

**An Evaluation of Marketplace Preaching by Calvin Miller
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Marketplace Preaching offers a practical guide to crafting sermons that address real needs in the lives of real people. Miller seeks to move preaching out of its isolation from the world. He sees that most preaching has lost its sense of mission, addressing only those within the church walls. In so doing, this form of preaching fails to reach both those inside and outside the church. Though he doesn't state it quite this way, he suggests that there is a wrong assumption by preachers that people's needs and concerns within in the church vary widely from those outside the church. He implies that church people are not primarily concerned with issues of theology but with issues of life. The common denominator of depravity and human suffering affect the lives of those within and outside the church.

Miller's suggests four paradigm shifts that affect those who preach. Perhaps the most powerful of these shifts is that the church now operates as a subculture. No longer does a strong correlation of values exist between the church and society. Kennon Callahan has pointed out that the church must again become a mission outpost. The church must see itself within society just as a missionary who plants a new work on foreign soil. Miller's eight suggestions (27-29) give workable guidelines for preaching that effectively communicates in a changing world.

I concur with the statements that Miller makes about contemporizing the mission. He suggests four responsibilities: 1) make converts, 2) teach a new crowd an old worldview, 3) help the flock to overcome a diminished self-importance, and 4) train laity

for secular encounter (34). These suggestions bring to the preacher a relevant expression of the Great Commission. They also move the church and its preaching toward the marketplace. Miller gives good advice to the preacher who will speak to an entertainment oriented audience by suggesting that three questions be asked about the sermon: 1) What will be heard in the audio document? 2) What will be seen in the video document? 3) How can the audio and video blend together to create an existential encounter? (38).

In Miller's discussion about the affirming note of positivism, I wonder at his choice of example of those who show how "... utterly important the new positivism is for reaching people outside the church" (40). While Bill Hybels is a good example of relevance and faithfulness to the truth of the gospel, Robert Schuller is an example of what Miller describes on page 25 where he states: "Once heaven and hell are completely deleted from the sermon, the church will have been culturally domesticated. God must at last surrender to human artifice, for then he must not be found either in the sermon or at the altar." In my opinion, the preaching of Robert Schuller surrenders to each of the three dangers that Miller sets forth on pages 42-43.

As one who utilizes a blend of manuscript and extemporaneous preaching, I find the discussion on extemporaneity compelling, especially in the statement that "extemporaneity welds audience and communicator together" (49). I find his suggestions on preparing the audio document as something to be heard to be very helpful (49-51), as I do also his practical advice on the three tools of delivery (sprout books, quote cards, primary sources). Miller offers practical advice for creating sermons that are relational. He asserts that good preaching is like good writing with a focus on nouns and verbs. He

also warns against preaching that is laced with heavy imperatives and suggests that relational preaching should utilize the indicative much more.

I appreciate Miller's identification of the four subjects that are of immediate interest to those in the marketplace (security, success, the entrepreneurial mind, destiny and decision-making). However, I think Kennon Callahan's analysis is more universal. He says that all humans are seeking four things: 1) a sense of identity wherein they are appreciated as an individual, 2) a need of community where they can enjoy relationships, 3) a need of meaning wherein someone interprets life for them, and 4) a need for hope, i.e. for someone to encourage them that they can go on. Though there is some overlap between Callahan and Miller, perhaps preaching in the marketplace should consider the combined eight suggestions.

As I read the discussion on "packaging preaching" I felt less convinced that Miller's analysis of the "package" was objective. The chapter assumes that the marketplace is a unified culture. I find that there are many marketplaces, requiring different packages that may violate some of Miller's basic principles of casual, colloquial, relational, and relevant (71-73). Also, though I may agree with much of what Miller says about music on pages 74-76, I recognize how highly subjective this discussion is and, therefore, is less of a true guide to understanding effective marketplace preaching.

I found the discussion on "picture preaching" to be instructive. Preparing the sermon utilizing video techniques (slow-motion, stop-action, fast-forwarding) helps to provide movement. I found the distinction between vision and image especially helpful. "Vision is the overall picture into which we fit our lives. Image is how we see ourselves

within that picture” (96). This distinction is helpful because it moves from the ideal and theoretical (vision) to the personal and practical (image).

The step-by-step Monday through Sunday process of preparing a sermon (Chapter 9) provides workable information. This chapter is worth the price of the book. The final chapter on “Nurturing a Creative Spirit” offers an excellent discussion on the need to move beyond our thinking faculty to what Miller calls a “sensate dynamic” (175). He says, “The best communicators are indeed those who impregnate their communiqué with sensations that must be picked up by the nervous system as well as the gray matter” (175). I am encouraged to increase my sensate encounter using the four suggestions that he offers (176).

Overall this is an excellent book that clearly sets forth both the “why” and the “how” of marketplace preaching.