Scripture as Interface
A Hermeneutical Reflection on a Concept based in Media Theory

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Following Michael Hemenway's description of the Bible as interface, Frederike van Oorschot reflects the dogmatic implications of this description. Understanding scripture as interface describes scripture as a zone of encounter, prompting questions about its affordances and highlights the relational, anarchic, and collaborational character of scripture.

1. Introduction: Three Premises and a Position

The relation in this paper between dogmatic and hermeneutical questions about Scripture to the phenomenon of "digitization" is based on three premises.

First, "digitization" not only describes binary data processing or computer based technologies but is also related to a profound media change that affects our understanding of writtenness. In terms of media history, one might compare this change from a "culture of book" to a "digital culture" with the invention of the printing press.[1] This

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[1] See e.g. Dalferth (2018), 428; Theologie und Ethik (ed.) (2016), 7. In reference to the understanding of writtenness, it might be interesting to discuss this notion of materiality and its affordances referred to the digital and forms of digital writtenness, related to Michael Hemenways understanding of probabilistic materiality. See Hemenway (2017), 6–7.41

implies – and might already serve as a first suggestion for discussion – a concept of "digitality" as both media and cultural change.[2]

Second, the hermeneutical question about Scripture and its authority is (also) a question about media. It reacts to the "media problem of monotheism" (Nordhofen), i.e. to the necessity of mediating the communication of the un-created God with the created world.[3] This notion of mediality is often not explicitly addressed in Christian dogmatic thinking about Scripture, but it is implicitly very powerful: The Christian tradition places special confidence in biblical texts as witnesses of God. Through the Holy Spirit, they reveal the gospel again and again to persons by being read and heard. Therefore, Scripture has a unique authority for the protestant community (sola scriptura) and is described as one of the *medium salutis*[4] in many theological traditions.[5]

Third, when it comes to Scripture as a medium, the medial form of the Bible – its "mediality" as text, song, image or play – must be taken seriously. Hence the question arises as to where and how medium and message are interrelated.[6] The debate - though still very small – about digitization and the Bible reflects an awareness of this

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[2] For my understanding of digital culture, see van Oorschot (2020), 236–237. Hemenway, too, offers a very similar understanding: "The term digital has come to represent a massive discourse that begins with the basic distinction between continuous (analog) and discrete (binary) phenomenon, particularly in reference to the binary machine language that is the basis for most forms of computing today. Yet, regardless of any meaningful distinction between continuous and discrete, digital has come to represent all things related to computing, the internet, and in a sense, anything that has a screen as its primary interface." Hemenway (2017), 8.

[3] See Körtner (2018), 507–8 (my translation).

[4] The latin term implies both: Scripture as medium and means of salvation. The following theological reflection reflects on this relation in reference to the question in the mediality of the written word.

[5] See e.g. Körtner (2001), 311. The contentiousness of this question is also expressed in the currently open discourse in dogmatics on the "location" of the doctrine of scripture: While the confessions imply a hermeneutic authority of Scripture (e.g. as iudex, norma et regula) – and most introductions to protestant theology therefore locate the doctrine of Scripture as part of the hermneutic and epistemologic introductions, like e.g. Joest and Lüpke (2010), 48–79; Korsch (2016), 35–48; Schnieder-Flume (2008), 69–89, Leonhardt (2009), 179–199 – some theologies unfold the doctrine of Scripture as part of soteriology or ecclesiology (see e.g. Schlink [2004], 631–645; Körtner [2018], 526–544). Christian Danz and Elisabeth Margaretha Hartlieb explicitly postulate and reflect this shift (see Danz [2010], 197; Hartlieb [2007], 78). This implies a shift of the understanding of Scripture itself, since the hermeneutic relevance is not reflected as a principle of theology, but processed from a certain perspective in and as part of theological thinking.

[6] See Dalferth (2018), 404. Closely related to the mediality one has to think about the materiality of media, as Hemenway expresses referring to Drucker's notion of "probabilistic materiality": "Probabilistic materiality conceives of a text as an event, rather than an entity. The event is the entire system of reader, aesthetic object and interpretation – but in that set of relations, the text is constituted anew each time. Like weather produced in a system around a landmass, the shape of the reading has a codependent relation to the structure from which it arises. Probability is not free play. It is constrained play, with outcomes calculable in accord with the complexity of the system and range of variable factors, and their combinatoric and transformative relations over time." (Drucker [2009], 8, as cited in Hemenway [2017], 41). Not only the medium influences the message, but also the materiality of media. These have to be taken into account in their actual condition – as Hemenway does in his study – and can therefore not be considered in this paper on overall hermeneutic questions.

change, though with mostly negative connotations:[7] Many people suspect an arbitrariness in accessing the sacred texts in the digital, suspecting that this breaks off their canonical validity.[8] In contrast, the written form of the biblical text is interpreted as the guarantor of the externality (or alterity) of the biblical texts against their interpreters. Similarly, some are concerned that the texts would be deprived of their fixed form and content (in contrast to oral traditions) by the fluid medial forms.[9] One can also read about the historical connection between Protestant tradition and the invention of printing,[10] which makes theology a "reading tradition."[11] The "emancipation of writing from the book" also leads to new conditions of theological research.[12] Throughout, the debate shows a profound struggle for the question of how the fixation of the message conventionally associated with the writtenness of the Bible and its externality to the recipient can be understood under changing medial conditions. The additional question of the subjects and extent of this assumed fixation also enters the debate.

In the following, I do not want to continue this debate on the level of media theory – I am not qualified to do so and Michael Hemenway has worked refreshingly and very constructively on this issue.[13] Rather, through relating the medial question (mediality of Scripture) with the hermeneutical question (Scripture as medium), I will first

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[7] The advantages are described mostly referred to the user (e.g. distribution of biblical texts, reaching different social groups through digital media). However, the worries outlined above seem to be in the foreground, disputed by Hemenway and the Institute of Theology and Ethics, which I will refer to later. Only some parts of the discussion are based on empirical evidence, which itself is interpreted very differently. See e.g. on YouVersion and GloBible Clivaz (2017), 56. More empirical data on this question can be found in CODEC (2019), esp. 17–21.

[8] For example, a study by the Swiss Protestant Church on digital reading of the bible argues that the greater interactivity of digital reading is thus "less canonical," i.e. the bible is perceived "no longer as a given, printed Holy Scripture, but as part of an ongoing communication process." Theologie und Ethik (ed.) (2016), 10 (my translation). The empirical analysis of CODEC confirms this claim: The interviewed millennials linked reading the bible as a printed book with the adjectives "holy/sacred," "real," "authentic," and "pure." CODEC (2019), 19.

[9] See e.g. Siker (2017), 37–51. Siker asks: "The Bible is supposedly the unchanging Word of God, and yet, all things digital are anything but unchanging. What does it mean to bring the relatively 'fixed' Bible into a medium that is utterly transient?" (X). Siker concludes: "digital Bibles in the twenty-first century continued to fragment into personalized tweets and snippets, from multiple versions of the Bible, representing increasingly individualized voices rather than a communal text" (241). See also Rakow (2017).

[10] Theologie und Ethik (ed.) (2016), 7.9–10. Siker points especially to the tension between writtenness and digital media, see Siker (2017), 183–208. See also Clivaz (2017), 57; Dalferth (2018), 427–428.

[11] Dalferth (2018), 439-440. 443 (my translation).

[12] Clivaz (2017), 39.54 (my translation).

[13] Hemenway explicitly states to contrast the growing fear and nostalgia related to Bible and digital media, he observes reading Jeffrey Siker, Nicholas Carr and Sherry Turckle. Hemenway (2017), 8–9. See with a similar aim Clivaz (2017), 36–37.

consider how Scripture can be understood as a medium and will then come back to the question of its mediality.[14]

My starting point is Hemenway's description of the "bible as interface," itself located at the interface of media theory and theology. In his study, Hemenway argues:

> The connections between the major technological transition from roll to codex in antiquity and the contemporary move toward the internet and mobile technologies as reading platforms encourage us to consider *bible as an interface that affords high surface area, collaboration, and anarchy*. [...] bible as interface is a relationship between a material platform and a user that cannot be reduced to simple consumption of content.[15]

The concept of interface – originating in media theory – becomes a dogmatic description referring to the properties of Scripture when he writes: "throughout its rich media history, bible has been an interface."[16] While Hemenway wants to describe rather than dogmatically construct his notion of "Bible as interface,"[17] I will try to further it from a dogmatic and hermeneutical point of view.

I will unfold the theological implications of "Bible as interface" in three ways: Firstly related to the understanding of Scripture as medium and its authority, secondly referring to its pneumatological and christological underpinning and thirdly in relation to the "users" of the Bible.

2. Bible as Interface – Scripture as Medium and its Authority

2.1. Bible as "Zone of Encounter" – a Relational Medium

"At its most basic, interface denotes some kind of relationship of interaction between entities."[18] Starting with this definition, Hemenway unfolds his understanding of interface, referring to the cultural scientist Johanna Drucker.

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[14] Therefore, I will focus on the changes in the understanding and interpretation of bible instead of the shifts concerning user and reading. See related to user and reading e.g. Hemenway (2017), 13–14; Phillips (2018), 405–406; Siker (2017), 37–51. From a church's perspective see Theologie und Ethik (ed.) (2016), esp. 4–7. See a similar attempt to re-read our understanding of the Bible throught digital analogies - here: "Bible as augmented reality" - in Phillips and Briggs (2012).

[15] Hemenway (2017), ii (italics in original) and 3.

[16] Hemenway (2017), 5.

[17] Hemenway (2017), 6.

[18] Hemenway (2017), 30.

Drucker describes an interface as "a zone of encounter, not a window through which we access content."[19] This encounter encloses "the entire system of reader, aesthetic object and interpretation."[20] An interface is therefore a "space that supports interpretative events and acts of meaning production."[21] Because of this, books can be understood as interfaces,[22] as Hemenway points out: "a book is an interface that *provokes probabilistic production* through the reading event."[23]

There are astonishing parallels between Hemenway and Drucker's unterstanding of interfaces and the interpretation of Scripture as the medium of the gospel in traditional dogmatics: Here, too, Scripture takes on the function of an interface. In Scripture, the reader encounters testimonies of the revelation of God, which through the Holy Spirit can become revelation for the reader, opening up the gospel for him or her. The Bible thus serves as an interface between the reader and what the texts attest: God's relation to humanity.[24] Scripture as *medium salutis* therefore does not imply a certain ontological quality of Scripture, but a "function" or "service" (Indienstnahme).[25] This is the reason for its authority, which must prove itself in the constant recognition and actualization of this confidence in the reception of the texts.[26]

2.2. The Bible as Event – a Procedural Authority

Because of this, one's encounter with the Bible is of central importance. At this point, Hemenway's description offers another interesting interpretation, by distinguishing between interface as a noun and interface as a verb.[27] The verb form of interface – Drucker speaks of "interface as event" – offers a helpful reinterpretation of Scripture's authority.

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[19] Hemenway (2017), 33. Following Drucker (2011); Drucker (2009).

[20] Drucker (2009), 8.

[21] Drucker (2011), 3.

[22] See Hemenway following Drucker, Hemenway (2017), 30.

[23] Hemenway (2017), 38 (italics in original).

[24] See section 3.1. of this paper.

[25] Körtner (2018), 508 (my translation). See Dalferth (2018), 442.446; Stoellger (2016), 310.313.

[26] See in detail on the authority of Scripture Zeller u. a. (2020). My thoughts are based on a relational concept of authority as described by Horst Bei and Paul Metzger. Vgl. Bei (1980); Metzger (2018), 25.

[27] There is an interesting connection to McLuhan, Hemenway mentions: "The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) has entries for 'interface' as both a noun and a verb. Interestingly, both noun and verb entries in the OED figure Marshall McLuhan, of 'medium is the message' fame, prominently as the first quotation in the non-scientific definitions of the term. In fact, the OED credits McLuhan as the first user of 'interface' in the verbal form in a 1967 collaborative effort with Quentin Fiore." Hemenway (2017), 31.

Authority understood as a relationship, as described above, can now be stated more precisely as a procedural authority: Scripture's authority comes to bear if and insofar as it is read - namely, if and insofar as it is read with the confidence that the gospel will be disclosed by reading these particular texts. If the authority of Scripture is imagined in this way, authority as a normative notion cannot be isolated from the actual use and interpretation of Scripture by the persons and communities claiming an authority for Scripture.

The appropriation of Scripture therefore has constitutive significance for the validity and authority of the texts, as Stoellger makes clear in comparison to the Lord's Supper: "Holy Scripture is only to be called holy if it becomes the body of the Spirit. And the Spirit can only meet us in it, as long as it is present as its power to give meaning. It's the same with Scripture as it is with bread and wine. Outside of their concrete use, which faith makes of them, Scripture is just one among many texts. Therefore, we worship the elements of the Lord's Supper as little as we worship the Bible. Without animating use, the Spirit would be as dead as Scripture would be."[28] Because of this, the actual uses of the Scripture are of great interest for dogmatic reasons.[29] This structure of the interface, in turn, is constitutive in the digital design practices described by Hemenway.

3. Dogmatic Groundings of Interface-theory

3.1. Interface-theory and Pneumatology

Following the proposed relational concept of authority, authority is constituted between reader and text in and around the event of reading and hearing. This understanding is grounded in the doctrine of *efficatia*: for the believer, the authority of Scripture results from its effectiveness, i.e. that it leads to faith through the Holy Spirit. This *efficatia* proves itself again and again in the communion of believers through history. Therefore, confidence in the biblical texts always precedes the reading of the individual Christian.[30]

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[28] Stoellger (2016), 315 (my translation). See in more detail the chapters "Gotteswort und Menschenwort" and "Schrift-tauslegung in relationaler Perspektive" in van Oorschot and Focken (2020). See also Körtner (2001), 311; Dalferth (2018), 442.446.

[29] I analyze and reflect on Scriptural authority in the relation between the theological interpretation and the actual uses of Scripture in contemporary dogmatic theologies in a current research project. For further information, see http://www.fest-heidelberg.de/schrifthermeneutik/.

[30] On the relation of authority, reception and community, see Zeller u. a. (2020).

Here, the description of the Bible as interface touches pneumatology: This understanding of biblical texts as *evangelion* is always inspired by the Holy Spirit. Theologically, Scripture described as interface is to be specified as a function or service (Indienstnahme) of the Holy Spirit: It serves as an interface used by the Holy Spirit to open up the gospel.[31] This event of "interfacing" is productive on both sides: While the Holy Spirit opens up the Gospel, this event needs active participation, especially interpretive work on the receiving end in order to become a communicative event. Always aware, that this is the most unlikely case of "successful" communication.

Therefore, one has to differentiate carefully between possible readings of the Bible: Reading and listening to the biblical texts is not always an experience of the Holy Spirit but might also follow other interests and aims. Although every act of reading is an exploration, not every exploration of Scripture opens up the gospel.[32] We can only experience the *evangelion* individually and in community. As soon as we start to share our witness, our experiences are hidden in our words, culture and communication setting, and communicating our witness is more likely to fail than to succeed. Being touched by the Holy Spirit in reading and understanding the *evangelion* in Scripture can only be witnessed intersubjectively, but not conclusively justified rationally.[33] Interpreting Scripture therefore means being part of a highly pluralistic community of witnesses to something we may agree – or argue about – to call "evangelion."

3.2. Interface-theory and Christology

In terms of media theory, one can speak of a two-stage mediation of the Gospel: The incarnation of the Logos in Christ is itself already a medium, the "ultimate medium of the monotheistic God".[34] Scripture does not replace Christ, but witnesses to him (at least in parts). Human knowledge of God is therefore mediated in two ways: It is me-

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[31] Of course, this does not mean that the Holy Spirit can use other media (texts, songs, films, people etc.). However, the canonicity of the biblical texts testifies to the particular confidence of the Christian tradition in these texts as places to encounter the gospel.

[32] On the difference between the soteriological and the hermeneutical dimension of the understanding of Scripture's authority see van Oorschot (2016).

[33] Here it differs e.g. to scientific readings of biblical texts that must be rational and methodologically comprehensible. See van Oorschot (2019).

[34] Körtner (2008), 321 (my translation). See also Stoellger: "God became word, tora, Scripture, in the Tablets of the Law and in scroll." (Stoellger [2016], 307, my translation) Also the embodiment of God in Christ – following Stoellger the absolute embodiment understood as an absolute metaphor – takes place medially "located in Scripture" (310). Thereby, Scripture does not become a literary or iconic artifact – in contrast, Scripture becomes an embodiment of God, understood as christus praesens, through a certain use (310.313).

diated through Jesus Christ, who in turn is witnessed in Scripture medially.[35] According to Stoellger, this is not limited to one specific medium: "The Word became flesh – and again word and sacrament and also image, ritual and 'Lebensform'."[36] Scripture and image, film, sound, music etc. are thus involved in the potential medial diversity of the embodiments of the Word of God.[37]

This hiddenness of the message itself leads to an inevitable plurality of readings and interpretations of the *evangelion* – both in the plural witnesses which the different biblical texts offer and in our differing readings of these texts in history and today. Hemenway therefore describes "anarchy" as one affordance of the interface: "Anarchy in interface constantly exceeds attempts by users to grasp and order the whole in a stable manner."[38] One might even say: The *evangelion* constantly exceeds attempts by believers to grasp and order the whole in a stable manner. Plural medial references and interpretations are therefore not a drawback of Scripture's authority, but its constitutive characteristic. Therefore one might speak of an "anarchic authority" of Scripture, as will be explained in the next paragraph.

4. The Affordances of the Bible: Perspectives of the "User"

For Hemenway, this constitutive facilitation of plurality is a central implication of the understanding of Bible as interface. He describes it as the affordances of Scripture: "Affordances are the set of real or perceived use possibilities offered by the material design of an interface *in relationship to a particular user and context*."[39] Applied to the Bible, he wants to "consider *bible as an interface that affords high surface area, collaboration, and anarchy*."[40]

As the affordances take up the perspective of the "users" of the Bible, I want to take up the debate sketched out above about the fixation of the written text as an alterity to its user.

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[35] Körtner (2008), 323. See also van Oorschot (2019).
[36] Stoellger (2016), 313 (my translation). See loc. cit., 315.
[37] On text and image see Stoellger (2011), 17.
[38] Hemenway (2017), 54.
[39] Hemenway (2017), 41 (italics in original).
[40] Hemenway (2017), ii (italics in original). See loc. cit., 3.

4.1. Interface as High Surface Area and the Written Text

Firstly, Hemenway describes the Bible as a "high surface area": It has many possible points of contact between user and platform. Thereby it can hardly be deterministic due to the many interactive possibilities offered by the structure of the interface.[41] Hemenway concludes that "the relationship of the interface always exceeds a user's ability to master an interface in its entirety."[42] Related to the notion of anarchy – understood in the very sense of the word as "*without the reign of an original*"[43] – this understanding might serve as a description of the plurality of the biblical witnesses of the *evangelion* in the biblical texts themselves: The plurality of the offered interpretations of God and the Gospel in the canonical collection of texts themselves make a reign of an original impossible. The origin lies beyond the texts, which themselves only serve as witnesses for this origin. Not only does the inner-biblical plurality of texts demonstrate a "high surface area," but the inner-biblical reception and interpretation processes as well as the diversity of dogmatic and historical interpretive patterns show the adequacy of understanding Scripture as a "high surface area." This implies anarchistic "interferences" to all theological aims to simplify or unify the biblical witnesses to one single message.

Digital media, therefore, do not add anything new to this plurality but only extend the existing plurality of medial and interpretive frames and forms. Scripture is – regardless of its mediation and medial form – a high surface area. The fixation of Scripture by its writtenness must therefore be unveiled as a dogmatic construct.

4.2. Alterity and Interface

As mentioned at the beginning of this article, the written form of the Bible is often interpreted as the guarantor of the externality (or alterity) of the texts against the interpreter. This understanding arises out of the (reformational) concern not to deliver the biblical text to the arbitrariness of its interpreters, but to find in the biblical texts a hermeneutical "counterpart" to the church's tradition and doctrine: Scripture should serve constructively and critically as the source and guideline of theological and ecclesiastical reflections. This conviction is grounded in Luther's reflections on the *claritas externa* of Scripture: The *verbum externum*, the text of the Bible, is a counterpart to the interpreter and his or her interpretational endeavors.

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[41] Hemenway (2017), 52.
[42] Hemenway (2017), 52.
[43] Hemenway (2017), 54.

The relation of this figure to a certain medium – especially to its writtenness – is quite controversial.[44]   From media theory, it is clear that the externality of Scripture understood as its mediality is difficult to maintain in the digital: Text and readers become interface and users, which are intertwined to one another in different material and virtual constellations. On the contrary, in interactive approaches to biblical texts, the texts will be constantly reconstituted, reconstructed in a collage-like manner, and linked together. Based on insights of reception aesthetics theory, the bias between text and reader is difficult to describe as sharply as necessary – even without changing medial forms: Every reader is part of the process of understanding and therefore is part of the hermeneutic process of generating "texts." Do digital texts therefore promote arbitrary readings of sacred texts, breaking off their canonical validity, as we heard in the beginning?

Following my interpretation means saying "no" to that question. But that does not intend to deny the notion of the alterity of Scripture. Its alterity consists of other reasons. The alterity of Scripture vis-à-vis its interpreter cannot be defended in media theory, neither analogue nor digital. This paper's theological reflection has shown that its alterity is based only in the alterity and externality of the one to whom Scripture witnesses. Scripture's alterity is part of the pneumatological understanding of Scripture. Therefore, it is part of the experience of "spiritual reading" and can only be witnessed intersubjectively.[45]

4.3. Interfaces Allowing Collaboration and Anarchy

Based on this pneumatological understanding, the two other affordances of Scripture, Hemenway suggests, are of constitutive relevance for the understanding of Scripture as interface: collaboration and anarchy. Both are closely linked to one another: Bible as interface affords "collaboration," offering "possibilities for both participation in constructing the space of interface and chances for user interaction."[46]   Thereby it

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[44] Körtner, for example, attributes great importance to the writtenness of the bible as a book. He therefore askes for a "theological hermeneutics of the book", a scriptology (Körtner [2001], 308, my translation). In contrast, for the Protestant Church in Switzerland the book is of no special importance: Although historically, there are "special affinities between the Christian message and the medium of the book", this "connection is not essential; it does not reach into the identity of the Christian faith" (Theologie und Ethik [ed.] [2016], 7, my translation). Christianity is not a "book religion," rather the book is a possible form of communication of the personal word of God among others (ibid., my translation).

[45] See in more detail Oorschot (2019).

[46] Hemenway (2017), 52. Hemenway distinguishes two layers: "First, there is a relationality of participation in constructing the material aspects of the interface rather than simply consuming the content. Second, there is a relationality of community, using and making together not entirely on a user's own terms" (53).

enables a relation of anarchy and proximity (Lévinas), "*without the reign of an original*."[47]

Therefore, collaboration in reading and reflecting biblical texts is as important for theological reasons – as described related to Christology – as for medial reasons (at least in digital contexts). Following a relational understanding of authority, the interpretation of biblical texts in community is of central importance. Reading, hearing and interpreting in *koinonia* is at the heart of the understanding of Scripture and its authority sketched out above. Clivaz therefore asks: "Are the different Protestant churches willing to understand the *sola scriptura* as *lectura* that happens in *koinonia*?"[48]

The meaning of common reading (and hearing and seeing) is especially evident in digital contexts.[49] *Hemenway concludes:*

> At its best, bible has and always will afford this kind of anarchy through the constraints and possibilities of its materiality in interface. Even if this anarchy looks more troubling and threatening to those who value the stability of the texts of bible, the continuity throughout history of this affordance of anarchy in the acts of material media translation can offer us a way to engage emerging bible interfaces from a place of familiarity and value, not anxiety.[50]

5. Medial Changes and the Holy Scripture: Conclusions and Open Questions

Overlapping media theory and theology, Hemenway's thesis of Bible as interface offers an innovative perspective on the hermeneutics of Scripture. It implicates – at least in

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[47] Hemenway (2017), 54 (italics in original).

[48] Clivaz (2017), 57 (my translation, italics in original). See also Theologie und Ethik (ed.) (2016), 17f. Clivaz applies this thought to the scientific community, for example in peer-reviews (Clivaz [2017], 43). Related to the outlined pneumatological background and its ecclesiological implications – not discussed yet – the question arises whether one has to distinguish more carefully between different communities of reading and interpretation. See van Oorschot (2016). On the mportance of epistemic communities in digital science platforms see Friedrich, Reichel and Renkert (2019), 176–178.

[49] Other sensual dimensions, such as feeling and tasting – which are of special importance to the Lord's Supper – lie beyond digitally mediated interaction. This restriction has to be reflected ecclesiologically when thinking about digital church life. With regard to common reading, the Swiss Church points to the parallel structures of the (new testament's) letter and of today's online communication regarding their discursive and interactive form. See Theologie und Ethik (ed.) (2016), 13.

[50] Hemenway (2017), 171.

my understanding – a close relation to reception-oriented hermeneutics, interpreting them in terms of media theory.[51]

My hermeneutical reinterpretation shows that the dogmatic reflections on Scripture as a medium are much more fluid than the debates on the mediality of Scripture suggest. The characteristics attributed to the writtenness of the Bible – it's alterity, the fixation of its content, and the embodiments of the gospel – are not challenged by digital media, but have to be reinterpreted regarding all medial forms.

To open the discussion, I want to conclude with two questions.

First, the question that arises out of media theory is whether we can speak of a "digital media change" related to the medialities of Scripture. It seems that the written culture remains in current digital and web-based accesses to the Bible: these are predominantly text-based interfaces.[52]

In my view, we are not challenged by media change as much as by media pluralism. This is a very old challenge – theology has been preoccupied with the relationship between writing and image throughout its history, ever since the Old Testament ban on images.[53]

Furthermore, the relation between orality and literacy has a long tradition in Christianity – so strong that the emerging connections in digital technologies can be interpreted as a return to the antique complementary understanding.[54]

To take this plurality seriously is indeed a challenge for the "culture of books" in current theology.[55] To consider the relation of writing and image – expanded in digital accesses to the Bible in films, plays, visualizations, sound, music etc. – is therefore the

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[51] The multiple parallels to Körtners understanding, for example, are obvious in this paper and need further exploration. On Hemenways reading of reader-response-theory see Hemenway (2017), 38.

[52] One has to differentiate between the medial access of the user on the one hand (digital interfaces instead of print – which, however, does not include a change of media with regard to the written form) and digitally accessed non-written forms of biblical contents (games, films, music) on the other hand.

[53] Stoellger points to the old rivalry of text and image, defining the heart of the crisis of Scripture in the image. Stoellger (2011), 16–17.

[54] See e.g. Siker (2017), 245: "But the digitization of the Bible reminds us that the words were not always written, that the message of the Bible has always been delivered in oral form for an aural experience." See also Beal (2011); Clivaz (2017), 56–57; Dalferth (2018), 427–428; Hemenway (2017), 15; Körtner (2001), 300.320.

[55] For example, Clivaz advocates to open theology for digital methods at the interface of theology and computer science (Clivaz [2017], 54–55), while Dalferth pleads for a stronger connection to the church's uses of Scripture (Dalferth (2018), 437–8.441.442.446 etc.). Dalferth also states, that it is a peculiarity of reading and writing books – in contrast to digital readings – to form one's own world design as an individual and to immerse in it, have to be discussed. To what extent one can describe similar – or even farer reaching – processes in the digital. See Dalferth (2018), 433.

actual, but in the end not new, task in the field of digitization and scriptural hermeneutics.[56]

Looking at this broad spectrum, I want to ask secondly: To what extent – if any – are the constructs of the fixation and alterity of Scripture theologically relevant? In other words: Do we need limits of interpretation – despite all sympathy for anarchic, discursive and collaboration models of interpretation?[57] In this regard, Dalferth stresses the duty of exegesis to emphasize the alien character of the biblical texts as the diversity of contemporary media blurs the lines between traditional content and fiction, text and interpretation.[58] Do we need to think about limits of interpretation – either related to the text or to the *koinonia* – when thinking about the affordances of Bible as interface?

We also need to think about the concrete materialities of the interfaces used – themselves expressions of the interface-character of the Bible.[59]

Here, at the very end, we face a question which Hemenway does not pose explicitly but I want to: If the Bible can be described as interface not only for reasons of media change but also for theological reasons, are digital tools not only appropriate but maybe the most appropriate medial forms for "the message"? Or in Hemenway's words if "bible at its best is an interface that enables relationships with users that cannot be reduced to simple consumption of its contents,"[60] how can "bible at its best" be theologically interpreted in digital and analogue medial forms?

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[56] Clivaz (2017), 43.

[57] For Hemenway this question is of secondary importance as he is interested in the structure of interface itself. If one focuses on the hermeneutic implications and pneumatological groundings, as I did, this question becomes more urgent.

[58] Dalferth (2018), 439–440.443.

[59] See for example Hemenway's discussion of Siker: "Siker characterizes bibles on screens as better fit for surface reading and skimming than for "deep"reading and he laments the loss of covers as a threat to the bible's authority as well as the loss of shape, the loss of tangibility, and the loss of stability of the biblical text." (Hemenway [2017], 13 referring to Siker [2017], 37–51). Clivaz emphasizes the need of analysis of the implications of materiality on our reading (Clivaz [2017], 56).

[60] Hemenway (2017), 170.

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