



Lights, Camera, Video-Interaction

If the projection of the words for worship choruses is disturbing to some congregants, the use of video inside the worship space might be considered downright blasphemous. There tend to be two distinct camps on this topic and not much vacillating between the two. From my observations this is partly because the use of video, when connected to the setting of worship, is often done quite poorly and without the appropriate forethought.

If you worship within a tradition that does not utilize any kind of video projection, you may have witnessed an example of the use of video when visiting another church. It can be a shock the first time. Since technology has made it so much easier for the novice to record and edit video, it has quickly made an appearance on the walls and screens of churches on Sunday mornings. Without proper aesthetic training, these can come off more like *America's Funniest Home Videos* than a proper liturgical element.

Uses of video range from a slide show of still images played along with the worship songs, to humorous announcements about upcoming youth activities, to video clips from Hollywood movies that a pastor may use to illustrate a point within a sermon. I've seen each used and, more often than not, the results were a bit dicey. Most of this comes from the added element that video provides—time. Editing video materials, not just for their visual interest but in light of time, is essential in their use.

Often, videos take on a fast paced quality. The quick action and editing can entice the viewer, gaining and keeping attention. But these are elements that are used in TV commercials, viral *YouTube* videos, and major motion pictures. When we enter the setting of worship, which is a reflection of the eternal, we should be reminded of how different reality is to what we call "reality" day-in-day-out. Since worship is set up as a call and response the use of video can often initiate congregants into a mode that is more passive than active. We fall into the familiar role of audience and not participants.

Again, time is a key element. Slowing down the pace is an example of one thing that can be done within a video to alter our understanding of worship. In worship we have entered an eternal time—if only for a few moments—and that time needs to feel different than what we experience the other six days of the week. Though video is often essentially passive, there are ways to make it more interactive. An example from CIVA's 2005 biennial conference always comes to mind.

Kim Garza (also mentioned in the *Theology of Powerpoint* essay) was commissioned to produce a video in cooperation with those from Fuller Seminary's Brehm Center. The result was a silent video (video doesn't always have to have sound) that repeatedly played while a choir and the congregation sang the hymn "O Sacred Head Now Wounded." We, as participants, were singing from hymnals. Each time we looked up from the words the screen was showing a different sequence. Sometimes, we could stop singing during a verse and let the words wash over us as the choir continued the hymn. The images of the video were odd juxtapositions of public domain films, both religious and benignly secular, that seemed to suggest a postmodern take on the Stations of the Cross.

This is only one example, but it shows the best elements of video in the worship setting. The combination with music made the act of worship more participatory than passive. Even when congregants stopped singing their minds were actively combining the text of the hymn with the images that flashed before them. The video existed within the time of the hymn. As it repeated it produced layers of meaning in connection with the text of the hymn. Not everyone will be as skilled as Garza in producing something like this. It took months of collaborative work to come up with the concepts for the entire worship service. But all this should remind us that our best efforts are required when we tackle the elements of worship. It is difficult, thoughtful, and beautiful work. The materials we employ are not the main point, but we have to treat them with proper respect, as we respect the One we worship.