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JOLYON MITCHELL

Preaching in an Audio-Visual Culture

The post-war explosion of mass media has changed the way we listen. Audiences now are used to brevity and directness in speech and conversational and colloquial styles of orality. How can preachers respond to this new situation? Jolyon Mitchell commends the use of what he calls a multi-sensorial approach. He encourages preachers to use shifts in perspective, conversational techniques and descriptive strategies that evoke mood as well as context and content.

Introduction

Preachers today face a highly competitive communicative environment. Many of their congregation on Sundays will already have glanced at a weekend paper, listened to the radio, or caught sight of an advertising hoarding before entering church. Some of their listeners will have spent several hours the evening before relaxing in front of Saturday night television, some will have snuggled down to view one of over 7 million videos rented each week in the UK. Others will have passed into the world of celluloid dreams, gazing at digitally formed images, while immersed in quadraphonic surround-sound at the local cinema or multiplex. An increasing proportion will have been exploring the multi-media universe of computer games, or surfing the World Wide Web. Given these diverse and sometimes rich media experiences, it is not surprising that listening to one voice, whilst seated on a wooden church pew or plastic chair, compares unfavourably. A pulpit monologue can tax not only visitors but also the regular attenders. Even in churches renowned for their preaching ministries, it is not uncommon to hear the sermon described as a 'frustrating' and 'tedious' experience.

The central contention of this article is that for preachers to be heard today, they must take seriously their communicative environment. This environment is described by some scholars as a 'visual culture' and by others as an 'audio-visual culture'.¹ Behind both terms lies the belief that our context has been significantly shaped by a series of revolutions and/or evolutions in communications. The result of this is that we now speak and listen, work and relax in a 'media saturated' society.²

1 See: Chris Jenks, ed. *Visual Culture*, Routledge, London 1995, and Henk Hoekstra and Marjeet Verbeek, 'Possibilities of Audiovisual Narrative' in Philip J. Rossi and Paul A. Soukup, eds, *Mass Media and*

the Moral Imagination, Sheed and Ward, Kansas City 1994. They argue that the 'audiovisual culture' represents 'the culture of the masses', p 215.

2 Wesley Carr, *Ministry and the Media*, SPCK, London 1990, p 58.

The rapidly evolving communicative setting has serious implications for anyone hoping to communicate orally and effectively. The mass media represent a central element of this setting. Preachers cannot afford to ignore this vital aspect of their listeners' context. Thor Hall argued in the early 1970s that: 'The study of communications media belongs, inextricably within the ecology of homiletics'.³ Stewart Hoover asserted in the early 1980s that for those involved in developing expertise in teaching, ministry or counselling: 'media awareness is no longer a luxury, an affectation or a hobby'.⁴ With the rapid development, expansion and convergence of communication technologies in the late 1990s, I would contend that preachers need, more than ever, to engage critically with their communicative environment.

This article will be divided into two main sections. I will first set out some of the reasons why preachers should take seriously the implications of working within an audio-visual culture. Secondly, I will suggest that a number of developments in homiletics have much to teach preachers who are competing with a whole range of audio-visual stimuli for their congregation's attention. On this basis, I will conclude that this highly competitive communicative context necessitates a reformed or re-newed approach to preaching.

Why does it matter?

Our audio-visual culture is like a wall of video monitors playing out many different scenes – it has many faces. This first section will primarily focus on one face of our mediated audio-visual culture: television. On average the British adult watches over 20 hours of television a week. The precise psychological and social effects of such regular viewing is an area of considerable scholarly debate. Television clearly has the *potential* to nurture beliefs, influence opinions and subtly transform our understanding of the world we live in. In this first section I will critically consider a range of claims about the impact of television made by certain homileticians.

Listening capacities reduced?

A common refrain amongst homileticians and educationalists is that television has undermined our ability to listen. Leander Keck, for example, argues that television has 'eroded the place of the sermon' because it has made it 'more difficult for people to attend carefully to merely verbal communication'.⁵ On this side of the Atlantic, Simon Vibert articulates the view that 'television provides a threat to serious preaching' as it:

has taught us to expect a frequent change in style of presentation – of presenter, scenery, topic – and this is to be accompanied by a rapid succession of visual images. Preaching, it is presumed, is too long and too dull in a TV age.⁶

3 Thor Hall, *The Future Shape of Preaching*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia 1971, p 4.

4 Stewart Hoover, *The Electronic Giant*, Brethren Press, Illinois 1982, p 155.

5 Leander E. Keck, *The Bible in the Pulpit – The Renewal of Biblical Preaching*, Abingdon Press, Nashville 1978, p 40.

6 Simon Vibert, *The Church in the Age of the TV Image – Dare we still preach?*, – Orthos 12, Fellowship of Word and Spirit, Northwich, Cheshire 1993, p 19.

Unsurprisingly, John Stott does not support this presumption, but he does assert that 'preachers have to reckon with a TV-conditioned congregation':

We have a colossal task on our hands if we hope to counteract the baneful tendencies of much modern television. We can no longer assume that people either want to listen to sermons, or indeed are able to listen. When they are accustomed to the swiftly moving images of the screen, how can we expect them to give their attention to one person talking, no frills, no light relief and nothing else to look at?⁷

On this basis it appears fair to assert, with Stott, that we cannot assume that congregations will listen. In a televisual age, preachers need to contend for 'people's attention'.

According to Bernard Reymond, a French Professor of Practical Theology, a further factor contributing towards the crisis in the way we listen to preaching is our increased reliance upon the 'zapper' or remote channel control:

'Zapping' has become part of normal behaviour; in front of the TV, the average viewer switches from one channel to another immediately they feel bored; faced with a sermon from the pulpit, they still zapp around in their minds, letting it wander wherever it will.⁸

Reymond argues for a 'revised rhetoric' and a 'video orality' which will assist distracted listeners to concentrate more easily on the sermon.

Like Keck and Vibert, Stott and Reymond make a persuasive case. At the heart of these arguments is the belief that television has reduced many congregations' capacity to listen. Many of their conclusions about the impact of television on listening, however, they leave comparatively unsubstantiated. Their assumptions about television and listening may not appear unreasonable, but they use little empirical data to support their claims. The danger with such an approach is that it can too easily slide into an over-simplistic 'direct effects' approach to television's influence.

It is necessary to develop a more sophisticated understanding of how our audio-visually saturated environment, and television in particular, cultivates audiences into particular habits of attending, viewing and listening. Such an approach recognises that 'exposure to television programmes [and other media] will, over time, have a cumulative influence on viewers' perceptions of the world and their place in it'.⁹ The contention of this section is that the cumulative influence of the form and content of the electronic media has influenced how congregations now listen.

7 John Stott, *I Believe in Preaching*, Hodder and Stoughton, London 1982, p 75. Stott had earlier argued pessimistically that 'TV has the tendency to make audiences physically lazy, intellectually uncritical, emotionally insensitive, psychologically confused, and morally disorientated'. pp 70-72. See also Michael Rogness, *Preaching to a TV Generation - The Sermon in the*

Electronic Age. CSS Publishing, Lima, Ohio 1994, p 29.

8 Bernard Reymond, 'Preaching and the New Media', *Modern Churchman*, n.s. xxxiv/5, 1993, pp 19-29.

9 David Gauntlett, *Moving Experiences - Understanding Television's Influences and Effects*, Acamedia Research Monograph 13, John Libbey, London 1995, p 97.

It is not being argued that one week's viewing will alter how people listen; nor is it being asserted that specific genres of television have necessarily changed attention habits. It is, however, being suggested that the repeated exposure to this 'audio-visual tapestry',¹⁰ of which television is but one part, has a cumulative influence on how congregations attend. In other words, I am not disagreeing with the fundamental conclusions of scholars such as Raymond in this area, I am merely questioning the way in which they have been reached.

It is important to underline that a shared assumption of each of these texts, also held by this author, is that television has *not* irrevocably undermined the ability *to listen*, but it has changed *how people listen*. This transformation has made the task of the preacher a harder one. Whichever approach is used to argue that television, and other electronic audio-visual stimuli, have changed and weakened congregations' ability to listen to the sermon, the sheer frequency with which this view has been asserted, points towards a second important issue: expectations about sermons.

Listening expectations changed?

Television, amongst many other media, has also contributed towards a change in how we expect to be spoken to in the public sphere. The language of television is markedly different from the language of the Victorian pulpit. It has also influenced expectations about the length, style and content of public discourse.

First, a point which connects with the previous section: length. In the 1890s it was not uncommon to hear an impassioned political speech lasting over sixty minutes. In the 1990s some commentators claimed that the average electioneering sound-bite on American television news programmes was down to under ten seconds. British networks may claim to give interviewees or speech-makers more time, but the tendency in news reports is towards short clips of under 30 seconds. The reductionist, selective and fragmentary tendencies of television have contributed to the abbreviation of public discourse.

Secondly, style: a growing number of communication scholars and linguists argue that television has transformed the style in which we expect to be addressed in the public sphere. We do not expect to be spoken at or down to, rather we expect to be spoken with. Kathleen Hall Jamieson, for example, in her fascinating text on *Eloquence in an Electronic Age* argues that:

Television has changed public discourse dramatically. Increasingly, eloquence is visual, not verbal. Where once we expected messages laced with impassioned appeals, now we respond positively to a cooler, more conversational art; where once audiences expected to be conquered by an art bent on battle, today's television viewer expects instead an intimate rhetoric of conciliation.¹¹

10 Gordon L. Berry and Joy Keiko Asamen, *Children and Television – Images in a Changing Sociocultural World*, Sage, London 1993, p 1.

11 Kathleen Hall Jamieson, *Eloquence in an Electronic Age – The Transformation of Political Speechmaking*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1988, p 44.

Even if Jamieson's assertions are only to some extent correct, and eloquence is gradually becoming more visual and conversational, then this 'democratisation' of discourse also has serious implications for preachers. Other writers argue that there is a sense in which a more colloquial and spontaneous style of orality is now expected from speakers.¹²

If this analysis is accurate, then it is significant for preaching methodology. A sermon which is constructed as a written text may display literary lucidity, but may lack the apparent spontaneity or colloquialisms necessary for oral communication. This shift towards conversational discourse serves as a warning to preachers who are constricted by their reliance on a written text which would be better 'read, silently, by the eye, than heard by the ear'. The shift towards a more conversational form of public discourse on television is another factor, therefore, which has contributed to the changed expectations of listeners.

A third changed expectation is centred on content. Television has the potential to raise profound theological questions. This is a point with which few homiletics have seriously engaged, and yet is probably as important as the issues of length and style. Consider for example Michael Buerk's reports in October 1984 from Korem on the Ethiopian famines. These historic and powerful broadcasts, which spoke of a biblical famine and showed images of children dying of starvation, were the catalyst for BandAid and a huge international relief effort. Like many news reports of tragedy it served as awakener to issues beyond our physical localities. It also raised huge theological questions, such as: Where was God in all this?

Paradoxically, the increased coverage of such suffering has also led to a weariness with such stories: compassion fatigue. Television can transport us into faraway worlds and yet at the same time can also distance us from them. The TV screen images which can instantaneously herald tragedies, or raise questions of theodicy, can also *screen* us from the reality of suffering. The way in which disasters are headlines for a few days and then are dropped to be replaced by the latest news may render such pictures ordinary. This process can turn us into voyeurs and so anaesthetise us to these images of pain. This process raises a twofold challenge for preachers: to be awakeners and to be interpreters.

The simple reminder being made here is that listeners will have many issues, questions and dilemmas raised by television, and other media, in their minds each Sunday. I am not arguing for a topically-based approach to preaching which relies upon news stories for its starting point. I am suggesting that an exposition of biblical texts which entirely ignores the underlying questions or memorable images raised by major stories of the week, will either fail to connect with listeners who are immersed in an audio-visual environment, or will become an act of collusion with those who would prefer we spent our resources on new commodities, rather than alleviating suffering.

12 See Alyce M. McKenzie, *Preaching Proverbs – Wisdom for the Pulpit*, Westminster John Knox, Louisville, Kentucky 1996, p xix.

In this section some of the reasons why preachers should take seriously the implications of working within an audio-visual culture have been set out. The list is not a comprehensive one, rather a reminder that preachers need to engage critically with our communicative context, and so develop an understanding of how listeners are likely to receive their sermons:

How shall we respond to our communicative context?

In an age where some homileticsians believe that 'television and motion pictures have shaped a visually orientated generation',¹³ it remains important to underline the competitive nature of the communicative environment in which preachers are now operating: notice how the preacher today is normally only an amateur in a world of professional communicators. Preachers are no longer the only educated voice in the village or town. They are now but one voice amongst a multitude of others. They are competing for the attention of congregations who are confronted by a kaleidoscopic choice of audio-visual media.

The advent of electronic audio-visual stimuli could be seen as dealing a fatal blow to preaching. One response to such an analysis is to withdraw from preaching, and concentrate on pastoral care, small discussion groups or liturgical and musical excellence. A second more traditionalist response would be simply to highlight the areas where biblical preaching is experiencing a renaissance and argue that these are successful and faithful models worth imitating. A third response, and the one taken here, is to argue that our communicative context raises not only challenges, but also new opportunities for preachers. The contention of this article is that our changed context does not toll the death-bell for the sermon. Rather, it provides new challenges and opportunities for preachers who are willing to adapt and to engage critically with how we communicate today.

From single-camera to multi-camera discourse

David Buttrick's seminal work on how to make 'moves' in sermons is pertinent to this discussion. He frequently draws cinematic or photographic analogies to illustrate his case. In *Homiletic*, for example, he argues that:

In an earlier era, movie directors worked with a fixed-location camera and moved actors around in front of the lens. Once upon a time the procedure was considered reality, but now when we view old films on late-night TV, they seem stilted and quite unreal. Today directors use a camera on a moving boom so that camera angles change, lenses widen or narrow, distances vary, imitating the actual way we perceive reality... Twentieth-century consciousness views the world from many different standpoints.¹⁴

13 Patricia Wilson-Kastner, *Imagery for Preaching*, Fortress, Minneapolis 1989, p 21.

14 David G. Buttrick, *Homiletic: Moves and Structures*, SCM, London 1987, p 55.

On the basis of this change in perception Buttrick argues for a similar development in approaches to making moves within preaching. The point being made is that speakers who act like one of the earliest cameras in their discourse and adopt a single, static or fixed point of view may seem slow and turgid to an audience more used to rapid shifts in viewing angles.¹⁵

It is significant, however, that Buttrick himself does not uncritically adopt and translate cinematic techniques in his methodology for movement in sermons. He argues that speakers to large groups wishing to effect successful moves need to take time with their transitions:

Group consciousness simply cannot handle rapid shifts in subject matter. To move along from subject to subject every few sentences would 'freak out' an audience; the effect would be similar to watching a movie film that has been speeded up many times the normal frames per minute. Minds will wander when pace is intense.¹⁶

Buttrick may draw upon film analogies to support his case, but he does not go so far as to argue that preachers should mimic cinematic devices such as rapid camera movement and swift point-of-view moves in their oral discourse. It is clear from this that he has a clear understanding of the distinction between oral and audio-visual forms of communication. This can also be seen by the way in which he draws extensively upon the image of a photographic camera to consider point-of-view in moves, and how to vary 'focal field, lens depth and focal depth'¹⁷ in preaching.

Buttrick's use of cinematic and photographic analogies in *Homiletic* demonstrates a sensitivity to his communicative context. He is aware that listeners are used to a range of electronic communication. Whilst these modern media appear to have influenced the development of some of his homiletical theories, it is clear that he is cautious and critical in the lessons he applies from visual media to oral communication.

David Buttrick is, however, a good example of one leading homiletician who has attempted to integrate some developments in communication with his homiletical method. A good test of his approach, is to reflect on how Buttrick's methodology might work out in practice. Consider, for example, the tale of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37), where the story could be retold from a variety of angles. By persuading the listener to stand by the listening lawyer, walk with the religious professionals and lie in the ditch with the mugged traveller the preacher can provide provocative insights into this story.¹⁸ Even a view from the inn might elicit a new response to this familiar parable. Richard Eslinger argues persuasively that:

15 Buttrick, *Homiletic*, 'Preaching that talks objectively about everything, as if from a third-person observational position, will not only seem archaic but may have an aura of unreality', p 56.

16 Buttrick, *Homiletic*, p 25.

17 Buttrick, *Homiletic*, 'Alterations in focal field, lens depth, and focal depth can be managed with ease. Thus we can widen or narrow

focus without much difficulty, although we cannot include more than one such alteration in any single move', p 63.

18 See: Robert W. Funk, *Parables and Presence: Forms of the New Testament Tradition*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia 1982, pp 29-34. Funk argues that this parable should be interpreted from the perspective of the victim and not the Good Samaritan.

Shifts in character point of view, as with the parable of the Good Samaritan, are rich with potential for new insight and even new hearings of the biblical narrative.¹⁹

Such shifts from one point-of-view to another are by no means a new homiletical technique. The danger, however, of being locked into one viewpoint remains. On the basis of Buttrick's argument, this could be described as a single fixed-camera approach, which merely allows the characters to pass across the screen of the imagination, or simply views the entire story from one perspective. This will also limit the story's potential power for multi-angle conditioned listeners. A different form could be described as a multi-camera approach. If sensitively handled, this could lead listeners into and through a story and so allow them to experience its movement and its depth.

For Buttrick the power lies not in discovering and making a single point in three different ways, but rather in enabling listeners to move through the story itself and so encounter its original force afresh. This multi-camera approach appears to have the potential to engage, even empower, listeners who are used to frequent changes of points of view in the cinema or in front of the small screen.

It has been implied in this section that Buttrick's argument, characterised as the move from a single fixed-camera form of preaching to a multi-camera approach to preaching, is robust, especially, when it is recognised that cinematographic developments have ensured that listeners are now used to viewing from a number of perspectives. Given that this is the case, then a form of orality that offers a variety of perspectives is more likely to hold listeners' attention.

From proclamatory to conversational discourse

It was suggested in the first section of this article that we have become accustomed to a more conversational form of discourse. Think, for example, of a Radio 1 DJ or Radio 4 *Today* presenter who speak as if they were friends in your front room. Such conversationalised discourse means that for many listeners the single voice attempting to speak authoritatively from the pulpit has lost much of its power. In our transformed preaching situation the sermon delivered as a closed monologue will often fail to connect with listeners.

A range of homileticians have identified the real danger of alienating or at least distancing listeners by relying on the traditional monological style of preaching. Henry Eggold, for example, argues in *Preaching is Dialogue* that:

One of the exciting and hopeful developments in preaching today is the accent on preaching as dialogue. It is an attempt to think of the sermon as a dialogue between preacher and listener instead of as the dreary monologue that it so often is.²⁰

19 Richard L. Eslinger, *Narrative and Imagination – Preaching the Worlds that Shape Us*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis 1995, p 145.

20 Henry J. Eggold, *Preaching is Dialogue – A Concise Introduction to Homiletics*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan 1980, p 11.

It is important to note that Eggold is arguing for a reconceptualisation of preaching as dialogue, rather than a termination of it as a single-voiced communicative practice. Eggold is by no means a lone voice in this understanding of preaching as dialogue.

Other homileticians have moved on from the image of preaching as dialogue to that of preaching as conversation or interaction. David Schlafer suggests that 'preaching is more of a community interaction than an individual monologue'. He develops this point arguing that:

Preaching is more than speaking *to* a congregation, however sensitively, it is speaking *for* and *with* a congregation as well. Preaching attempts to articulate the concerns, questions, commitments, and celebrations of the whole faith community... The sermon is not a monologue, but an unfolding conversation of the people of God – a conversation about and with God, and about their struggles to know and be faithful to God.²¹

At the heart of Schlafer's argument for conversational preaching is the strongly stated belief that preachers should listen to a whole range of voices before speaking.

At this stage it is valuable to see how certain homileticians have attempted to develop a more dialogical or conversational mode of preaching. Many draw upon Fred Craddock's work on preaching. Craddock identifies the problem of the monological approach which treats listeners like vessels for pouring information into. He argues that:

... sermons which begin with conclusions and general truths arrived at by the minister in the privacy of a study tend to oppress and treat as less than fully faithful and capable a listening congregation. Today, this is often called the banking method of communicating; that is, the speaker simply makes deposits of information in the mind of the listener.²²

Craddock is not arguing here for a balanced, tame, or objective style of preaching which lacks passion or vision. He is rather explaining how he came to prefer an inductive approach over a deductive approach for preaching. He suggests inductive movement is from the 'particulars to the general', and deductive is from 'the general to particulars'. The inductive approach attempts to turn the sermon from a closed monologue into a conversation between 'the congregation and the biblical text'.²³

In the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), for example, a deductive approach might be to begin with the general statement: 'Love your neighbour as yourself' (v 27). The parable would be used as a tool to support this imperative. An inductive approach, might invite the listeners to reflect on the characters portrayed in this story. How do they act? What do they say? How is it relevant today? These could be questions raised to consider by a homiletician preparing to preach on this story. In short, Craddock's approach to inductive preaching is an attempt to move the authority from the preacher to the text. The congregation is

21 David Schlafer, *Surviving the Sermon*, Cowley, Boston, Mass. 1992, p. 24.

22 Fred Craddock, 'Inductive Preaching' – unpublished paper for the Societas

Homiletica – Stetson University, August 20–23, 1990, p 8.

23 Craddock, 'Inductive Preaching', p 10 and p 12.

invited to explore it with the help of the speaker, rather than have the answers thrust upon them.

Some homileticians have gone further than Craddock's inductive model²⁴ and argued that preachers should use an 'interactive' or a 'collaborative' form of preaching. In both *Interactive Preaching*²⁵ and *The Roundtable Pulpit*,²⁶ it is clear that the authors are keen to move away from the monological or 'sovereign' approach which often finds its theological support in a Barthian understanding of preaching. This move raises a foundational issue: 'Since preaching is essentially monological, how best can principles and practices of truly participative dialogue be incorporated?'²⁷ Such a question lies behind Eggold's, Schlafer's and McClure's discussions of preaching as dialogue, conversation and collaboration.

This section has demonstrated how there has been an attempt by certain homileticians to move away from seeing preaching as a monologue to a more interactive model, which involves the listeners participating more actively in the process of preaching. Underlying these attempts is the recognition that there has been a crisis in confidence in the authority of the preacher, partially brought about by the multiplicity of voices communicated through the electronic media. To be heard in such an environment it is vital that preaching involves listeners more in the communication process. A 'truly participative' form of discourse will not be afraid to draw upon what has been described as inductive, dialogical, conversational and collaborative approaches to preaching.

From visual to multi-sensorial discourse

In this section it will be argued that we need to develop a form of discourse which is appropriate to our competitive communicative environment. One theme touched upon in the first half of this article is the move from verbal forms to visual forms of communication. A range of homileticians have attempted to explore how to communicate in this apparently image-saturated culture. Our new preaching situation, where television and film as electronic storytellers and image creators dominate, led Paul Scott Wilson to argue that, 'What Barth told preachers needs updating: Have the Bible in one hand, the newspaper in the other, and the TV on in the background.'²⁸ Notice how Wilson has added the TV to this famous Barthian dictum.

A frequent refrain in Paul Scott Wilson's text-book, *The Practice of Preaching*, is the 'need for preachers to make a movie with words'.²⁹ Imagine, for example, what

24 See Paul Scott Wilson, *The Practice of Preaching*, Abingdon Press, Nashville 1995, p 214.

25 D. Stephenson Bond, *Interactive Preaching*, CBP, St Louis, Missouri 1991.

26 John S. McClure, *The Roundtable Pulpit – Where Leadership and Preaching Meet*, Abingdon, Nashville 1995. See especially chapter 2, 'Towards a Collaborative Homiletic' and chapter 3, 'Collaborative Preaching'.

27 McClure, *The Roundtable Pulpit*, p 47.

28 Scott Wilson, *Practice of Preaching*, p 279. He continues: 'The lives of our congregation's members are shaped by media. How they think is affected by media. What they talk about is in part provided by media.'

29 Scott Wilson, *Practice of Preaching*, p 255 and p 112. 'We become like movie directors'. See also p 183, and p 132.

decisions you would have to make if you were filming the paralysed man being lowered through a roof to Jesus. I would suggest that if preachers are to become like 'movie directors' with words, then they must learn to develop skills for experiencing imaginatively the world of the scriptural text.

Some homileticians' advice in this area resonates with an Ignatian approach to biblical texts. Charles Rice, for example, argues that:

...if we have an experience of the text, allow ourselves to be led deeply into its images – in our mind's eye to see its people, places, and things – to experience its language as a new dawning, there is every likelihood that the resulting sermon will in form and content, rely upon and awaken the imagination.³⁰

One of the great strengths of re-imagining the world of the text, is that it provides resources for vivid language. This form of discourse has the ability to create images on the screens of listeners' imaginations.

Some preachers go beyond engaging the visual imagination. They use 'words which you can see, smell, touch, taste, hear and feel'.³¹ One of the strengths of such multi-sensorial language is that it can work on many different levels, feeding different parts of the listeners' imaginations. Behind many of these calls for the development of pictorial or multi-sensorial language is a serious attempt to aid effective oral communication and so engage the listener more actively in the communicative act. As such it is a more interactive form of discourse. This part of the discussion began with a call for preachers to act like movie directors, it ends with an encouragement to develop a discursive style which engages all the senses.

Conclusion

As a face to face medium, in which a single voice relies primarily on verbal communication, preaching is a rare species in our audio-visual jungle. When compared to other forms of communication habitually used today, preaching stands out, almost alone, as a set piece of public discourse. This strangeness may be a strength in a context where electronically mediated communication appears to dominate. Nevertheless, even if preaching is *sui generis*, preachers cannot afford to ignore our audio-visual context, nor should they acquiesce entirely to its more seductive images. Preachers who wish to be effective communicators of the *evangelion* today cannot yearn for and mimic styles from 'the golden age of pulpit princes'. Voices from the new homiletic movement which point towards shifts in how we speak and listen should be heeded. Those who seek to point distracted congregations towards a Galilean who adapted his discourse to connect with his listeners, also need to adapt to and critically engage with our highly competitive communicative environment.

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30 Charles Rice, 'Shaping Sermons by the interplay of Text and Metaphor', in Don M. Wardlaw, ed. *Preaching Biblically* Westminster Press, Philadelphia 1983, p 104.

31 Edward F. Markquart, *Quest for Better Preaching*, Augsburg, Minneapolis 1984.