



Visual Technologies within a Consumerist Culture.

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Abstract

The use of visual technology is now a familiar medium of communication in most churches across New Zealand and Australia. Its accessibility and effectiveness in branding has had wide appeal especially to those leading large churches, who are eager to promote their identity, enlarge the size of their existing congregation(s), and expand influence within a consumerist-culture of lifestyle choices. Large Pentecostal churches are some of the most adept at utilising and absorbing these visual technologies, and do so, to great effect. This creates a level of vulnerability within Pentecostalism which largely goes unnoticed – the hidden absorption of a consumptive way of being. The pragmatism of its leaders to be relevant within this culture creates its own blind-spot. This quest for relevance tends to negate the need for theological critique and a robust process by which to evaluate various visual technologies thus allowing elements of secularity the scope to shape and re-shape congregational identity.

In this paper I discuss to what extent these visual technologies (an aberration of contemporary culture) are shaping a Pentecostal ecclesia and the behavioural patterns of its participants. A brief explanation of how images work is offered. This is followed by a case study of East Auckland Elim Christian Centre (EE) and its use of visual technologies. (EE is one of the largest churches in Auckland). The paper argues that while EE is very effective in communicating its identity and vision, its absorption of visual advertising practices (and thus of popular culture) makes it susceptible to the secular forces that run counter to the gospel, and may even in time, undermine the integrity of its own vision.