Faith-Based Electronic Publishing and Learning Environments as a Model for New Scholarly Publishing Applications

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Abstract
Faith-based publishers were some of the earliest adopters of electronic publishing; while many such publishers continue to produce simple e-books and/or websites for personal or academic study, a smaller number have developed comprehensive, integrated, highly dynamic electronic publishing and learning environments. There are lessons to be learned for the future of secular scholarly publishing through examining how faith-based communities of readers/learners are engaging in these specific resources. The tailoring of eTheology applications to communities of users also offers a model for a potential/future integrated scholarly publishing system that would dynamically engage in levels or knowledge domains of discrete (but interconnected) "communities" of users, collect and analyze usage and needs in real time, as well as provide clusters of resources and tools tailored for the user.

Keywords
Digital humanities; Electronic publishing; E-books; Learning communities

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Introduction

Faith-based publishers were some of the earliest adopters of electronic publishing; while many such publishers continue to produce simple e-books and/or websites for personal or academic study, a smaller number have developed comprehensive, integrated, and highly dynamic electronic publishing and learning environments. Two of the most successful such environments are Olive Tree (www.olivetree.com, "The

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Bible Study App") and Logos (www.logos.com, "Bible Software"), both of which are focused on here, since my contention is that there are lessons to be learned for the future of secular scholarly publishing through examining how faith-based communities of readers/learners are engaging in these specific resources. For example, the dynamic features of ePhilology, as discussed by Crane, Bamman, and Jones (2008), have parallels in current "eTheology" (as it is tempting to call them) publishing and learning applications. The tailoring of eTheology applications to communities of users (e.g., those seeking serious academic content, guidance for pastoral duties, personal spiritual development, etc.) also offers a model for a potential/future (see Brown, Griffiths, & Rascoff, 2007) integrated scholarly publishing system that would dynamically engage in levels or knowledge domains of discrete (but interconnected) "communities" of users (see Burdick, Drucker, Lunenfeld, Presner, & Schnapp, 2012, p. 45), collect and analyze usage and needs in real time, as well as provide clusters of resources and tools that are similarly tailored for the user (i.e., scholarly articles or books, analytical tools, and embedded computer apps). As mobile electronic publishing and learning environments, Olive Tree and Logos have to a certain extent already reconfigured scholarly publishing, presenting and integrating traditional "static" scholarly texts into dynamic cross-platform applications that offer powerful modes of pedagogic development.

eTheology applications: A user's perspective

Contra the direction of much literary theory for the past three or four decades, eTheology applications are firmly "logocentric" or, more accurately, "*Logos*-centric." The *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) gives as a first instance of "logocentric," meaning "centred on reason," from 1939; however, in the "draft additions" to this entry (*OED*, 1997), a new meaning emerges: "centred on language; regarding language as a fundamental source of reason," with the *OED* also giving a suitably ambiguous and marvellously incomprehensible literary-theory quotation as the first usage, in 1971. "Logocentric" is, of course, used pejoratively by literary theorists, although with the more recent religious turn in contemporary theory (if roughly 1990 can be thought of as recent: see Lane, 2013), this negative signification is being questioned.

Examples of such a turn from a range of literary theorists and contemporary philosophers include the following: Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism* (1997; trans. 2003); Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity* (2003); Agamben, *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans* (2000; trans. 2005); Zimmermann, *Recovering Theological Hermeneutics: An Incarnational-Trinitarian Theory of Interpretation* (2004); and Caputo and Scanlon, editors, *Augustine and Postmodernism: Confessions and Circumfession* (2005). What these and similar texts share is a focus on the Logos and its implications, but what they also reveal (e.g., Agamben's [2005] discussion of the word "katargein" starting on page 95 of *The Time That Remains*) is the comprehensive pedagogic, interpretive, and translation resources and tools needed for a more general audience to engage with Biblical text. While such resources and tools have long existed in centres of learning or in private libraries, their availability in electronic form makes them far more readily—and cheaply—accessible for a wider community of users. Crane, Bamman, and Jones (2008) list six features distinguishing print and electronic publication (basing the latter on Perseus): global access; hypertextual writing; fine-grained, repurposable digital

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objects; documents that learn from each other; documents that learn from their users; and documents that adapt themselves to their users.

Unlike the open source Perseus, which has the ambitious "mission … to help make the full record for humanity as intellectually accessible as possible to every human being, providing information adapted to as many linguistic and cultural backgrounds as possible" (see www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/research), the two proprietary eTheology applications under discussion operate commercially, although with their own ambitious aims in terms of focused interrelated data sets. Similarly, when it comes to hypertextual writing, the proprietary eTheology applications again fall short, since according to Crane, Bamman, and Jones (2008), hypertextual writing needs "to build on ubiquitous access to source materials" and, further, "Only open access publications with links to open-access sources can increase the transparency of what we in the humanities do and engage a broader audience in the intellectual discourse that we pursue" (p.38). Where eTheology applications are strong is in the remainder of Crane, Bamman, and Jones' list, especially with "repurposable" digital documents, smart books, user feedback, personalization, and customization. While Logos is the more powerful of the two packages being examined, a brief foray through Olive Tree sets the scene.

Olive Tree application

One of the advantages of Olive Tree is the fact that the application is available across platforms, including cellphones, tablet computers, and laptop computers, in dedicated versions that are designed for the particular device, and which can be synced across all devices. (Logos can also be synced, but the mobile versions are simplified and fairly basic compared with the full application that runs on a laptop or desktop.) The core function of Olive Tree is the "Resource Guide," which is called, perhaps rather cheesily, a "personal research assistant" that "follows you, looking in your library for any information that is relevant to your reading" (http://blog.olivetree.com/2012/06/05/resource-guide-my-personal-research-assistant). The resource guide, for example, will offer for any particular verse of text being read directly relevant material found in any of the following: available critical apparatus (such as language or translation apparatus); maps; other Bible translations; Christian e-books; commentaries; dictionaries; and study Bibles (including separately packaged, but associated, study notes).

On the iPad version of Olive Tree, the resource guide is one option within a toolbar that appears when a verse is touched on the screen; this toolbar also contains a copy function, a note-taking function, a bookmark function, a share function (share with Facebook, Twitter, email, or text message), and a function to start the page at a particular verse. Another menu icon offers customization features (called "my stuff"), which include reading plans; notes (a notes dialogue box that contains the verse-referenced personal notes, listed by date modified, title, or verse title); notifications; highlights (searchable via different highlighter colours); bookmarks; book ribbons; tags (pre-set list or customized by the reader); help videos; and other sync services (on the iPad this synchronizes with Evernote). With the study Bibles, such as the *Complete Word Study Bible*, tapping a word brings up the Hebrew or Greek original, the transliteration, grammar notes, and *Strong's Concordance* number; tapping *the Strong's Concordance* number brings up the definition, in context, with hypertext links. Additionally, the "look up" function enables the user to find the word in any other

concordance within their library. At this point, a user can add a note, utilizing the language tools on the screen. Finally, the standard screen layout for most users is the "split screen" layout of a main translation at the top or side, with another translation open underneath or side by side; the additional translation scrolls automatically to keep in line with the main one.

With proprietary software, one serious concern is the cost of populating applications with data. The current Olive Tree *free* book count is 150 books, including Bibles in various translations and languages, theological books, and study guides. In other words, a user can install the free application, download a large number of free books, and immediately start utilizing the pedagogic resources of the application. Where this differs from, say, the vast number of books available for free on Project Gutenberg (42,000 books as of December 2013) is the dynamic integration of this smaller free library (to ignore the paid-for resources for the moment) into what Hayles (2012) calls "spatialised grids" of information, "extending in all directions and incorporating rich connections within themselves" (p. 50). Not only is the reader being *offered* rich data connections, ranging from notes to commentaries, which themselves are hypertext linked to other "spatialised grids," but the reader is creating new connections and organizing additional data, which will be *offered back* at a later date as additional contextualized information.

For example, in a recent paper delivered at the Electronic Textual Cultures Laboratory (ETCL), University of Victoria, I utilized Blanchot's essay called "Reading" (in Blanchot, 1989); within this essay Blanchot compares the reader of books to the disciples who move back the stone to Lazarus' burial chamber (and extends the comparison to Christ, who issues the command): "The book is there, then, but the work is still hidden. It is absent, perhaps radically so; in any case it is concealed, obfuscated by the evident presence of the book, behind which it awaits the liberating decision, the 'Lazare, veni forus' " (p. 195). Blanchot quotes from the Latin Vulgate translation, John 11:43; in English this reads "Lazarus, come forth" (KJV). In my current Olive Tree, a user-generated tag has been created, associated with a user-generated note (which cross-references Blanchot's essay with an essay by D.L. Moody); the user-generated tag is now available for further study or research on this topic, and for the organization of future annotations, cross-textual references, and textual resources beyond (or outside of) the application.

The Olive Tree "share" function is easily passed over, yet this link with social networking software is crucial to another element of "spatialised grids" of information, which is "cross-connections with other grids" (Hayles, 2012, p. 50), in this case, with a "low … bar to entry" (Burdick et al., 2012, p. 80) for both joining a community and generating more data for that community. In terms of the future of academic publishing, this single component of eTheology applications has potentially vast consequences, and it is one that Burdick and colleagues (2012) stress can be comprehensively analyzed by digital humanists:

> [T]he humanities are one of the key places to which we naturally turn to understand, analyze, and evaluate the social and cultural significance of any technology, to interpret its value, its dangers, and its possibilities. This, we

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> contend, makes the work of the humanities more critical than ever as new social structures, economic models, cultural forms, value systems, and forms of selfhood emerge, rendering the "human being" decidedly more motile, diffuse, and even fragile. Broadly speaking, since the Digital Humanities studies and explicates what it means to be human in the networked information age, it expands the reach and relevance of the humanities far beyond small groups of specialists. ... The scope and scale of the Digital Humanities encompass a vast archipelago of specialized domains of expertise and conversation, but also open up the prospect of a conversation extending far beyond the walls of the ivory tower that connects universities to cultural institutions, libraries, museums, and community organizations. (p. 82)

From an eTheology perspective, this makes perfect sense, since the corporate nature of faith communities is foundational, and this includes pedagogy; as Bonhoeffer (1998) argues, "[A]ll intellectual acts are potentially bound up with sociality" (p. 68).

Logos application

The Logos eTheology application is shaped around social networking and corporate study in a number of ways, not least being that the application opens with a Web-style "home page" that combines toolbars, easy-to-access settings, a news-feed page of articles (a combination of advertising for additional data and genuinely useful information) that are hypertext linked to the Logos website, and suggested readings that link through to a reader's customized Logos content layout. Logos also allows readers to share textual data with social networking software, including a Christian social networking site called Faithlife. Logos is an enormously powerful application, and compared to Olive Tree, it is more expensive, however, the "base" packages are comparable in price to popular proprietary software such as the Adobe Suite (academic pricing).

Apart from the cheapest base package, the full power of Logos' system can be acquired with the next package that is one level higher, the "languages" package, which comes (at the time of writing) with a library of 430 books (called "resources" in the Logosphere), including most crucially the languages or translation apparatuses. A typical reader's screen layout in the languages package will include the following: a lead translation (with tabbed additional translations that can be clicked on to immediately replace this text) open in a large dialogue box, probably an interlinear Bible with inline original language data, transliterations, morphologies, and *Strong's Concordance* numbers, et cetera (all customizable); a commentary in a parallel dialogue box (again, with tabbed additional commentaries on standby); a list of "References" or *intratextual* citations; and a "Text Comparison" list of verses from different translations for immediate comparison of a particular verse. A large vertical dialogue box provides two tabs, an exegetical guide and a passage guide. The former smart-searches all of the reader's Logos resources for apparatuses, grammars, visualizations, and word-by-word analysis, and the latter smart-searches resources for commentaries, cross-references, parallel passages, tagging metadata, outlines, images, maps, multimedia resources, word clouds, interesting words, graphical representations and comparisons, and links to media resources available online, including online sermons. User-generated "documents" are comprehensive. For example, the user can create or edit bibliographies,

clippings, notes, passage lists, prayer lists, reading plans, sentence diagrams, syntax searches, visual filters, word puzzles, and word lists. Guides are aimed at different communities of users or different purposes (e.g., passage, exegetical, word study, sermon-based), and the "tools" are exegetical and study tools, such as passage analysis, text comparison, community notes, collections, favourites, and highlighting. An advanced feature that separates this eTheology application from virtually all of its competitors is the "command window" in which commands can be typed, such as "rebuild index," "look up [word]," and "open notes."

Academic publishing futures: Some preliminary conclusions

An anecdotal reflection is pertinent to the argument being presented here: while working on my *Global Literary Theory: An Anthology* (Routledge, 2013) and the accompanying interactive website (http://cw.routledge.com/textbooks/9780415783026), I was struck by the fact that I would rather have produced a set of electronic resources similar to Olive Tree and Logos for students to learn literary theory and for professors to teach it. In fact, some of the structure and content decisions for the anthology were made with electronic resources in mind; some of the peer reviewers did not like these decisions, but students have since thanked me in person and by email for precisely these features that were based on eTheology applications. In other words, while an e-book version of this anthology will no doubt be made available, this will still not come near to the complexities and pedagogic advantages of an eTheology application, even as hastily sketched out above.

Olive Tree and Logos provide integrated dynamic sets of reading tools that work with, and for, the reader, and are embedded within communities of learning geared toward sharing knowledge. From a phenomenological perspective, it can be argued that these reading tools are equipment in the sense of being tools that are practical or ready-to-hand, but also in the sense of equipping a person for a journey or voyage (i.e., pedagogic formation), which also means they are frameworks for "deep contextual understanding," to adopt Bill Seaman's (2009) phrase that he uses to distinguish between humans and electronic computers. Seaman's account of the former could be used to describe eTheology reading applications:

> [H]umans show a deep contextual understanding to their studied subjects, enfolding a 'knowing' and informed relationality to multiple and shifting contexts in the production of thought. Humans build up an understanding of environment through multi-modal sensing, learning, multiple forms of logic etc., as well as by employing distributed technological processes and relationality to media exchanges as part of knowledge production. (p. 214)

The eTheology applications model the "dynamic relationality" (p. 209) that arises from contextual understanding, that is, the fact that "often new knowledge arises in the space between established domains" (p. 209), and this (perhaps rather obviously) relates to future academic publishing, especially in light of Seaman's discussion of his "insight engine," where there is the exploration of "multiple disciplinary perspectives through 'intelligent' dynamic juxtaposition of relevant information to facilitate informed discussion and debate," achieved through "creating a singular multi-functional interface enabling one to access a multitude of distributed digital processes, bringing different

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'perspective' domains into juxtaposition" (p. 210). More simply put, this is a way of structuring, exploring, but also leaving open the juxtapositions and creative sparks that arise from partaking of the "academic conversation" of peer-reviewed outputs such as conference papers, journal papers, and monographs.

The value in adding multimedia components to this "multi-functional interface" could derive from Seaman's (2009) notion of the development of a "common language," which would then have the potential to enable "us to bridge disciplinary domains in a relevant manner through articulate negotiation of linguistic and related media-object potentials" (p. 210). O'Donnell (2010) ponders such media objects in the context of learned societies and their associated electronic academic journal publishing, noting that "we have a population of scholars who want us to innovate more ambitiously"; he asks: "Can we innovate with the technology of publication itself to include more illustrations, animations, media clips, and databases in what we publish?" (p. 51). But while the answer is an implied yes, and while O'Donnell goes on to talk about the necessity of "outreach" and not becoming too preoccupied with technological questions – and further, while he is undoubtedly right that the core competency of a learned society is to identify "good scholarly work" (p. 52) – there is a sense that the innovative technological framework and potential benefits become secondary and simply about communicating with other groups of people (who presumably inform the decisions as to what constitutes "value" in terms of public funding for such learned societies).

The eTheology applications studied here are *not* a case of technological "add-ons" for communicating with less-knowledgeable people, even though they do utilize technologies that make advanced learning accessible. I suggest that the eTheology applications are technologies in Heidegger's sense of being a "mode of knowing" (Pattison, 2000, p. 49), whereby two quite different concepts of *techne* coincide, that is, between equipment and art: "Equipment 'frames' its material as ready for use, and thus reduces the material to its usefulness or serviceability. The work of art, on the other hand, allows the material … to permeate and be tangibly present. … It is not 'used-up' or reduced to 'usefulness' but is re-presented in a new aspect" (p. 53). So, if rapid searching, that "core function of digital libraries" (Witten, Bainbridge, & Nichols, 2010, p. 134), is deeply contextualized, but also re-contextualized in multiple user-defined or shaped "context-windows" (as Seaman, 2009, calls them, p. 210), which then surround an interlinear text (where the levels of interlinear data can also be user-defined), the framing is less about making available a "standing reserve" or pre-programmed "resource" (to use Pattison's translation of *Bestand*), and more about creative connections that lead to innovation and new knowledge production.

How far, then, is this above notion of *techne* any different from what humanists simply have already done, that is, the standard "work of the humanities: acquiring new information, synthesizing that information into new knowledge, and arriving at new understandings" (Wulfman, 2009, p. 19)? In some ways this question brings my exploration full circle, back to Perseus, which Wulfman articulates in relation to the tools that are brought to bear upon our understanding of primary texts:

> [B]ecause computational technologies promise to support new ways of discovering relationships and asking questions in large, heterogenous

> collections, the fact that these materials co-exist in an integrated digital library is more important than digitization, because users can exploit the suite of tools available there: automatically generated citation links between primary sources and secondary literature; contextual linking; spatio-temporal visualization tools; sophisticated search and retrieval utilities, and others. (p. 19)

Wulfman also discusses some of the weaknesses of Perseus, such as the primary text being overwhelmed by the "deictic apparatus" as well as the associated scalability issues, and further, the fact that "Perseus's apparatus is opaque and only weakly differentiated," for example, experienced when a reader has to laboriously follow "links one after another" because "there is no way to distinguish among the potentially very many sources of annotation" (p. 21). In Olive Tree and Logos, the user interface tackles these issues in a variety of ways, with the simpler Olive Tree relying on user-generated tags to build upon the already usefully designed "deictic apparatus," whereas both Olive Tree and Logos add user functionality through pop-up data-rich windows that show the reader the data (either in summary form or with the first few lines of text) that would otherwise be buried in a link; Logos adds to this by enabling the reader to create "context-windows" of which snapshots can be saved and re-opened at a later date, to return to a creative or particularly informative layout. More poetically, this is analogous to what Wulfman (2009) describes as "tools that allow readers to construct their own melodies and harmonies of argument, analysis, and historical dependency from the critical cacophony" (p. 23), and I suggest that Olive Tree and Logos can inform the current academic research into such tools.

There is one more issue to conclude with, and that is the notion that the "hypervariorum" ("the explicit linking of all that has been thought and said in print about a canonical work to the objects of criticism," p. 21), as with other "hypertexts … substitutes for the rhetoric of judgment the rhetoric of choice" (p. 23). I suggest that what eTheology applications can offer is a third option, where this binary opposition is held in an open tension, one explainable through phenomenological language, that is, where Heidegger's notion of *techne* corresponds with his notion of *aletheia* (truth as unconcealment); in other words, instead of future electronic academic publishing replacing editorial or ideological judgment with a pure stream of (admittedly reader-relatable) data sets, the technology of eTheology applications facilitates *pedagogic mapping,* where the map both reveals and conceals through shades of grey rather than a binary either/or (judgment or choice) representation of knowledge.

This mapping functions synchronically and diachronically, something that Pattison (2000) alludes to in his gloss on Heidegger's notion of artistic *techne,*

> which is not the presentation of a finished product with a determinate significance (as if it were the case that "the work means *this* and nothing else") but an active bringing-forth, a process of unconcealment. Consequently, the truth of the work, that which is unconcealed in it, always stands in a determinate relation to the prior state of concealment from which it emerges. It comes with an accompanying penumbra, and beyond that, with a relation to what is not at all unconcealed in it, a darkness beyond and behind it. (p. 51)

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Although this sounds esoteric and typically Heideggerian, Pattison later makes an important observation, that "[o]ur normal experience of daylight is, of course, of a constantly shifting pattern of light and shade, and our perception and appreciation of the visual field is inseparable from the fluctuating process of illumination" (p. 51). So the synchronic component of the data mapping includes the "penumbra," and the diachronic component records in reproducible form the experience and insights gained through the "constantly shifting" patterns of knowledge formation and interaction, or, to use Pattison's excellent phrase, "the fluctuating process of illumination" (p. 51). Both Olive Tree and Logos facilitate such data mapping, building complex pictures of pedagogic journeys that can in turn generate valuable user-created information for feeding back into the eTheology application's dynamic database.

Websites

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Logos, https://www.logos.com

Olive Tree, http://www.olivetree.com

Olive Tree resource guide, http://blog.olivetree.com/2012/06/05/resource-guide-my-personal-research-assistant/

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