which currently has over 300 million installations on smartphones and tablets worldwide.[65] Such applications offer users not only different versions of the biblical text at one swipe but a lot of additional material, such as maps, illustrations, and videos. They also offer structured reading plans and invite the user to mark passages and make notes—not only for their personal use but also for sharing and discussing with others in social networks. The smartphone or tablet, which acts as an interface between user and application, is always at hand, as people usually carry it with them wherever they go. By default, the Word of God in its different modes of digital consumption is always at hand as well, wherever they are. Accordingly, YouVersion's website used to display the slogan "The Bible is everywhere" and explained, "God is near, and so is His Word. As you wake up. While you wait. When you meet a friend. Before you go to sleep. When the Bible is always with you, it becomes a part of your daily life."[66] The producer's promise fits well with evangelicalism's emphasis of a regular Bible-reading practice as an important Christian identity marker and a practice shaping evangelical subjects.[67]

To reissue an object in a new medium or format has implications for the function of the object but also for its design and manufacture, that is, the production and the circulation. Today Bible publishers and Bible societies quite naturally offer digital versions as these make the biblical text available in a medium that has become ubiquitous in everyday life. In addition, remediation in new media formats allows producers to access new markets and reach new groups of prospective customers—or converts—and enables the distribution in missionary contexts, where the import of printed Bibles might be problematic or even dangerous.[68]

[63] Comment no. 16 on the blog post "Digital Bibles: Good or Bad Idea?" by Poncho Lowder published on *Vyrso Voice: The Christian eBook Blog* (http://blog.vyrso.com) on August 5, 2013.

[64] Marcia Z. Nelson, "Bibles and Sacred Texts 2011: As in the Rest of Publishing, It's Digital, Digital, Digital," *Publishers Weekly*, October 17, 2011, 24.

[65] YouVersion, "The Bible App," accessed August 31, 2018, https://www.youversion.com/the-bible-app/.

[66] Since a makeover of the website in 2018, this slogan is no longer displayed on the current version of YouVersion's web presence.

[67] James S. Bielo, *Words upon the Word*: *An Ethnography of Evangelical Group Bible Study* (New York: New York University Press, 2009).

[68] Hutchings, "E-Reading and the Christian Bible," 424–5.

Circulation: Deployment, Reception, and Ideology or Cultural Work

In Morgan's model of material analysis, *deployment* refers to the constant circulation of artifacts in the context of commercial, artistic, or public performances and private practices such as trading, collecting, displaying, and gifting.[69] Through deployment, objects might encounter new practice settings and interpretive frames that extend their original function and intent. Old illuminated Bible manuscripts become collectors' items displayed in museums for their craftsmanship and artwork. As we saw, the Bible once used by Martin Luther King Jr. becomes a symbolic object in the second-term inauguration ceremony for Barack Obama, America's first black president, on January 21, 2013, which coincided with the federal holiday in honor of the civil rights leader. In both cases, the specific design, manufacture, and history of the object influence possible deployments of the object, which are not primarily concerned with the semantic meaning of their textual content.

Reception is broadly understood as the use of objects by religious practitioners and other people who handle the artifact (e.g., traders, collectors).[70] This includes handling and practices that might differ from the original or officially intended use of the object in question. Victorian parlor Bibles were not only read but were also displayed to indicate status and express the aesthetic taste of its owners. Contemporary Bibles of devout evangelicals often are full of handwritten notes scribbled in the margins, colorful markings in the text, and sticky notes peeping out from the pages. They tell a story of intensive Bible study and a life steeped in the Word of God. Such Bibles give access to the biblical text but also function as identity marker and material repository for memories:

> My grandmother died. And on that day of her funeral my mom handed me one of the most precious treasures I've ever had in my possession—her Bible. Inside, the pages are filled with notes that capture how the Word of God was living and active for her throughout her life. . . . As I held it in my hands and read her secret prayers for her grandchildren written out, her bold declarations of truth, her faith in the God who saves . . . I knew . . . I had nothing of this magnitude to pass on to my own children and grandchildren. And I wouldn't if I continued to take notes on my iPad every time I studied the Bible.[71]

A Bible might function as material family memento, but the concrete materiality of a medium can limit the uses an object is put to. The lack of physical properties of digital Bible versions, which become accessible only through an electronic device and the relatively short lifespan of devices and applications before these are succeeded by updated

[69] Morgan, "Material Analysis," 27. [70] Ibid., 28.

[71] Brooke McGlothlin, "Why You Should Still Read Your Bible (and Not Just Your iPad)," blog, April 25, 2013, http://brookemcglothlin.co/blog/2013/04/why-you-should-still-use-your-real-bible-and-not-just-your-ipad.

versions or a new generation, render the digital object insufficient to act as a material memento of the past.

The ninth and final aspect of Morgan's analytic model pertains to the *ideology and cultural work* an object accomplishes through all the previously mentioned aspects of its materiality, (re)mediation, deployment, and circulation. It refers to the often repetitive engagement with material culture and its function in creating, shaping, sustaining, and transforming religious worlds and subjectivities.[72] That the Bible acquired an iconic status in American culture is the result of the ideological cultural work enacted through a continuous engagement with the Bible as material object in diverse practice settings: Bible reading; the production, circulation, and consumption of Bible media; uses of the Bible in religious and public rituals; the display of Bible monuments and the encounter of biblical worlds in creation museums and Bible parks.[73]

The variety of examples illustrating the different aspects of the materiality of the Bible has shown that the Bible is more than a text to be read, interpreted, and understood. The printed Bible is a material object made of words on paper, bound pages, cover, and spine used in various ways. The biblical text itself has a material dimension that becomes obvious when looking at the visual image formed by words and typography, whether printed on pages or displayed on electronic devices. We saw that the Bible can be considered a transmedial object that is mediated and accessed through various media formats—print, digital, audio—which all come with their own affordances. Morgan's nine aspects of a material analysis point out that the material culture of the Bible relates to more than just the object as such. Thus an analysis of the materiality should always include not only the material properties of the object in question but the ways an object is used by religious practitioners, how it is deployed to create and sustain religious worlds, subjects, and communities, and how it is embedded in cultural discourses and practices.

Future Prospects and Questions

- The Bible is a transmedial and transtextual object that is available in various translations, formats, and media. A material analysis guided by the nine aspects as suggested by David Morgan could be comparatively applied to different media and formats to gain insight into how different media come with different affordances and produce different effects in the context of production, circulation, and deployment of Bible media.
- Such a comparative endeavor will further our knowledge about how change and innovation in media formats affect religious discourses, practices, and identity

[72] Morgan, "Material Analysis," 29–30.

[73] Marty, "America's Iconic Book," 1–21; Beal, "The End of the Word," 207–24. See also the anthropologist James S. Bielo's project "Materializing the Bible," accessed July 20, 2017, http://www.materializingthebible.com/. Finally, see Bielo's essay "Theme Parks," and Valarie Ziegler's chapter on "Creationist Museums," both in this volume.

politics and thus contributes to our understanding of the ongoing transformation of religion. Such an analysis would be situated in the broader project of writing religious history as a history of religious media.[74]

- A comparative analysis of different Bible media could further focus on the question of how those media relate to each other and support, constrain, or depend on each other. This question is particularly relevant in the context of the introduction of new technologies and new media in religious contexts. The import of new media is often accompanied by processes of dispute and negotiation, of the appropriateness of such media and their ability to mediate the divine before adopting such technologies.

Suggested Readings and Annotated Bibliography

Hutchings, Tim. "Augmented Graves and Virtual Bibles: Digital Media and Material Religion." In *Materiality and the Study of Religion: The Stuff of the Sacred*, edited by Tim Hutchings and Joanne McKenzie, 85–99. London: Routledge, 2017.

The first part of this chapter applies a material approach to digital products and discusses the material dimension of digital media, showing that digital objects are produced, circulated, and consumed just like other material objects. Their specific materiality comes with certain affordances that shape and constrain the ways users engage with digital media.

Hutchings, Tim. "E-Reading and the Christian Bible." *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 44, no. 4 (2015): 423–40.

Hutchings's article provides a good introduction to digital Bible media and how their technological properties shape the encounter and engagement with the biblical text. The article sketches user attitudes, motivations, and experiences with digital Bible media and thereby provides interesting insights into Bible practices in the digital age.

McDannell, Colleen. "Material Christianity" and "The Bible in the Victorian Home." In *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America*, 1–16 and 67–102. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995.

The first chapter of McDannell's book argues for a materialization of the study of American Christianity and explains the main reasons for the long neglect of the material dimension of Christianity. The third chapter, on Victorian Bibles, focuses on the Bible as material artifact and the question of how the text became a precious possession and holy object in the context of the domestic sphere in the Victorian era. The volume is richly illustrated with a broad variety of historical examples.

Meyer, Birgit. "Religious Sensations: Why Media, Aesthetics, and Power Matter in the Study of Contemporary Religion." In *Religion: Beyond a Concept*, edited by Hent de Vries, 704–23. New York: Fordham University Press, 2008.

Meyer's essay is a good introduction to the material approach in studying religion. She emphasizes the crucial role of materiality, media, and religious sensations in the making and sustaining of religious worlds, subjects, and communities. She introduces her central concept of "sensational forms," a set of media and practices in which what is perceived as the divine

[74] Peter J. Bräunlein, "Religionsgeschichte als Mediengeschichte—Eine Skizze," *Münchner Theologische Zeitschrift* 55 (2004): 325–9; Meyer, "Material Mediations," 11.

or the transcendental becomes mediated and thus accessible and sense-able to religious practitioners.

Morgan, David. "Material Analysis and the Study of Religion." In *Materiality and the Study of Religion: The Stuff of the Sacred*, edited by Tim Hutchings and Joanne McKenzie, 14–32. London: Routledge, 2017.

Morgan's chapter introduces an analytical approach comprising nine different aspects to structure a material analysis of the various facets of the materiality of an object as well as the handling of the object by religious practitioners and the object's function in mediating religious worlds.

Parmenter, Dorina Miller. "Iconic Books from Below: The Christian Bible and the Discourse of Duct Tape." In *Iconic Books and Texts*, edited by James W. Watts, 225–38. Sheffield, UK: Equinox, 2015.

Parmenter's chapter is dedicated to more mundane and individual Bible practices, such as the worn-out and duct-taped Bibles that indicate long and heavy usage by their owners and mark them as deeply steeped in the Word of God. By studying common, noninstitutionalized, and individual Bible practices, she demonstrates that the iconic status of the Bible is produced and upheld not just by theological discourse focusing on the semantic meaning of the biblical text and official and High Church rituals but also by mundane rituals and practices of the lived religion of individual practitioners.

Plate, S. Brent. "Looking at Words: The Iconicity of the Page." In *Iconic Books and Texts*, edited by James W. Watts, 119–33. Sheffield, UK: Equinox, 2013.

In his chapter, Plate analyzes the material dimension of words, arguing that visual design influences the cognitive interpretation of texts. Using various examples, he shows how words function as images, become iconic, and shape and stimulate the process of perception long before the reader engages in deciphering the semantic meaning of the text displayed. Further, he argues that there is an intricate relationship between the typography and design of religious scriptures and related theologies or ideologies.