Media/lity
Between Image Ban and Eucharist

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The paper rethinks the question of media as a systematic theological question. Based on the image ban, the first part reflects the ambivalent assessment of media in the theological tradition, referring to the tension between image ban, images and the imagined. The second part is focuses on the Lord's Supper as a fundamental media practice for the churches. Interpreting this media practice, Christian Life is described as augmented reality, which always interlaces several levels of reality through media. The paper closes with reflections on difference and analogy, as well as conversion and convertibility as fundamental questions of theological media theory.

1. Introduction

From early 2020 on, people have reduced their "contacts" due to the SARS-Cov-2-pandemic. During the year, bloggers, experts, the WHO and journalists started to discuss the appropriate term for this reduction of contacts: "social distancing" or "physical distancing"?[1] One argument for the second term: Not being able to meet "onsite" must not imply to give up solidarity with each other; physical distance must not mean social distance.[2] The difference between the two terms raises a question

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[1] See; For example: Streckeisen 2020.

[2] For example: Streckeisen 2020. He argues: "Nicht soziale Distanz, sondern soziale Nähe soll gefördert werden – trotz physischer Distanz." (ibid.)

that has been answered practically in multiple ways during 2020: What bridges our physical distance to each other so that social proximity[3] becomes possible even while physical distancing is required? If the answer to that is not nothing – and for some organizations and people it has been "nothing", the answer most likely includes some kind of media-technology: from old-school landline-telephones to youtube-videos and Zoom-conferences. The importance of technical media, particularly digital media has become even more obvious during the pandemic: Media-technology functions as a bridge between physically distanced people; Media-technology somehow makes present what is physically absent.

In this paper, we want to reflect digital media's function to bridge absent entities theologically, inspired by two discourses: the thinking about the biblical image-ban after the iconic turn on the one hand and the debates about the Lord's Supper on the other. Of course, this will not lead to a full theory or concept of media and mediality. But it leads to the following main suggestions: We will argue, that the common dualities of "reality" vs. "virtuality" and "embodied" vs. "disembodied" are not appropriate for reflecting digital mediality. Rather, the difference between different media and different media-practices is decisive. This difference is also more decisive than the difference between seemingly unmediated presence and mediated presence. The focus on media all too often hides that seemingly unmediated practices are media practices as well. We will show how different practices – particularly the practice of Eucharist – are already media practices that partake in the dialectic between presence and absence, between making present and withdrawal.[4]

2. Image, Image-ban and the Media

What happens, when media work? We want to draw a first bunch of impulses for reflecting this issue in a digital age from thinking about images and the biblical ban on images. It might look like a very non-lutheran move, but it is helpful to start the reflection of images and the biblical ban on images outside the theological traditions in the philosophical thinking about images, because they offer helpful terminological clarification. Particularly since the so called "iconic turn"[5] the literature on images has become hardly over seeable. Hans Belting's anthropological work on images provides

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[3] Streckeisen 2020.

[4] For this dialectic see for example Hartenstein / Moxter 2016: 157, 163 and already Höhne 2019: 148 and the literature referenced there.

[5] Boehm 2006, particularly 13, 16f., Hartenstein / Moxter 2016: 15, 263, 354.

the necessary terminological clarifications and first impulses.[6] Our thesis: His terms are better fit to reflect on digital mediality than the distinctions between reality and virtuality, disembodied and embodied. On this background, the debate about the biblical image-ban offers differentiated sensitivity for the religious dangers of media and mediality. Implicitly, the image ban points to the differences in mediality for the dialectic of absence and presence.[7]

2.1 Images, Bodies and Media.

In his anthropological approach to images, Belting distinguishes between images, bodies and media, partly parallel to Mitchell's distinction between pictures and images.[8] For Belting, the term "*images*" refers to inner, mental images as well as to external images; "production of images" happens "in the social sphere", in human perception as well as in imagination.[9] Hence, images are produced in *bodies,* they are embodied: Our body f.e. is the place in which imagination, memory and perception of images happens.[10]

But images are also embodied in a second way, namely in the medium that carries the image.[11] In this distinction, the terms "media" and "medium" refer to the physical, material dimension of images,[12] to the "techniques and programmes" that make images visible.[13] While image and media belong together like "two sides of one coin" and while their distinction does not parallel the classic distinction between form and matter, Belting understands them as referring to different aspects or dimensions of one phenomenon.[14] For example: If I see the painting "Mona Lisa", I will see the image of a smirking lady on canvas and I will have the image in my head as well – this is what the term "images" refers to. If I drew my attention to the paint and the canvas, to

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[6] Belting 2001.

[7] For this dialectic see Belting 2001: 29–30, 143–147.

[8] See Belting 2001: 15, 11–55.

[9] Belting 2001: 11–13. My translation.

[10] Belting 2001: 12–15. Belting also uses the term "Entkörperlichung" but also takes it back: "Aber eine Entkörper-lichung ist nichts anderes als eine Körper-Erfahrung neuer Art, die schon ihre historischen Parallelen hat." (Belting 2001: 14)

[11] Belting 2001: 12–13, 15, 17.

[12] Belting 2001: 13, 15, 29. Belting talks about the "material" not as opposite to "form" (13), but as feature the term "medium" refers to (29) while it is unseperable interlinked with picture or image (13).

[13] Belting 2001: 12. My translation.

[14] Belting 2001: 13, 29–30.

the formed material that carries the images and is the picture, I would focus on what Belting would call "media".[15]

This terminological distinction is helpful, because it allows Belting to explore the relation of presence and absence in image-experiences. Two of his thoughts are decisive for our argument.

Firstly, Belting relates the power of images in an ambiguous way to the role of mediality:[16] On the on hand, neglect of mediality gives power to the images while focus on mediality distances the observer from the image and its influence.[17] On the other hand, the medium carries the images and the image couldn't be powerful without the medium.[18] I wouldn't gaze at Mona Lisa's smile with capturing fascination if canvas and paint weren't arranged in this specific way, but focusing on canvas and paint can break the ban of the image and distance me from the effects of fascination. Hence, a medium works as mediation and transportation of an image only as long as its mediality is not the focus of attention. The medium works by withdrawing its work from attention.[19]

Secondly, the archetypical experience of images for Belting is the cult of the dead:[20] absence and presence are entangled in images:

> "Im Rätsel des Bildes sind Anwesenheit und Abwesenheit unauflösbar verschränkt. In seinem Medium ist es anwesend (sonst könnten wir es nicht sehen), und doch bezieht es sich auf eine Abwesenheit, von der es ein Bild ist."[21]

> Das „Rätsel des Bildes [...] liegt in einer paradoxen *Abwesenheit*, die ebenso aus der *Anwesenheit der Leiche* wie aus dem *anwesenden Bild* spricht."[22]

Belting continues by elaborating on the „act of animation", in which the perceiver "separates" medium and image,[23] and discusses whether digital media can be called "media".[24] The decisive point for us is already his notion of the entanglement of pres-

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[15] The example tries to illustrate what Belting describes in a more abstract way (Belting 2001: 29–30).

[16] See particularly Belting 2001: 22.

[17] Belting 2001: 22. For a similar thought see Stoellger 2014a: 1, 3.

[18] Belting 2001: 22.

[19] For this see also Stoellger, who shows how certain images make forget that they are made, handmade (Stoellger 2014a: 1).

[20] Belting 2001: 29–30, 143–147, 153, 186.

[21] Belting 2001: 29. See also ibid.: 143–147, particularly 146, 153, 186. Also quoted by Hartenstein / Moxter 2016: 268.

[22] Belting 2001: 146.

[23] Belting 2001: 30. My translation.

[24] Belting 2001: 38–41.

ence and absence in the mediated image. He explicitly says, that this entanglement can take different forms in different media.[25] His concrete story for this: When the statue of a Madonna overcomes temporal distance, presence and absence are not in the same way entangled as when television overcomes spatial distance.[26]

In the aftermath of Belting, it seems promising to reflect the entanglement of absence and presence for digital media, using the terminological distinction of medium and image: For example, what happens in a Zoom-conference, when one sees the images of colleagues? In what way does the digital medium make these people present in their images? In what way does the digital medium point to itself, making the absence of the depicted poignant?

2.2 Image Ban, Images and the Imagined

As far as we have summarized it, Belting's distinction between image and medium draws attention to the role of media in relation to what we see when we see an image. But what do we see? This question points to "the relation between the image and that what the image shows"[27]. The innovation of the "iconic turn" refers to this relation in particular, as Moxter points out.[28] He quotes Belting to summarize the new understanding of this relation: "Bilder sind niemals nur das, was sie zu sein behaupten, Abbildung der Realität, es sei denn daß sie eine Idee der Realität abbilden."[29]

To put it close to Moxter's German words: Images not only depict or represent something, they show and "give to see".[30] This transcends the thinking in terms of similarity and representations.[31] Images not only "represent" something, they also "present" something, as Stoellger has put it for the golden calf.[32] On the background of this new perspective, Moxter and Hartenstein have developed a "Hermeneutik des Bilderverbots".[33] Interpreting the texts of the Hebrew Bible, Hartenstein makes three decisive points that mark the "borderlines of the visible".[34] Let's start with his third point:

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[25] Belting 2001: 30–31.

[26] Belting 2001: 30.

[27] Hartenstein / Moxter 2016: 298. My translation.

[28] See Hartenstein / Moxter 2016: 263.

[29] Belting 2001: 109; Hartenstein / Moxter 2016: 263.

[30] Hartenstein / Moxter 2016: 264, , with reference to Boehm 2006: 16, 35.

[31] Hartenstein / Moxter 2016: 36, 247, 263–266.

[32] Stoellger 2014b: 144. See also: Hartenstein / Moxter 2016: 264–265; Boehm 2006: 35.

[33] Hartenstein / Moxter 2016.

[34] Hartenstein/ Moxter 2016: 154. My translation.

(1) Hartenstein sees a connection between the ban of images and monotheism.[35] The world-transcendent creator God cannot be represented by anything in the world: "Nichts Geschöpfliches (= Vergängliches) vermag den unsichtbar transzendenten und ewigen Gott [...] angemessen zu repräsentieren (Dtn 4 u.a.)."[36]

Understood this way, the ban of images is strictly spoken pointing to the inadequacy of the medium. All created things aren't suitable media for carrying the image of God.

(2) Secondly. According to Hartenstein, God is experienced by God's deeds in the Hebrew Bible.[37] God is narrated to be visible and present, but always in fleeting ways:[38] "Feuer, Finsternis, Wolken und Wolkendunkel sollen gesehen werden, sie zeigen aber eine räumlich entzogene Präsenz, sichtbar *und* undurchschaubar."[39]

There are metaphors, mental images[40] and appearances of God's presence, which make people experience God's presence; but they never nail God down to a specific image-medium, the dialectical tension between presence and withdrawal[41] remains.[42] God is narrated to be present in image-media like a burning bush, but always "transitory".[43] According to Hartenstein, one problem the image ban draws attention to is the images' tendency to capture what they depict.[44] This is the problem, the story of the golden calf illustrates.[45]

(3) The other problem Hartenstein points to is, that images could draw the attention away from God.[46] We can see this in connection with what he had written about the power of images earlier: images can have the power to "capture" the spectators' view.[47]

Taken together, this leads to an understanding of the image ban that makes it not about "God's invisibility but [about] God's beeing concealed", as Moxter summer-

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35 Hartenstein / Moxter 2016: 80, 155–156.

36 Hartenstein / Moxter 2016: 156.

37 See Hartenstein / Moxter 2016: 154.

38 See ibid.

39 Hartenstein / Moxter 2016: 167.

40 See Hartenstein / Moxter 2016: 14, 157–162.

41 See Hartenstein / Moxter 2016: 157.

42 Hartenstein / Moxter 2016: 154.

43 Hartenstein / Moxter 2016: 165–170, quote from 165. My translation.

44 See Hartenstein / Moxter 2016: 154.

45 See ibid.

46 Hartenstein / Moxter 2016: 154, (209).

47 See Hartenstein / Moxter 2016: 141. My translation. See also ibid.: 279.

izes.[48] Following from their, it is also about the human spectator's freedom, who could easily be banished by the image.[49]

The interesting thing for us is that Hartenstein's three points imply a certain connection between specific mediality on the one hand and the dialectics of presence and absence of the God who appears in image-media in a transitory way. God makes God present in a transitory way in the medium of fire and clouds. The image-medium of the golden calf needs to be destroyed. It's mediality would nail down God's presence to one image and distract attention away from God. Implicitly, the image ban points to the differences in mediality for the dialectic of absence and presence. That's a trace it seems worth following.

3. Bread, Wine and the Internet

3.1. The Lord's Supper as Media Praxis. Or: Christian Life as Augmented Reality

Another basic media practice in the Christian tradition is the Lord's Supper: Bread and wine are media used for the (re)presentation of Jesus Christ in the community of faith "making" present the body of Christ. The Lord's Supper thus is a mean of mediation – a medium – between God and humans.[50] Therefore it describes as *medium salutis* in the tradition. Reflecting the Lord's Supper from this point of view, raises the question of where and how God and humans encounter each other, as Teresa Berger explains:

> " 'Mediation' is no newcomer to theology but rather a cornerstone of under-
> standing God's grace rendered present and efficacious under sacramental signs.
> This brings me to a second vital signpost, which is reflected in contemporary dis-
> cussions of theology and new media. Most authors writing at the intersection
> of theology and new media endeavor to show that God's self-communication
> has always been mediated in manifold ways. Divine self-disclosure, in other

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[48] Hartenstein / Moxter 2016: 247. My translation, and ibid.: 251–260; similarly already Höhne 2019: 149.

[49] See Hartenstein / Moxter 2016: 260–261 and Höhne 2019: 149–153 and the literature referenced there.

[50] Therefore the German linguist and media theorist Jochen Hörisch introduces the Lord's Supper as one of the main media (Leitmedien) in media history. See Hörisch 1992; 2010. In contrast, the Lord's Supper is not explicitly discussed as a medium in Horsfield's study "From Jesus to the Internet". Rather, Horsfield focusses on writing as the main medium in Christian history – and thus focuses on the question of the medialization of Jesus' message without thinking about the medial (re)presentation of Jesus Christ. See Horsfield 2015.

See on the relation of interface and media https://cursor.pubpub.org/pub/vonoorschot-bible-interface/release/5 and https://cursor.pubpub.org/pub/hemenway-bible-interface/release/3

words, itself is a 'media event', and often a multimediated one, for that matter."[51]

Thus, according to Gumbrecht, the denominational disputes on the presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper can also be read as a media-theoretical debate about the question of the presence and representation of what is depicted, or of their entanglement: While the Catholic Eucharistic model emphasizes the real presence of what is depicted, the Protestant tradition, especially in its Reformed interpretation, geared towards the representation of what is remembered.[52]

During the last month, there has been a debate about digital celebrations of Lord's Supper – at least in the German context.[53] This debate was strongly based on traditional dogmatic descriptions. And it focused on the question of a possible digital mediatization of the celebration of the Lord's Supper – mostly without reflecting on the character of the Lord's Supper as a media practice and medium itself.

In many places the debate follows a binary description of "virtual" and "real". With Teresa Berger, we would like to contradict this separation of the "digital dualists": This description overlooks the fact that virtual spaces also form a or many realities.[54] We will discuss this question elsewhere in this workshop; therefore I would like to briefly refer to the relationship between virtuality and mediality from the question of mediality and mediatization: We want to distinguish between virtuality in a philosophical understanding and virtuality in a technical understanding. Virtuality in the philosophical understanding literally describes a field of possibilities, an imagined reality that can possibly come into being. When it comes to digital technologies, a virtual reality describes a communication space, a "world of objects that promises to be reality without having to be".[55] In the debates on digital church life, the virtual usually refers to an encounter enabled by technical means – called media. The focus here is on the mediating process through certain technologies, and therefore on the technical understanding of virtuality.

This dual virtual character also applies to digital worship services and digital celebrations of the Lord's Supper: Every Christian worshipping community – digital or not

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[51] Berger 2017: 79. Berger refers to Nordhofen, Stoellger and Byers.

[52] See Gumbrecht / Schulte 2010: 214-218.

[53] That this debate has expanded due to the Covid 19 pandemic, but is by no means a new questions, is shown e.g. by Berger 2017; Phillips 2020; Ostrowski 2006; Mikoski 2010 et al.

[54] Berger 2017: 16. See also Nord 2008.

[55] Vaihinger 1997: 21.

– is also a virtual community insofar as it hopes to participate in the community of the body of Christ, the invisible church, the community of saints. We celebrate every service, every Lord's Supper, hoping and believing that we are part of this community. This community is biblically qualified as a community in the spirit, i.e. as a pneumatic community. In this sense, every worship service has a virtual aspect in the philosophical sense of the word: It is a community that is always more than that which can be recognized our senses. According to Deeg, the tension between virtuality and physical reality describes every liturgical performance – as a connection between earthly and heavenly worship.[56] As this not only applies to the worship but – following Paul's understanding of the new life in Christ (*en christo*) – one could say: Christian life in itself is a form of augmented reality – hoping and believing to live not only in the world we can see, hear, touch, taste and smell, but also at the same time living in a world far beyond our understanding.

If we celebrate church services online, this pneumatic virtual character is accompanied by a certain form of mediation, which means it is mediated by digital technical structures. This technical mediation does not oppose the spiritual community described above: In the New Testament letters we read about the community of the body of Christ, which is realized by blessings, greetings or prayers over distances in the medium of the letter.

3.2. Bread, Wine, Word – and Body. Or: Argueing on mediated media

If one looks at the Lord's Supper as a media practice, the issue at stake can be specified as follows related to the overall question on the bridging function of the media: Whether and how the Lord's Supper can be celebrated digitally, focuses on the relationship between the media used in the Lord's Supper and their digital mediatization. The question then would be: What should be represented in the media – and how can it be mediated digitally? How do bread and wine as key media in the Lord's Supper, relate to the mediation of the community, the words of institution or the mediated presence of the liturgist? And last but not least: Which media are suitable for expressing which dimensions of shall be (re)presented? So it is an argument about the possibilities of mediating the media of the Lord's Supper. The interesting question is what exactly are the media and mediations to argue about. In the words of our introduction: What shall be bridged – between God and Humans or Humans on different

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[56] Deeg 2019: 20–23.

places and spaces? what should actually be presented, represented or made present – and by which media?

Classically, bread and wine are named the media of God's presence in the Lord's Supper. It is an incarnate word that leads to a bodily practice of eating and drinking, as Fechtner points out. [57] It is this material, sensual character, that forms its characteristic. Proponents of a digital celebration of the Lord's Supper emphasize that this physical dimension is also part in digital practices: Here, too, the elements are involved, one eats and drinks the material elements.[58] Experiencing bread and wine is also a physical occurrence in digital communion, even alone in front of the screen. This concrete bodily devotion in bread and wine offers the decisive surplus to the devotion of God in the word.

Augustine's definition of the sacrament emphasizes this connection between word and element: accedit verbum ad elementum, et fit sacramentum. So, the sacrament is constituted by connecting the word with elements – in media-theoretical terms it is constituted by the plurality and combination of media. Amazingly little has been argued about this connection in the German debate about digital forms of the Lord's Supper. It seems to be of secondary importance whether word and element come together with or without mediatization – the medial communication of the words of institution through digital channels does not prevent word and element from coming together, just as does a hearing aid. It therefore seems unproblematic if a medial mediation takes place between word and element.

Much has been argued about another aspect: The meaning of the bodily presence of the celebrants and their community. Gordon Mikoski put this in a nutshell in 2010 already and describes it as a reversal of the classic debate on the sacrament:

> „In the digital age, it may be the case that the classical debates about the presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist have been inverted. The question with which we may now have to wrestle is not 'In what way is *the Lord* present in the Supper?' Instead, the question is 'In what ways are *we* present in the Supper?"[59]

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[57] Fechtner 2020. Vgl. Leppin 2020.
[58] See for example Berger 2017: 16–19.
[59] Mikoski 2010: 258–259. See also Apgar-Taylor 2020; Daniel-Siebenmann 2020; Fiedler 2019.

In this turn, the ecclesiological dimension of the Lord's Supper and the community it constitutes comes into focus – and thus, in media theory, the question of the importance of the human body as a medium of community.

Firstly, the relation of virtuality and corpo-reality/embodiment must be taken into account: The virtualization of the community lacking physical co-presence means a virtualization of the body – not only of the individual, but also of the body of Christ in the congregation.[60] In contrast, the image of the body of Christ, at least in its New Testament description, is closely connected with the concrete congregation and their corporeal-physical dimension (cf. 1 Cor. 11-12). Spiritual communion is not to be thought of as purely immaterial or virtual, but can be experienced in concrete bodily community: How people eat together, who eats what – for Paul, these are theological questions because in and through them one can see the body of Christ and the new being in Christ. In the New Testament, the body of the individual believer seems to be indissolubly integrated into the image, representation and presence of the body of Christ to be represented. Following Stoellger it can be described as an "event of immersion" (Immersionsgeschehen) that describes the " 'transubstantiation of the celebrants' to the body of Christ". [61] In a nutshell: The bodies – one's own and those of the other celebrants – are media of the presence and representation of the body of Christ, which is supposed to be represented.[62]

Secondly, the physical co-presence has an anthropological component: It touches questions of perception and interpretation, as Gorski points out: It is about "basic anthropological questions of the relationship between immanence and transcendence, i.e. how humans can perceive and interpret divine signs of salvation". [63] As Dietrich Bonhoeffer emphasizes in "Life Together": The physical presence of other Christians can be a source of joy and strength, because the nearness of the Other can become a physical sign of God's gracious presence. [64] Conversely, the physical closeness of oth-

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[60] This could also be continued with Confessio Augustana 7 and its focus on the specific congregatio as I show in my thoughts on digital communio (LINK). With regard to the Lord's Supper, Fechtner emphasizes that these congregationes are defined through their physical co-presence. Therefore, digital communities are not a congregatio in the sense of the word, since the co-celebrants are not present in the event: "Without their physical co-presence, the co-celebrants are not present in the event to me." Fechtner 2020: 2. My translation. Grethlein in contrast points out that this also occurs with some analog forms, e.g. at major events. Grethlein 2019: 56.

[61] Stoellger 2021: 35. My translation.

[62] This aspect could be underlined by the strong diaconal dimension of the metaphor of the body of Christ and other ecclesiological images in the New Testament. I would like to thank Matthias Konradt for pointing this aspect out discussing my understanding.

[63] Gorski 2020: 4. My translation.

[64] Bonhoeffer 1997: 29.

ers can become an imposition to others. The ambivalence of physical closeness is part of this aspect of the bodily co-presence.

It becomes clear how both one's own body and the body of those who celebrate with me become part of the media complex in which and through the Lord's Supper can be understood as media practice. Berger aptly points out, that it is about pondering the spiritual community in relation to the physical and physical gathering of believers.[65] Tan goes even further: Is the emphasis on embodied communion an expression of a stronger or weaker ecclesiology – to put it another way: Is the emphasis on physical community an expression of a particularly body-oriented anthropology and ecclesiology or an expression of a lack of trust in the unifying power of God's Spirit?[66] We will discuss the question of the relationship between these realities elsewhere in this workshop, so we will leave this question open for now.

4. Proceedings for Understanding Media and Mediality

What follows from these impulses for the understanding of media and mediality? First, the thoughts around images and image ban point to the analogy and difference between different practices of media use. This has an impact for how to discuss digital communion (4.1).

Ssecond: If one describes the media as bridging functions and reflects on the Lord's Supper from this perspective, we see three main points (4.2). Firstly, the virtual dimension is a constitutive element of Christian life as it emerges in the relation of the physical world and the new creation. Technical mediatization processes can be integrated in this relation, but are not constitutive. Second, in the debates on digital church life the body plays in important role as a medium: How corpo-reality can be related to virtual realities is an open question here. Third, the relation between presence and absence, representability and hiddenness, bridging and a remaining gap must be redefined in new media practices – not only from the perspective of image theory and the image ban, but also from the media complex of the Lord's Supper.

4.1 Difference and Analogy

In this paper, we have sofar mentioned and discussed different phenomena of media practices: Telephone calls and Zoom conferences in the introduction, the paintings

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[65] Berger 2017: 39.
[66] Tan 2020: 63.

and sculptures in summary of some of Belting's thoughts (2.1), the golden calf and burning bushes in the section on the image ban (2.2), the Eucharist with bread and wine and the internet in the chapter on the Lord's Supper as media praxis (3). The summarized points of Belting, Hartenstein and Moxter on images and images make something important visible about these different media practices. They show the analogy between these practices as well as their difference.

The aforementioned practices are analogous insofar as they all include a material dimension that can be referred to as "medium". The medium of a painting includes canvas and paint, a burning bush is a material medium, the media of Eucharist are bread and wine and digital communication requires screens, computers, cable and/or WiFi-connection and so an. Inspired by Belting's work (2.1), we can now say:[67] In all the named practices those material media bridge a distance and make something present that is physically absent. But in doing so, the material media also function as reminders of absence – with different intensity and in different ways, but they all do. Bread and wine can be experienced to make the body of Christ present while they still taste and feel like bread and wine and thereby point to Christ's temporal absence.

This analogy transcends the mentioned duality of reality and virtuality as well as the duality of embodied and disembodied. Media transmit mental images – and that holds true for real and material paintings as well as for the digital media – they just do so in different ways. Images are always somehow embodied[68] – and that also applies for digital media: the image a screen or another interface creates in my head is an embodied image.

The aforementioned practices are also different, insofar as they make different use of different material media and lead to a different balance between presence and absence.[69] For example: On the one hand, if someone with little liturgical practice participates in a Lord's Supper in physical co-presence, her or his focus might be on the materiality of the media, the taste of the wine, the haptics of the bread, the oddness of the setting. Those media might still serve him or her as media of Christ's presence but the dimension of absence will be quite strong because of the focus on the media themselves. On the other hand, if someone uses the medium of VR-glasses to explore a virtual landscape, the experience of this very landscape might be so real and present

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[67] Belting 2001: 29–30, 143–147, particularly 146, 153, 186.

[68] See also Belting 2001: 14.

[69] See Belting 2001: 30, as quoted.

that she or he totally forgets about the mediality of his experience and hence about the absence of the reality she or he experiences.

On the background of these differences and analogies, the debate about digital communication should not be about the difference between mediated and non-mediated but about different ways of mediation.

In any case, this concept of analogy and difference makes it about conversion between different practices – and less about the mediation of an otherwise less or not mediated reality.

4.2 Conversion and Convertibility

If the Lord's Supper is described as a media practice that makes communion with God and with each other (re)present in and through various media, the question of the "convertibility" of this practices in the course of digital media change arises. The German media theorist Jochen Hörisch developed this notion of conversion in his media history: According to Hörisch, leading media share the possibility of "conversion" or convertibility, i.e. the possibility of embedding an information element in other contexts and cultural techniques.[70] When media cultures change, the medial representations outshine the presences hoped for: The medial presentation and representation require explanation and become problematic in their use and aims. If the main media change, conversion between media is the only way to preserve the represented: One converts in order not to actually convert, in order not to get stuck in an old, non-portable system.[71] Hörisch therefore concludes: "Converts are the real supporters of the systems they want to strengthen through their conversion."[72] A central query from a media-theoretical perspective therefore asks for clarification of the possible conversion and convertability of the media forms chosen.

However, there is a second thing to consider. From the reflections on the Lord's Supper it became clear that the testimony of Jesus Christ, his presence and the community he founds are constituted in plural media: In the relation of word and element, in the relation of body and word, in the relation of body and element, in the relation on Gods spirit and word,... This constitutive media plurality in the mediation and testi-

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[70] Hörisch 2010: 22–23.
[71] Hörisch 2010: 25.
[72] Hörisch 2010: 25.

mony of the singular media event "Christ" [73] is also preserved in the mediatization of these media – maybe even increased. The desire for a direct knowledge or vision of God is thus again rejected, as has already been made clear. The description of changing media therefore means less a change to a new main medium (Leitmedium) than an expansion of the medial forms and practices. The focus thus shifts to the question of the relationship not only between different media, but also different mediatization practices. Or, in the words of Berger: „Or do we have to think of God's media praxis as the ongoing, multi-mediated, living self-disclosure of a Living God? In which case, might sacramental mediations today be shaped by bits and bytes?"[74]

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[73] See for this thought Stoellger: „The question is then, how this singular media event (Christ) can be medialized diachronically; how Christ becomes present, after he is dead, resurrected and exalted with the Father? In short, through Christ's *spirit* (not through a general but singularly defined spirit). And this sparks hopes in some for a new immediacy of the spirit – which is immediately disappointed and redirected: to the media of Christ's spirit. For the spirit is not *bodiless* but bodily performed, embodied in preaching, sacrament, gestures, images, worship and form of life. God as medium (per Christum) – enters and binds himself to the *supplementary media of Christ*. The mediality of Christ's spirit is a qualified media plurality." Stoellger 2018b: 42. See also Stoellger 2018a: 380.

[74] Berger 2017: 80.

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