

“The Role of Multimedia Tools in Preaching according to Recent Homiletics Texts:
Toward a Healthy Theology of the Convergence of Multimedia Tools and Preaching”

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Abstract

Multimedia technologies and forms of communication dominate American culture and are increasingly permeating life inside the church. More preachers are relying on multimedia tools both for sermon preparation and delivery. This study examining major preaching texts published since 2000 reveals that homileticians are divided over the proper role, if any, multimedia should play in preaching and reveals the need to move toward a healthy theology of convergence.

Introduction

Wayne McDill, the senior professor of preaching at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, makes the bold claim, “Homileticians and preachers alike see multimedia presentations as the future of preaching” (2006, p.207). If this statement be true, then one would expect the textbooks rolling off the presses to inform the future of preaching to emphasize this projected role of multimedia for sermon preparation and delivery. This essay explores many of major texts from some of America’s most respected homileticians and preachers published since 2000 in order to explore their treatment of the multimedia question.

No one challenges the assertion of Farmer and Dalton when they write, “Multimedia is a primary language of the culture of today’s learners” (2002, p.393). What is debated is the extent to which the church should conform to the culture through the incorporation of multimedia technologies into worship services. Rodger Nishioka expresses the conundrum in a recent article published in Journal for Preachers, “From music videos to web sites to MTV’s Real World to video games, youth and young adults are more visually oriented than auditory. This poses a huge challenge for the Church. How do we reorient our worship experiences so they engage more than one sense at a time?” (pp.42-43). Some who refuse to compromise the orality of preaching argue the answer lies in inductive methods and narrative preaching with their indirect method of communication and appeal to the mind’s eye. Others place their hope in honing the oratorical skills of the expository preacher, believing that through appropriate use of imagery, illustration, metaphor, gesture, eye contact, and other rhetorical strategies, the hearer will not become bored with sacred didactics.

He that Hath Eyes to See, Let Him Hear

Calvin Miller, a professor of preaching at Beeson Divinity School, for example, mentions in the introduction to his book on narrative preaching that “today’s listeners have developed great eyes

as their ears have atrophied...,” and “sermons must remember the visual age to which they are preached” (2006, p.19). He suggests, “It would be great to be sure that we are preaching in pictures, for pictures are the language of the age.” Just when Miller has made a cogent point that could segue nicely into a discussion on the role multimedia technologies might or might not assist this “preaching in pictures,” he chooses rather to mention only the need for “a rhetoric that is image-centered.”¹ Early pioneers of inductive preaching such as Fred Craddock (2001, 2002) and Eugene Lowry (2001) have issued revised editions of their classic texts, but they also remain silent on the question of multimedia support.

Few homileticians in recent years have surpassed the influence of Haddon W. Robinson (evidenced in part by the number of forewords to preaching textbooks that bear his name), the distinguished professor of preaching at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. In a recent work on preaching first-person expository sermons co-authored with his son, Torrey, Robinson argues, “The advantage of indirect address is that it resembles the familiarity of television” (2003, p.45). The pulpit should be removed and the story relived, not merely retold. Robinson and son encourage the use of costumes, makeup, and stage props but offer no discussion on how multimedia technologies could be used either in place of or in addition to traditional visual aids. J. Kent Edwards (2005, pp.101-04), professor of preaching at Talbot School of Theology, likewise, mentions only the traditional visual aids of costumes, makeup and stage props in his Effective First-Person Biblical Preaching. Commendable as these suggestions are, many, if not most churches, do not have the resources or talent to do live drama in a way that will not come across as “cheesy” to media savvy postmoderns. On the other hand, professionally produced multimedia presentations are readily accessible for little or no cost to churches.

It is not as though these scholars dismiss the power of multimedia. They often refer to the current culture’s addiction to multimedia in order to emphasize the need for preachers to develop a more dramatic and image evoking rhetoric. In the preface to the second edition of his monumental text, Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages, H. W. Robinson states the following as one of the main reasons for bringing forth a revision: “Television and the computer have influenced the way we learn and think” (2001, p.10). This knowledge notwithstanding, Robinson’s revised text contains no advice on how to incorporate such multimedia technologies into the art of preaching.

Johnson T. K. Lim states, “We have moved from an audio to a visual generation. The past is an auditory generation; ours is a visual generation...This visual replacement of the oral and audio has great implications for contemporary preaching” (2002, p.69). Lim goes so far as to affirm that for the preacher, “It is not enough to work on the hearing. We need to work on the seeing” (p.81). Despite the fact Lim believes in the ancient Chinese proverb, “One picture is worth a thousand words,” (p.63), none of his suggestions for illustrating the sermon and making it interesting includes a single reference to multimedia helps.

The late Keith Willhite offers a contribution with a promising title, Preaching with Relevance: Without Dumbing Down. Willhite, who was a professor of preaching at Dallas Theological

¹ Miller in an earlier work that predates the *terminus ad quo* for this study does stress the need for preachers and churches to embrace video image in worship (p.115). The most that can be made of the comment noted here is that “rhetoric” is a broad term and leaves the door open to multimedia forms of communication.

Seminary, stresses the importance of metaphoric imagery in preaching. He concludes, “In preaching with relevance, we need to tell *and* show” (2001, p.101). But by “show” Willhite means only “describe.” An example that he provides makes this clear. He explains that if he were to refer to the fast food restaurant McDonald’s in a sermon, he would have a clear picture in his mind of such a place. Then he cautions, “For a few people in your audience who have not been in a McDonald’s, it may be more difficult to get across those images. You may have to describe the counter, the distance to the table, why they use trays, and some things along those lines...” (pp.99-100). Why not project an image or two of a McDonald’s on the screen or take a digital video recorder to a McDonald’s and shoot 30-seconds of video for a clip to illustrate the point rather than take two or three minutes of valuable sermon time to explain what a McDonald’s is like?

Ronald J. Allen, a professor of preaching at Christian Theological Seminary, also understands the impact of media on the preacher’s listeners. In his recent text on preaching which he subtitled “An Essential Guide,” Allen encourages the preacher to look to things like “a play, a movie, or a television comedy” and affirms, “Newscasts and interview programs on radio and television often bring forward stories that can help give flesh to the sermon” (2002, p.83). In his advice on how to begin a sermon, his bulleted list includes, “Draw from a movie, a television program...” (p.100). Yet, Allen stops short of mentioning that the preacher might actually share an appropriate video clip. His “Appendix D: Resources for Beginning Preachers” includes no multimedia references.

In an earlier work co-authored with Gilbert L. Bartholomew, Allen seems to indicate that an open Bible is the only visual aid that a preacher needs: “The visual medium of print reinforces the words of the text that the congregation otherwise only hears” (2000, p.114). While one certainly does not impugn the motive to get people to bring their Bibles to church, and actually use them, the question Bartholomew overlooks is, what visual medium reinforces the majority of the sermon that does not consist of direct quotes from Scripture?

Others are not merely silent on the multimedia question; they demonstrate either extreme caution or even outright disdain in their comments. Debra Murphy points out in her critique of PowerPoint® use in worship that such video technologies are “not value-neutral” and her plea is for “a more judicious and limited use” of video projection in worship (2007, pp.10-11). In an editorial piece published in *Christianity Today*, Marilyn Chandler McEntyre expresses the need to “acknowledge, and even mourn, what we lose when worship meets media” (2001, p. 83).

Lucy L. Hogan, in a paper presented to the 2001 conference of the *Societas Homiletica*, seems discouraged that preaching students “no longer want quotations and interesting stories,” but rather “they want to know how to search databases for appropriate images, and what are the copyright laws for showing movie clips...” (2002, p.66). This concerns Hogan for two reasons. First, the expense and level of expertise associated with the multimedia resources “privileges wealth and size” (p.67). Second, the entanglement between business and technology that bleeds over into the church through the use of PowerPoint® and other media tools commonly used in the business world “blurs the line between church and business” and reduces the “awe and mystery” of the former (ibid.).

Hogan's first concern could apply *ad infinitum* to a host of culturally conditioned practices that American churches have adapted to through the years that have required purchases and volunteer training. But does Hogan really believe it is either cost prohibitive or too technologically challenging for even a "poor" church in America to have at least one member who might both make available and know how to operate a television and DVD player? Hogan's second concern borders on nonsense when one considers how through church architecture, church growth philosophies, organizational structures, mission and vision statements, and polity, the entanglement is already acute. Why is it okay to copycat corporate America in so many ways, but draw the line with multimedia tools?

Popular expositor and president of The Master's College and Seminary, John MacArthur, offers perhaps the most disparaging comment in his recent edited work, Preaching: How to Preach Biblically. Having already noted that he is "not into storytelling", MacArthur addresses the issue of "drama in the pulpit," which one may also safely assume covers in his mind any multimedia preaching aids (2005, p.280). MacArthur refers to their use as "a crutch" and that "only a weak preacher would need such a crutch...[since]...the power of God's Word will be more effective than any human drama or communication gimmick" (p.283). It is not surprising, then, that in his contribution to MacArthur's anthology that covers the topics of introducing, illustrating, and concluding the sermon, Richard L. Mayhue allows no reference to any multimedia source in his offering of over 40 suggestions for spicing up the sermon.

Richard Ward, a professor of preaching at Iliff School of Theology, is concerned that the "boundaries between *communication* and *art* are increasingly being blurred in the study and practice of preaching..." (2001, p.7). He laments that he is "concerned that our experience of Scripture is getting smaller and smaller, its place in our memory rapidly eclipsed by new and dazzling technologies" (p.15). Ernest T. Campbell employs a similar rhetoric when he bemoans the changes forced on preaching whenever "some villain in a black hat sought to open several of movie houses on the Lord's day" and "when television came into its own" and Sunday evening preachers lost out to "Uncle Miltie" and 60 Minutes (2004, p.53).

So far in this survey, McDill's assertion noted above that homileticians and preachers view multimedia as "the future of preaching" does not fare well.

Table 1

Homiletics Books Published since 2000 that Do Not Engage the Multimedia Question

Author/Editor, Book Title^a

Allen, Preaching: An Essential Guide

Allen & Bartholomew, Preaching Verse by Verse

Bisagno, Principle Preaching: How to Create and Deliver Sermons for Life Applications

Craddock, As One without Authority (Rev. Ed.)

Craddock, Overhearing the Gospel (Rev. Ed.)

Dykstra, Discovering a Sermon: Personal Pastoral Preaching

Edwards, Effective First-Person Biblical Preaching: The Steps from Text to Narrative Sermon

Elliott, Creative Styles of Preaching

Table 1 Continued

Fasol, Fish, Gaines, & West, Preaching Evangelistically: Proclaiming the Saving Message of Jesus
 Graves, What's the Matter with Preaching Today?
 Honeycutt, Preaching to Skeptics and Seekers
 Immink, G. & C. Stark (Eds.), Preaching: Creating Perspective. Studia Homiletica
 Kaiser, Jr., Preaching and Teaching from the Old Testament: A Guide for the Church
 Lim, Power in preaching
 Lowry, The Homiletical Plot: The Sermon as Narrative Art Form (Rev. Ed.)
 Kalas, Preaching From the Soul: Insistent Observations on the Sacred Art
 MacArthur (Ed.), Preaching: How to Preach Biblically
 Massey, Stewards of the Story: The Task of Preaching
 Matthews, Preaching that Speaks to Women
 Mathewson, The Art of Preaching Old Testament Narrative
 Miller, Preaching: The Art of Narrative Exposition
 Robinson, Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages (2nd Ed.)
 Robinson & Robinson, It's All in How You Tell It: Preaching First-Person Expository Messages
 Stiller, Preaching Parables to Postmoderns
 Swears, Preaching to Head and Heart
 Ward, Speaking of the Holy: The Art of Communication in Preaching
 Willhite, Preaching with Relevance: Without Dumbing Down
 Wilson, Broken Words: Reflections on the Craft of Preaching

^aSee *Bibliography* for complete bibliographic information.

He that Hath Ears to Hear, Let Him See

Only a handful of recent homiletics textbooks address the multimedia question directly. For an overview of texts surveyed that offer any discussion on the role of multimedia in sermon preparation and delivery, see Table 2. Kenton C. Anderson, a professor of preaching at Northwest Baptist College and Seminary and a past president of the Evangelical Homiletics Society, has written a unique homiletics text in which multimedia and preaching converge. The book itself is a narrative story in which the main character is a fictional preacher who voices and discovers answers to questions regarding how to preach to a postmodern audience. The preacher in the story uses his computer extensively and finds resources online at, Preaching.org —albeit he needs to upgrade from dial-up to a cable modem. Anderson does not directly address the role of multimedia tools in sermon delivery, but he seems to open the door through the role multimedia plays in his narrative and with his comment on the last page, “The preacher ought to embrace whatever helps the listener hear from God” (2001, p.150).

Ramesh Richard, a professor of preaching at Dallas Theological Seminary, justifies using multimedia in preaching because, “Present-day audiences are oriented toward story in sight and sound in addition to verbal instruction” (2005, p.155). In Richard’s perspective, “Visual support that enhances oral communication could be as natural as appropriate gesturing or could involve more sophisticated graphics like clips from movies” (ibid.). Richard, however, does not include movie clips or graphics in either the personal illustrations that he shares or in his list of “Kinds of Illustrations.” In fact, Richard references a preaching book from 1950 for the 9 categories of illustrations he lists: figures of speech, analogy, allegory, fable, parable, historical allusion, biographical incident, personal experience, and anecdote. Granted, any of these nine could be illustrated through multimedia, but this is left to the student’s inference. Richard is clearly open

to multimedia tools that can enhance oral communication, but how is this enhancement to be determined and evaluated?

Table 2

Homiletics Books Published since 2000 that Engage the Multimedia Question

Author/Editor, Book Title^a

Altrock, Preaching to Pluralists: How to Proclaim Christ in a Postmodern Age
 Anderson, Preaching with Conviction: Connecting with Postmodern Listeners
 Chapell, Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon (2nd Ed.)
 Immink & Stark (Eds.), Preaching: Creating Perspective
 Johnston, Preaching to a Postmodern World: A Guide to Reaching Twenty-First Century Listeners
 McDill, 12 Essential Skills for Great Preaching (2nd Ed.)
 Richard, Preparing Evangelistic Sermons: A Seven-Step Method for Preaching Salvation
 Robinson & Larson (Eds.), The Art & Craft of Biblical Preaching: A Comprehensive Resource for Today's Communicators

^aSee *Bibliography* for complete bibliographic information.

Bryan Chapell, president and professor at Covenant Theological Seminary, acknowledges, “Video and audio media have become the sensory wallpaper of many American’s daily existence” (2005, p.181). Since this is the case, “Contemporary preachers must acknowledge these cultural challenges even if they are unsure how much to accommodate them...we must ask how we can best serve present needs” (p.182). Lamentably, this fine teacher of Christ-centered expository preaching does not explore how contemporary preachers might find answers to these two important questions. Chapell acknowledges the need for video and audio media in preaching but leaves readers in a lacuna by not offering any instruction as to how preachers should utilize them.

Chris Altrock, a preacher in Memphis, TN, offers a helpful text with his Preaching to Pluralists: How to Proclaim Christ in a Postmodern Age. He informs the reader on many postmodern values, but he does not stress the role of media technologies as they relate to postmodern values. Altrock proposes an acrostic of GRE for preachers to plan their sermons around: God-encountering, relational, and experiential. Altrock encourages the use of lighting, drama and video/images as part of the strategy. He affirms, “Image-driven worship is experiential worship” (2004, p.128). He provides several suggestions for using image and video in the sermon and points to an online resource for help (www.highwayvideo.com). While the information presented is good, Altrock’s treatment of multimedia is limited to just a few short paragraphs in his 160-page text.²

Graham Johnston, a pastor and lecturer in homiletics from Australia, makes a stronger case for using multimedia tools in his Preaching to a Postmodern World: A Guide to Reaching Twenty-

² Altrock does share an earlier example of multimedia use in a Wednesday night teen service at his church “with lights low and the words...projected on a screen” and involving “elaborate visual aids and/or intriguing Power Point presentations” (pp.33-34).

First Century Listeners. Johnston engages the critics who “decry the use of alternative forms of communication such as video and art” and counters that “the Bible is replete with examples of God’s prophets—Hosea, Jonah, and Jeremiah—called to act out or dramatize God’s message...” (2001, p.166). Johnston believes preachers must use audiovisuals, drama and art to connect with postmoderns. To the critic, he asks, “How many more people might you connect to the Word of God if you did use different methods, maybe even show a scene from a film?” (p.163). Johnston offers, “As the postmodern public endures a media saturation, preachers can bury their heads. But I would opt to critically engage society using its own images and technology” (p.164). He gives three practical reasons why every church should invest in “a video projector and the proper copyright permission” (pp.164-66). First, listeners know the media. Second, no one else is going to give the media a Christian perspective. Third, messages with contemporary imagery and sound resonate with the audience.

Touted as “A comprehensive resource for today’s communicators,” the edited work of Haddon Robinson and Craig Larson, The Art & Craft of Biblical Preaching, has 201 essays from over 100 leading voices in homiletics, organized into eleven parts plus and appendix and an accompanying audio CD. Part 7 of the encyclopedic volume addresses the use of stories and illustrations, and its 16 essays—even one titled “Illustrating from Pop Culture”—are silent regarding the use of video or other high-tech worship tools for illustrative purposes. Discussion on multimedia is confined to an essay by K. C. Anderson in a later section on “Sermon Delivery” in an essay titled, “In the Eye of the Hearer: Visuals that Support rather than Distract from the Word.”

Anderson’s essay offers a short paragraph on how PowerPoint® can help by projecting “still images” that “focus the attention of listeners on key ideas” (2005, p.607). This is followed by three longer paragraphs on how PowerPoint® might hinder the preacher because of the time and energy it consumes to create the presentation and because people will likely judge it unfavorably in comparison to the more “professional quality presentations” they “are accustomed to viewing...on their televisions and in their workplaces” (ibid.). He offers six helpful tips for using PowerPoint® well that emphasize the quality of the sermon itself, projecting images that create visual metaphors to support the sermon, abiding by the “less is more” rule, using appropriate size fonts, colors, brightness and contrasts, teaming up a design team, and keeping the visuals secondary.

After briefly discussing the judicious use of PowerPoint®, Anderson turns his attention to videos, where his optimism for usefulness seems to increase. “Video is the language of contemporary culture...” Anderson begins. “Not only does it add variety, color, and motion to the preaching experience, it shows that the preacher is relevant and in-touch with the culture” (p.608). Anderson provides a few suggestions on how to incorporate video into the sermon then offers four suggestions for utilizing video in preaching: 1) keep it legal, 2) keep it short, 3) keep it flowing, and 4) keep it clean. He also provides a sentence or two on pitfalls to avoid:

A video clip is a supercharged sermon illustration, subject to all the strengths and weaknesses of such illustrations and then some. Video can eat precious time and interrupt carefully designed sermon flow. Further, a video clip creates a world for the listener to inhabit. Many times that world is more compelling than the world of the sermon

itself...Preachers need to be particularly careful with clips taken from movies that can be seen to give license to listeners to view things that might be substantially less than the pure and lovely things of good report that Paul describes in Philippians 4:8. (p.609)

After offering a somewhat positive view toward the convergence of multimedia and preaching, Anderson dilutes his prescription for multimedia by concluding his essay with a paragraph that minimizes any role it could play:

Visuals are valuable, but they should be used with the confidence that the greatest visual effect inherent to preaching is the image of the preacher standing and delivering. Preachers are going to have difficulty competing with Hollywood, but no one excels the preacher in standing up and speaking the truth of the gospel. The strength of preaching is that a human being, having heard from God, helps others hear the same. *The energy and passion of such a preacher can be visual stimulation enough* (ibid., italics for emphasis).

So in the end, Anderson intimates that if one is sufficiently energetic and passionate in one's preaching, then no multimedia tools are necessary. This is similar to the view expressed as well by one of the volume's editors. Larson affirms, "Stories even more than images provide impact through their plot, conflict, resolution, curiosity, human interest, climax, life, and surprise" (2005, p.488).³ What about the potential for impact when both story and image unite in one delightful multimedia stream?

Adam Hamilton, an author and pastor of one of America's fastest growing congregations (Church of the Resurrection in Leawood, KS), goes farther in promoting multimedia tools than any in the past 7 years in a preaching text. His Unleashing the Word: Preaching with Relevance, Purpose, and Passion devotes an entire chapter to the subject of "Using Video in Preaching and Worship" (2003, pp.45-56). Hamilton writes from the helpful vantage point of a pastor of a church where the convergence of multimedia and preaching has transpired gradually since the church's inception in 1990. With this experience under his belt, Hamilton states, "The challenge for most churches will not be the raising of funds to be able to purchase the equipment for introducing video into worship. Your challenges will be in helping your members accept this new medium...and in the temptation to go overboard with this new tool" (p.47). Those who resist the use of multimedia tools in church, in Hamilton's mind, are parallel to those from an earlier generation who initially resisted the introduction of lights and sound systems upon the arrival of electricity.

Hamilton shares from his pastoral history how he met the challenges of introducing and using multimedia and in the process provides guidelines for others to follow. His testimony reveals two points worthy of further research. First, he keeps projection screens to the sides and not in the center of the sanctuary. Second, he uses IMAG technology to project himself on the screen as he preaches so that those seated in the back of the auditorium might see his non-verbal communication, such as facial expressions and gestures. He shares several other ideas and examples, some of which are included on a companion DVD packaged with the book. Hamilton

³ To be fair here, and accurate, Larson is contrasting using verbal image versus verbal storytelling for sermon illustration.

also provides a more informed list of nine “tips and hints” for using video in preaching and worship (pp.52-54):

- Purchase the Motion Picture Licensing Corporation License (Hamilton provides the phone number and web site)
- Be careful of the rating of the film from which the clip derives so as not to endorse sex and violence.
- Use motion picture film clips rarely and don’t expect a good film clip to make up for a subpar sermon.
- A general rule is to keep video clips under one and a half to two minutes and not more than 10 percent of the sermon time.
- Be sensitive to the younger audience when choosing images.
- Remember that sometimes telling a story is more powerful than watching a story.
- Video taped testimonials are effective because through editing one can control length and content.
- Most video clips are enhanced by adding background music.
- Have sufficient video monitors for those on or behind the stage to allow viewing of screen content.

Hamilton testifies to the positive role multimedia can play in the preacher’s ministry and offers practical suggestions, but much more is needed than an example and helpful hints.

While some (perhaps more who do not publish their thoughts than those who do) view multimedia “as the future of preaching,” McDill—whose quote began this study—is not as confident. He enumerates five circumspect suggestions for using media effectively in preaching: 1) use it sparingly, i.e., do not put too much on the screen at one time, 2) balance visual media and oral presentation, i.e., give deference to the oral, 3) plan and rehearse the visual media presentation, i.e., do not let glitches cause you to lose even your oral presentation 4) only use media if it serves the purpose of the sermon, i.e., words are usually good enough so do not use media just to use media, and 5) avoid cluttering the worship space with equipment, i.e., technology devices are really out of place in the worship center so do not draw attention to them (2006, p.207).

McDill (2006, p.208) further warns that multimedia can hinder oral communication in three ways: 1) it minimizes the personality of the preacher, 2) it might not engage the audience’s experience, and 3) it appeals less to the imagination of the hearer. These three arguments are weak at face value. McDill offers no theory to back up his claims. He merely offers assertions such as, “The use of visual media in the sermon tends to minimize the personality of the preacher as a factor for persuasion in the sermon,” “Low-tech preaching can have a high impact when the message addresses the needs of the audience,” and “Instead of enhancing the appeal to imagination, audiovisual media may distract from it because the projection screen doesn’t have the power of the mental screen” (pp.208-09).

In response to McDill’s caveats on converging multimedia and preaching, it is asked regarding the first, in some cases could minimizing the personality of the preacher be healthy? Would

McDill argue that churches do not have problems with cults of personality worshipping at the altar of the pulpit? This is not to throw stones at the author's own profession, only to acknowledge an ever-present danger. On the flip side, however, if the preacher is selecting the multimedia resource that are aiding the sermon, can this not be seen as an extension of his or her personality? Regarding the McDill's second admonishment that a given multimedia resource might not connect with the audience's experience, the same argument can be raised against any teaching method or tool the preacher employs. In some cases, a clip from a movie, music video, or graphic might connect far better with the audience than the preacher's own attempt at verbally sharing or illustrating a point. McDill's third point amounts to a toothless bite. Certainly poor choices regarding multimedia resources can dull the minds of the audience as much as any lackluster sermon void of multimedia, but to say that multimedia resources are less likely to stimulate imagination is a bold claim that needs substantiated.

McDill clearly reveals his bias that "a stronger appeal to imagination comes with a vividly described scene" than through any picture painted with multimedia (p.208). McDill seems to think it is an either/or proposition: either the sermon is orally presented or visually presented. For him the two are at odds. This is clear when he writes, "Twenty-first century preachers would do well...to consider the power of simple oral communication before forsaking it for audiovisual aids" (ibid.). And, again, "Before the preacher gives up on the sermon as simple oral communication...let him consider how to enhance his delivery..." (p.209). One hears in such rhetoric, "Oh, for the 'good old days' when preaching was really preaching."

Questions and Suggestions for Further Study

In the balance, one has only to compare Table-1 with Table 2 to see that the majority of recent homiletics textbooks appears not to discuss the role multimedia should or should not play and the few that do only skim the surface. Among those that do engage the topic, the majority calls for sparse and careful use, as though it were a necessary evil they wish they did not have to address and do little to move toward a healthy theology of the convergence of multimedia and preaching. This raises a few interesting questions and suggestions for further research.

1. Why is the multimedia question avoided to such a great extent? Three questions develop this query further. First, is this silence because multimedia is viewed as a separate subject that should be addressed in other texts? It is true that many seminaries offer distinct courses on media technologies for ministry, and a number of good books exist that deal exclusively with using multimedia—although most of these focus more on the aspect of worship than preaching in particular.⁴ The texts listed in Table 1, however, tend not even to direct their readers to multimedia resources or list them in their bibliographies for further study. Furthermore, are preachers really the target audience for these limited multimedia classes or books, or is it media ministry staff, worship leaders, or lay volunteers who sit in an A/V booth during church gatherings? Second, does the silence spring from a bias or even a fear? Certainly preachers, and homileticians no less, are subject to the vice of pride, and even if pride would prevent the admission, a measure of fear over the threat that multimedia poses to the honored position of oral preaching is understandable. Third, could the silence have anything to do with the median age of the authors of these preaching texts? While not a focus of this study, it did appear that the

⁴ For example, see Quentin J. Schultze (2004), Jason Moore & Len Wilson (2006), and Richard A. Jensen (2005).

majority of the authors would not postdate the baby boomer generation. If this is true, then an affinity for the modernistic values of authority and reason might be skewing the advice.

2. Is it unrealistic to think that most preachers and the churches they serve have the time and financial resources to utilize multimedia tools? As a pastor for over 16 years, this author knows well the demands on a pastor's time and the squeeze of small church budgets. He has never served a church with paid staff to create or run multimedia presentations. Yet he has always been able to find gifted people who feel called to serve in this area. Sermon points, themes or topics can be shared in advance. People who are movie buffs can recommend clips that fit. People who enjoy serving behind the scenes and are computer savvy can find appropriate graphics and create a file using one of a variety of presentation software programs.

A growing number of books and Internet resources exist that provide ideas and even offer movie clips, professionally designed media clips for church use, graphics and more—all indexed by subject, keywords, and even Scripture references.⁵ Many of these resources are royalty free, and others offer professional video clips for as little as two dollars. It is simply not justifiable to discount the practicality of incorporating multimedia tools in preaching due to budget or workload factors. As with Moses, God is faithful to provide answers for these excuses.

3. Should instruction about multimedia resources and tools, especially presentation software, graphics, and video clips, be considered essential content in any guidebook for preachers today and in any seminary program of studies? It seems disingenuous to ignore it in light of the role multimedia plays in culture, the existing resources, and the technologies available to create, edit and almost endlessly manipulate digital media content for one's context. It is suggested that, if in no other place, preaching texts today should engage the possibilities in a section dealing with sermon illustrations, which any sermon textbook worth its salt emphasizes. At the very least, preaching texts should point the reader to some of the vast print and electronic resources available on the topic for further study.⁶

4. Let homileticians, whether for or against the convergence of multimedia and preaching, build their cases out of sound theology and solid communication theory. Much of the diatribe against the convergence comes across as both nostalgic about and apologetic for the proud tradition of oral preaching and the primary role of the preacher as communicator. In the same way, critics of the convergence tend to impugn the arguments of their counterparts as being conciliatory to a culture that threatens the core values of Christian faith for the sake of relevancy. These perceptions that convergence is desired merely for the "cool factor" are doubtlessly true in cases, but proponents of convergence who wish to separate themselves from such appearances of evil can do so through sound theological argumentation and support from appropriate communication theories.

5. Be consistent. Hypocrisy, especially religious hypocrisy, is almost an unpardonable sin to postmoderns. This author finds it peculiar that almost without exception the preaching texts

⁵ Just a few examples this author finds helpful are: MovieMinistry.com, SermonSpice.com, BluefishTV.com, and Heartlight.org.

⁶ For example, a book on suggested film clips arranged topically and by Scripture index like Larson & Quicke (2004) and online resources such as those noted in footnote 5.

listed in Table 1 provide graphs, figures, diagrams and other visual aids in their texts. If the power to describe is so superior, as they say it is, why do they deem it necessary to include a picture to illustrate or clarify their points? What is the difference in a picture on a page and one projected onto a screen? Why is it okay to have costumes, makeup, props, object lessons, fill-in-the-blank sermon outlines printed in bulletins, etc. but not multimedia aids?

6. No one would deny that a theology of verbal preaching can be easily mined out of Scripture. The Bible places an emphasis on preaching and hearing the spoken Word. Jesus Christ himself came to world as the Word incarnate. Can solid theological reasons for using multimedia in preaching be plumbed out of Scripture as well? While occasional attempts are made to justify multimedia in sermons by a passing reference to dramatic acts and teachings of prominent biblical figures, if proponents of multimedia use want to convince those on the other side, they must demonstrate that they can do serious exegesis and theological thinking and not just tip their hats at a few examples and overdo the cultural relevance arguments. Although God's people know better, motive judgments are frequently passed. The strong in the faith still tend to look down on the weak and the weak despise the strong, and they argue over who even wears which label. Until clear biblical reasons and convincing theoretical proofs can be articulated and appreciated by both sides, the churches with and without multimedia preaching are likely themselves to remain unconverged in fellowship and even mutual respect.

7. This author suggests that, at the very least, even those who oppose the trend toward the convergence of multimedia tools and preaching should concede that preachers today desperately need classes in the course of their seminary training on how multimedia technologies have impacted communication. Even if this requires bringing in adjuncts for a few classes on general communication theories, media effects, the rhetoric of digital media, etc., or partnering with other colleges with communication studies departments, we are, after all, training more than Bible exegetes, church administrators, and pastoral counselors, we are preparing people to devote their lives to *communication* for the sake of the Gospel.

Conclusion

Whether or not a paradigm shift occurs in preaching through its developing convergence with multimedia tools in the near future remains to be seen and depends on whether or not the academy of homiletics is willing to partner with theologians and communication scholars to build a convincing case for the need and the way to meet it. Media in its various forms brings both blessings and curses. Christians are called to be in the world while not being conformed to it, but they are also expected to be transformed by the renewing of their minds to the glory of God. Among those called to become all things to all people for the sake of the Gospel and to make the most of every opportunity, Clayton Schmit's words seem reasonable, "Any art or technology...that truly advances the promises of the gospel or successfully draws people into an encounter with God is worth exploiting for the very best reasons" (2003, p.41).

If critics lament the fact that many preachers are turning to multimedia resources to boost their sermons, then why not let this be a motivation to rigorously study the issue from theological and communication angles? Whether as a concession or conviction it is accepted that multimedia resources have the *potential* to enhance verbal communication, why should the academy of

homiletics not want to engage them and work toward a healthy theology of preaching where multimedia and verbal means of communication converge?

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