

FRIARS' BOOKSHELF



PIETRO DELLA VECCHIA - ST. DOMINIC AND THE DEVIL

AND THE WORD WAS MADE DIGITAL

The Douay-Rheims, RSV, and NABRE Bibles for e-readers.

If you were in London during the first decades of the twentieth century, you may have noticed an old man dressed in dirty-white wool robes bearing a large sack on his shoulder like the exile's baggage in Ezekiel (Ez 12:6). This man was Fr. Vincent McNabb, O.P., and the sack was called the McNabb-sack. It contained his life-blood: the Bible, the Breviary, and a few volumes of the *Summa Theologiae*. Fr. McNabb was famous for his Hyde Park sermons, which would begin with the Gospel of the day read from his Bible and would proceed through whatever topics the good Dominican thought his audience, whom he loved, needed to hear, assisted when necessary by the reasonable arguments of the Angelic Doctor.

Despite its usefulness, the McNabb-sack must have been a heavy burden, even if its contents were calculated to help make the yokes of others light. Like so many cases when we gaze on the mysteries of history in light of the wisdom of our own age, we might longingly sigh: If only McNabb had been alive today, he could have used a Kindle.

Now, I like books very much—sleek-pagéd books, and such as sleep a-nights—but I recognize that electronic tablets like the Kindle or iPad can be very useful as a supplement. The Kindle, in addition to being smaller and lighter than a sack full of books, is able to provide the three needs of McNabb: the Bible, the Breviary, and the *Summa*.

The Breviary is well accounted for by the website www.ibreviary.com/m, which allows a user to pray the Liturgy of the Hours in a variety of languages and liturgical forms. (To use this feature, it is most convenient to use a 3G Kindle that is not reliant on the availability of WiFi access.) The Kindle versions of the *Summa* are somewhat more difficult to use, mostly due to both the complexity of its arrangement and the inherent difficulties attendant on flipping back and forth to read the objections and replies, but it is possible to find versions of it that are adequate. But of the three, the Bible is by far the best provided for.

Historically speaking, it is not surprising that the Bible should have this advantage, for since the invention of the printing press the Bible has been at the forefront of developments in typography and printing technology. But just as with contemporary printed Bibles, which range from the cheap, mass-produced pocket New Testaments put out by Gideon's to the beautiful productions of Baronius Press, the editions available on the Kindle are considerably varied in quality.

At the time of writing, a search for "Bible" within the Kindle Store on Amazon.com brings up 19,256 results, although as may be expected many of these are various non-biblical texts such as *Men of the Bible* by Dwight Lyman Moody. "Catholic Bible," on the other hand, brings up 1,655 results. This number, too, is somewhat

exaggerated by titles such as *Where is That in the Bible?* by Patrick Madrid, as well as by editions such as *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version (with Cross-References)* by Crossway Bibles, which for some reason come up despite not being advertised as Catholic versions by the publishers themselves. In any event, there are many different versions available that can be confusing to the reader who is simply trying to find a trustworthy, usable, and complete edition of the sacred text.

Here, I'd like to focus on three different translations of the Bible that are available for Kindle: the Douay-Rheims, the Revised Standard Version, and the New American Bible. An examination of the available versions of these translations will lead to the consideration of various practical and theoretical issues regarding publishing the Bible in Kindle format.

DOUAY-RHEIMS

In light of recent trends in biblical studies, it is perhaps surprising that the Catholic translation of the Bible most widely available on the Kindle today is what is commonly called the “Douay-Rheims,” first translated from the Latin Vulgate between 1582 and 1610 by exiled English Catholics living in France and revised between 1749 and 1752 by the English bishop Richard Challoner. In the time prior to Pope Pius XII's call for translations directly from the original biblical texts, the Challoner edition of the Douay translation was widely used throughout the English-speaking world, although other approved Catholic editions also existed. In the years following the Second Vatican Council, the Douay edition was kept in print by TAN Books and more recently in the well-crafted editions of Baronius Press.

Leaving aside a consideration of the relative merits and demerits of this particular *translation*, it is interesting to note the rhetoric with which these editions are often presented on the Kindle Store: one version is described as *The Definitive English Authorized Version*, another as the *SearchByVerse™ Catholic Bible (CHURCH APPROVED OFFICIAL DOUAY-RHEIMS VERSION)*, and a

third—inexplicably, given the Kindle’s ability to easily adjust the size of the type—as the *LARGE PRINT EDITION ... The Catholic Holy Bible - Church Authorized Douay-Rheims*.

Perhaps because the Douay-Rheims translation is in the public domain, and is freely available in various forms on the Internet, many individuals have tried their hands at producing Kindle versions of the text, most of which are rather difficult to navigate and have not been carefully laid out. This is understandable, given the quantity of material involved, but it seriously dampens the usability of the texts.

These editions range in price from free to \$5.99, and clearly



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READING A BIBLE

exhibit a wide range of quality in the presentation of the text. In the \$5.99 *Catholic Bible: Douay-Rheims English Translation* published by The BibleScript, for instance, each chapter and verse number is surrounded by distracting brackets. The free version is almost unusable, as it lacks any navigation features. In *The Douay-Rheims Bible CR (with book and chapter navigation)*, priced at \$4.35, the editor has included the explanatory notes by Challoner, which most Kindle editions seem

to omit, but has not taken the trouble to set them in a different typographical style or use the footnote feature so as to differentiate them clearly from the biblical text. The \$1.99 *Catholic Bible Douay-Rheims Version (with book, chapter and verse navigation)*, edited by Forward2 is better in this respect, setting the notes in a smaller, grey font, but it puts them in between verses, rather than as footnotes.

The wide range of quality found in these editions raises interesting questions about the accuracy of the transmission of the text; with no oversight or review, how can a user be assured that this particular version is an accurate rendition of the text? How is the experience of reading the Bible affected by lingering questions about the fundamental trustworthiness of the version of the text you are reading? We might compare the experience to that of readers of the Bible in the manuscript era, when the text someone read might well have various peculiarities that could only be identified by a rigorous comparison with other manuscripts, aided at best by Hugh of St. Cher's *Correctorium*.

There is a certain irony to this proliferation of versions of the Douay Rheims Bible, given this translation's reputation as an icon of the centralized and authoritarian "pre-Conciliar" Church. In particular, the question of the inclusion or exclusion of the approved explanatory notes raises interesting questions in light of Canons 825 and 829 in the *Code of Canon Law*: Does the exclusion of the footnotes constitute a new edition of the biblical text that would consequently demand a new imprimatur?

On a related note, in my perusal of various Kindle Douay-Rheims Bibles, I was unable to find any that followed the typographical conventions of the printed editions, for instance the use of Italic text for scriptural quotations and words supplied by the translator (e.g. Romans 1:7: "To all that are at Rome, the beloved of God, called *to be* saints."), although this aspect is preserved in the more fastidious editions of the King James Version.

Of the Douay-Rheims Bibles I have looked at, the most usable seems to be that produced by Illya Antonenko, the founder of OSNOVA, a publisher that sells electronic editions of the Bible and other religious publications. This publisher came to prominence in 2009 with an innovative presentation of the King James Version that introduced a method called "Direct Verse Jump" to quickly navigate to any verse in the Bible with a few simple steps. In the OSNOVA Douay-Rheims, sold on Amazon for \$2.99 as the *Catholic Bible (D-R) (best navigation)* [ASIN: B0033PSG1Y], the

same system has been introduced, making it one of the most usable versions of this translation. Like most Kindle and printed versions of the Douay-Rheims, each verse is given its own paragraph, but here each paragraph follows immediately after the preceding paragraph, in contrast to editions such as *The Catholic Bible* | *The Catholic Holy Bible*, which has an odd and unprofessional-looking space between each verse-paragraph.

Surprisingly, this latter version nevertheless seems to be fairly popular, being ranked #1,874 in the Kindle Store, compared to #41,518 for the OSNOVA version. This is perhaps due to its \$0.99 price tag, compared to the \$2.99 price of the OSNOVA version. This is a sobering indication of how Kindle users relate cost and quality: a vastly inferior version that is two dollars cheaper might sell much better than a vastly better but slightly more expensive competitor.

REVISED STANDARD VERSION: SECOND CATHOLIC EDITION

Turning from the Douay-Rheims to the more recent translations based on the original texts rather than the Latin Vulgate, we will first consider the Revised Standard Version: Second Catholic Edition. This translation has a complex pedigree: it is a revision of the 1966 Revised Standard Version: Catholic Edition, which was a slight modification of the 1952 Revised Standard Version, which was itself an update of the late-19th century “Revised Version,” which was a revision of the 1611 “Authorized Version” (also known as the “King James Version”).

The main intent of the Second Catholic Edition is to revise the text according to the Congregation for Divine Worship’s 2002 Instruction *Liturgiam Authenticam*. The revision updates archaic language, such as “Thee” and “Thou,” as well as introducing other minor changes, such as occasional privileging of the Septuagint reading of certain texts (e.g. Isaiah 7:14’s *virgin*, rather than *young woman*), the use of the word “mercy” in place of “steadfast love,” and various changes in accordance with the 1971 RSV revision of the New Testament. The RSV: Second Catholic Edition was published in 2006, and the Kindle version was published as *The*

Ignatius Bible [Kindle Edition] in 2009 [ASIN: B002LDM8UO]. The current price as of writing is \$12.07, which is only slightly less expensive than the printed versions (hardcover: \$18.09, softcover: \$14.49), but significantly more expensive than most Bibles available on the Kindle Store. (Perhaps due to the price tag, it ranks at #7,862 in the Kindle Store).

The Kindle edition of the *Ignatius Bible* directly reproduces the look and feel of the printed edition, and offers a pleasant reading experience free from the distraction provided by bad typography. The presentation of the text itself is excellent. Chapter numbers are in bold and are slightly larger than the normal text; verse numbers within a paragraph are printed in a discrete superscript and are immediately adjacent to the following sentence. The editorial section headings are clearly distinguished from the main body of the text by being centered and bold. Book titles are bold and in all caps.

Unlike in the various Douay-Rheims editions, the footnotes have been carefully and conveniently reproduced. Notes appear in two forms: an asterisk before the start of a book that links to a short summary of the book, and underlined letters in superscript that appear after a word, linking to notes such as etymologies or major variant readings. Footnotes that reference other scriptural texts are hyperlinked, which is helpful for pursuing a particular reference. In cases where a parallel passage is indicated for a particular verse, the verse number itself is underlined, and the parallel passages are linked to directly.

Ignatius has also published a Kindle edition of *The Ignatius Catholic Study Bible New Testament* edited by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch [ASIN: B003RWSARS]. This volume also boasts fine typography and layout, with the addition of further commentary that may be accessed by clicking on underlined links in various words and passages.

The Kindle edition of the *Ignatius Bible* has been constructed with great care and is beautifully presented. Internal links allow for an integrated reading experience that allows the reader either to focus on the text itself or to pursue critical questions with ease.

Unfortunately, the navigation system as a whole is mediocre, making it very tedious to find a particular passage. It provides a good reading experience when you are already within a text, but is less useful as a reference tool for looking up particular passages. The Direct Verse Jump system developed by OSNOVA would be a significant improvement for future versions.

Further, it would be helpful if future editions of Ignatius' publications made better use of the joystick and swipe features of the Kindle Keyboard and Touch models, which give the reader greater navigational control, especially when moving between sections. Ignatius Press is at the forefront of Catholic digital publishing, and yet has curiously neglected the opportunities arising from this valuable aspect of the Kindle technology. This is more forgivable in books that tend to be read more linearly, like their delightful recent book-length interview with Msgr. Georg Ratzinger, *My Brother the Pope*, but it is more problematic in texts such as the Bible or their *Companion to the Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

NEW AMERICAN BIBLE REVISED EDITION

The most recent Catholic edition of the Bible available on the Kindle is the New American Bible Revised Edition (NABRE), promulgated by the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine and the United States Council of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) in March 2011. Like the RSV: Second Catholic Edition, the NABRE has a complex textual history: following the promulgation of Pius XII's *Divino afflante spiritu* in 1943, the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine began to translate the books of the Old and New Testaments, publishing various books as they were finished between 1952 and 1970. The full collection was published as the *New American Bible* in 1970. In 1986, a revision of the New Testament was completed, and then in 2010 a revision of the Old Testament was finished. The 2011 NABRE thus includes the 2010 Old Testament and the 1986 New Testament.

The proliferation of available Kindle versions of the Douay-Rheims is annoying, but understandable. More perplexing is the

presence of three distinct editions of the New American Bible Revised Edition. Several months ago, I purchased one of these editions for personal reading, which at the time was the only one available. Unfortunately, the version that I purchased is bizarrely laid out, with the notes for each chapter of a book stuck between one chapter and the next. This means that if you are reading a particular book and come to the end of a chapter, you either have to scroll through several screens of footnotes, or flash back to the beginning of the book and then click on the link to the next chapter. This edition is called *New American Bible Revised Edition* [ASIN: B0054SLCOQ] and was published on June 6, 2011 by Greg Fairbrother (<http://www.gregfairbrother.com/>), who has also released versions of the NABRE for other devices, including a stand-alone NABRE Bible app for the iPhone.

On October 31, 2011, another Kindle edition of the NABRE was published by Michael Pierce as *Bible: New American Bible, Revised Edition 2011* [ASIN: B006298622]. Unlike Fairbrother's edition, Pierce's version helpfully sets the footnotes at the end of the file rather than between each chapter. In addition, this version incorporates the OSNOVA navigation system, making it very easy to navigate through the text.

Finally, on November 7, 2011, a third version appeared, published by St. Benedict Press (which also publishes a selection of printed Bibles in various Catholic translations) as *NABRE: New American Bible Revised Edition* [ASIN: B0064QZQBW]. The St. Benedict's edition helpfully adds a section that lists and links to the passages used in the Lectionary of the Ordinary Form of the Roman Rite, including both the three-year Sunday cycle and the two-year weekday cycle. However, like the Fairbrother edition, the St. Benedict's edition also interpolates the notes between the chapters, raising the same problems for reading. Further, both of these editions lack the sophisticated navigation tools provided in the Pierce edition.

The Kindle user who wants to use the New American Bible is thus put in the awkward position of trying to determine which of

three versions should be purchased. This is of course a common dilemma for consumers, but in this case the choice can be bewildering: though externally indistinguishable, one of the three versions—the Pierce edition—is easily the most usable Catholic Bible available for the Kindle, and the other two are ineffective for the task of simply reading the text itself.

The customer reviews on the Amazon website are only somewhat helpful in this regard, and it is easy to imagine that an unwary reader might be led to purchase one of the inferior editions, particularly as both the Fairbrother and Pierce editions currently have four and a half stars in the review section (the St. Benedict's edition only has three stars) and as the Fairbrother edition is the cheapest edition, sold for \$4.61 as opposed to \$5.49 for the Pierce edition and \$5.95 for the St. Benedict's edition.

In principle, I am in favor of a wide licensing of the biblical text, which the USCCB has done both in this case and in the case of the printed editions of the new translation, and yet releasing seriously deficient approved editions is unfair to customers; we can hope that more stringent standards will develop in time. Further, just as Ignatius could learn much from Pierce's OSNOVA-based navigation scheme, so too the text-formatting of the Pierce version could be improved based on some of the principles of the Ignatius edition.

CONCLUSION

One of the peculiarities of digital files is that although having a proliferation of them does not physically weigh one down in the way that a McNabb-sack filled with books does, nevertheless a computer or Kindle can feel rather full when it is stuffed with many different files. While writing this essay, my Kindle screen became claustrophobically cluttered with acronyms like NABRE, D-R, and INFO/CLIOP as I downloaded sample after sample. In one sense, the Kindle is like Hermione Granger's magical tent in *Harry Potter*, expanding or contracting to fit a palace or a bungalow, while looking the same on the outside regardless.

And yet the experience of using the Kindle demands the same discipline that collating a personal library does: you need to know when to keep an item, when to get rid of it, and how to organize it. So too, the tremendous amount of text that the Bible presents must be organized and presented in a mature and disciplined way in order to be effective.

Here we might think about how the innovation of chapter and verse numbers itself is a human tool that assists us in the organization, presentation, and understanding of the sacred text. In the time leading up to the final development of the chapter-and-verse system, different solutions were proposed, such as chapters with alphabetic section listings, or in some cases just simple incipits to jog a mind that had already mostly memorized the text. In the case of the Kindle versions of the Bible we have considered here, a similar process of innovation and self-correction is underway: different modes of presentation have been developed that have different advantages and disadvantages for interacting with the Bible.

Certain publishers have made valiant efforts to use the new tools of digital media effectively in the transmission of the Bible, but unfortunately many more publishers have glutted the market with inadequate versions that accomplish little more than allowing buyers to feel piously self-satisfied at having the Bible on their Kindle, rather like the unread Reader's Digest book series that once adorned American mantelpieces. In the coming years, we hope that established Catholic publishers and individual entrepreneurs alike will rise to the task of creating reliable and usable digital editions of the Bible and other central texts, responding to the challenges presented by these forms of media and taking full advantage of their unique possibilities.

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