

Marianne Gaarden. *The Third Room of Preaching: The Sermon, the Listener, and the Creation of Meaning*. The Westminster Homiletics Monograph Series (published in digital format). Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2018. 158 pages. \$16.50.

As the first volume published in the Westminster Homiletics Monograph Series (in partnership with Christian Theological Seminary and endorsed by the Academy of Homiletics), *The Third Room of Preaching* offers a bold and substantive contribution to the field of homiletics in general and collaborative preaching in particular. True to the purposes of the Series in promoting critical scholarship and conversations about preaching, Danish homiletician Marianne Gaarden's empirical study of sermon listeners and preachers focuses on how listeners interact with and create meaning when hearing sermons. Her work is based on qualitative interviews with preachers and listeners in five Danish churches, and challenges the "transfer model" that has dominated much of European and North American homiletics (i.e., assuming that the kerygma may be extracted from the biblical text and transferred by the preacher into the consciousness of the listeners), replacing it with "an understanding of the sermon as an interactive event, generating meaning in the consciousness of the listener in the dynamic interplay between preacher and listener" (47).

Gaarden outlines the contributions of empirical studies of sermon listeners in both northern European and North American contexts (chapter 1) and critiques homiletical models that assume preachers are able to regulate how listeners create meaning in dialogue with the sermon (including proponents of the New Homiletic). Appreciative of collaborative models that respect the "otherness" of sermon listeners (e.g., those developed by John S. McClure, Ronald J. Allen, O. Wesley Allen, Jr.), Gaarden similarly rejects a hegemonic understanding of sermon listeners (chapter 2). However, she challenges the notion that preachers may bridge the gap between themselves and listeners by gaining closer proximity or familiarity with them in their local, embodied existence (58). Instead, her study reveals that new meanings and understandings emerge for listeners during the moment of worship or afterward, suggesting that a Third Room is entered during the preaching moment where the listener's own experiences are met with the words of the preacher, creating a surplus of meaning in the creative interplay of listener and sermon.

In chapter 3, Gaarden presents the five main results of her analysis of the listener interviews: (1) the significance of the preacher's ethos (especially his/her authenticity and attitude), (2) the reciprocal relationship between the preacher and the listener (i.e., preaching as a relationally defined interaction with listeners inspired by the preacher and the preacher dependent upon the listeners' attention), (3) the different dialogical interactions between listeners and the sermon itself (i.e., between the words of the preacher and the internal dialogue of the listener, as some listeners were *confirmed* and some were *moved* by the preacher's words; with listeners employing associative, critical, and contemplative interactions with the preacher's words), (4) the importance of each listener's situated starting point (i.e., the listener's life situation and experiences encountered anew within the context of public worship), and (5) the sermon as an intersubjective production of meaning (i.e., listeners relating fragments of the preacher's words to their own experiences, resulting in new insights and meaning-making). According to Gaarden, "The encounter between the listeners' inner experience and the preacher's outer words facilitates...*the Third Room of Preaching*, in which the listeners in an internal dialogue create a surplus of meaning that was previously not present in either the preacher's intent or the listener's frame of reference" (107).

Among the most significant contributions of Gaarden's work is her adaptation of the social constructionist theory of Barnett Pearce, who views communication as a meaning-making process that develops through the relational connection among people—never done in isolation but always and necessarily coordinated in the way we manage our meanings with other people (93). Of theological and spiritual significance is Gaarden's assertion that "something more is at work" in the preaching moment beyond the rational and semantic meaning-making we associate with sermons "which may move the focus from words to spirit" (69). Her brief allusion to "an immanent experience of transcendence" in chapter 4 is not developed or explored beyond suggesting that the preacher serves as a "tool" (not the carpenter) in working with God to construct the Third Room of Preaching. A brief appendix suggests a shift from "sermon formation" to "preacher formation" in homiletical teaching to encourage students to reflect upon their own practices without judgment or critique. Questions of human and divine agency linger throughout the closing pages of Gaarden's work and we are left to ponder what the preacher should focus upon beyond seeking "clarity" (111) and "presenting whole, unified sermons" (115) as s/he prepares to preach. Although we may wonder what the process of sermon preparation and sharing may entail in light of Gaarden's findings, her book suggests areas of fruitful inquiry and the promise of further theological, spiritual, homiletical research to come.

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