

Preaching in contemporary North American culture is increasingly visual in its imagery and imagistic in its content. The various approaches representing the new homiletics emphasize the role of the image in the language of preaching. (In fact, one of the hermeneutic issues of this day in preaching is the cost of translating an *oral* text of biblical narrative into a visual presentation of sermonic imagery.) Under the impact of the visual media in general – and, it seems, TV commercials in particular – some preachers have fallen into the pitfall of adopting a kind of pulpit language that resembles the soft drink or automobile ads. Images come tumbling out, diverse, seemingly unarranged, far too many for the hearers to process or recall.

Richard Eslinger, *Pitfalls in Preaching*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1996.

What would happen to the worship I prepared if I looked at it differently? What if I saw the task not as a mechanical, logical, modernist one of putting stuff in the right order so that it 'progressed' through a form to give a predetermined message with an anticipated outcome, but instead saw myself more like a curator of an art gallery? A curator who considers the space and environment as well as the content of worship and who takes these elements and puts them in a particular arrangement, considering juxtaposition, style, distance, light, shade, and so on. A maker of a context for worship rather than a presenter of content. A provider of a frame inside which the elements are arranged and rearranged to convey a particular message for a particular purpose. A message that may or may not be overtly obvious, may or may not be similar to the message perceived by another worshipper. So instead of Worship-Leader, or Worship-Planner, I become an artist, a framer, a reframer, a recontextor, a curator of worship. I provide contexts, experiences for others to participate in.

Mike Riddell (et al), *The Prodigal Project*, SPCK, London 20000.

The images always present the viewer with multiple meanings (they are inherently multivalent), meanings that are not susceptible to precisely articulated propositions... [The] multivalence of images has to do with their character as objects of perception. Visual images possess in inherent ambiguity a “floating chain of signifieds” within some sort of “spectrum of meanings”. Anyone seeking to interpret imagery, then, is presented with the challenge of locating the width of its meaning spectrum along with *possible* denotations within the spectrum. The interpreter must realise all the while... that any given meaning of an image is never exhaustive or authoritative over other possible meanings.

Richard Eslinger, *Narrative and Imagination*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1995, citing Margaret Miles, *Image as Insight*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1985.

Pictures are presentations of experience, not commentary about experience. Thus the TV curriculum is largely irrefutable. You can dislike television programs, but you cannot disagree with them... Such words as “true” and “false” come out of a different universe of symbolism altogether. They are applicable to the world of exposition, in which we confront statement and counter-statement, hypotheses, reasons, refutations, contradictions, explanations, verifications – above all, where we confront ideas expressed in the form of subjects and predicates... Television is a world dominated by stories, usually accompanied by music and segmented into -eight-minute modules, that call for visceral, not cortical, responses.

Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, Penguin, New York, 1985.

In the postmodern world, the image is the primary unit of cultural currency. In the modern world, preachers exegeted words to make points. In the postmodern world, preachers must learn how to exegete images to create experiences. Preachers are connoisseurs of biblical images, for it is the image that fixes the subject in postmoderns' mind and memory...

One "illustrates" points. One "animates" experiences...

Postmoderns rely on emotions for evidence, metaphors for truth, and myth for direction. Postmoderns live in metaphors and dwell in parables. They have a highly developed visual sense...

In preaching, we still think that people are moved by impeccable logic, powerful reason, and scientific thinking... Preachers must learn how to body forth their sermons...

Worship is the art of transcendence-releasing...

"For worship in the 21st century, if you can say it all with words, you've missed the point!" [quoting Easum & Bandy]

Leonard Sweet, *SoulTsunami*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1999.

Because of what computers commonly do, they place an inordinate emphasis on the technical processes of communication and offer very little in the way of substance. With the exception of electric light, there has never been a technology that better exemplifies Marshall McLuhan's aphorism "The medium is the message." The computer is almost all process. There are, for example, no "great computers," as there are great writers, painters or musicians. There are "great programs" and "great programmers," but their greatness lies in their ingenuity either in simulating a human function or in creating new possibilities of calculation, speed and volume... [For] the moment, computer technology functions more as a new mode of transportation than as a new means of substantive communication.

Neil Postman, *Technopoly*, Vintage Books, New York, 1993.

The electronic media... work in subtle ways to disconnect audiences from local communities and traditional ways of life. In fact, some of the most avid consumers of the electronic media have little or no sense of how they relate to the broader culture or to previous generations. By means of this “bias”, the electronic media have produced an actual “generation gap.” ... [Many] young people are anchored in a specialised media world, a youth subculture, that gives their lives meaning but at the same time distances them from their own family life. Often all that really remains of strong personal relationships is the peer group, which is immersed in the same electronic environment.

Quentin Schultze et al, *Dancing in the Dark*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1991.

As Christianity moves into a forming culture, there is often a venturesome theologian, a person such as Augustine or Luther, who will move out of a contrapuntal posture and constructively reformulate the faith in very new ways... During formative periods, preaching speaks freely in popular language, language close to everyday speech, and reaches out in search of analogies to explain traditional Christian doctrine in a new way... So, as a cultural formation begins to come together, preachers must seek a new, “two-way” metaphor; metaphor to convey God’s mysterious grace and, at the same time, human experiences of sin and liberation. Christian preaching must play on “the edges of language” where metaphor brings out redefinitions of human experience... Homiletic form is usually experimental, because preachers are developing rhetoric to match the shape of a new, forming human consciousness.

David Buttrick, *A Captive Voice*, Westminster/John Knox, Louisville, 1994.