

Jennifer E. Copeland. *Feminine Registers: The Importance of Women's Voices for Christian Preaching*, Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2014. 150 pages. \$20.

Jennifer Copeland has written an engaging monograph that begins with the simple premise: sermons are different when women preach. That difference, she claims, is because the variables of register shift in numerous ways during that event. As the book sets out evidence to support her thesis' reality, it becomes a helpful tool for understanding women's voices in the pulpit.

Copeland opens this short volume with a brief history of women preaching, noting especially the regression of women from leadership in the life of the early church, a gradual exclusion beginning in the second century and eventually institutionalized with Constantine. In this post biblical system, women became what the church told them they were: "unworthy, weak, dangerous and deceptive, even while the experiences of their own lives continued to bear witness to a different reality" (14).

Fast forwarding to recent trends, Copeland laments that as women finally entered seminaries and became clergy, most homiletic literature failed to offer any substantive work related to women in the guild. Fred Craddock, David Buttrick, and Tom Long are chided for their failure to attend to women's enrichment of the discipline, thus contributing to ongoing androcentric assumptions about preaching. With aid of Rebecca Chopp's work, however, Copeland attempts to fill that lacuna and opens the homiletic conversation to include different voices and processes to describe God as she lays groundwork for a fresh look at meaning-making strategies for preachers and listeners.

Utilizing the linguistic concept of register, Copeland sets forth an analysis of preaching that recognizes women's theological and semantic contributions and examines how gender influences these meanings. Field (the sermon's *what* and *where*), tenor (the sermon's *who*) and mode (the sermon's *how*) are the determinants that shape meaning and provide the variables of register. Meaning comes to life, Copeland explains, by considering not only the words themselves but also the social context, relationship, and method. Changing a variable as significant as gender alters the sermon's subject before the preacher even begins to speak. And each register shift creates possibilities for more profound understandings and living, all of which were unknown when pulpits were limited to men.

Rooting her work in dialogue with theorists Christine Smith (resistance), Lucy Hogan (priority of relationship from the inside), Anna Carter Florence (priority of relationship from the margins), Mary Catherine Hilbert (proclamation as sacred imagination) and John McClure (deconstruction and othering), Copeland kick-starts a stimulating effort to "listen for registers" in the trajectories of current work. In the process, she exposes preconceptions about sermons when the preacher is a woman as she simultaneously explores grist for dialogue into new vistas of understanding.

Copeland's monograph is an essential contribution to homiletic literature, an engaging and thoughtful advancement of understanding what happens when a woman preaches. Her scholarship is at once accessible and theoretically rooted, while its practical ramifications for both preachers and listeners make it an ideal volume for seminarians, preachers, congregational leaders and all who believe that "More and different voices create a deeper appreciation of God's presence in our lives and a richer testimony of God's power in our world" (125). I anticipate requiring it for reading in graduate courses in homiletics and recommending it to experienced preachers.

This leads to one criticism of the book. The author misses an opportunity to broaden her audience, which is essentially limited to white mainline Protestants. There are a fair number of “others,” from evangelical and conservative churches for example, who, like their mainline colleagues of a generation ago, are more progressive than the congregations they lead. They, too, have consumed the homiletics of Craddock, Long, and Buttrick and engaged the work of Hogan, Florence, and the other theorists Copeland employs. These preachers and seminarians from conservative churches will welcome this volume to help them articulate their own experiences and prepare parishioners for the changes already afoot. These women and men would have felt embraced as welcomed readers if Copeland had simply acknowledged their existence. Instead, her references, statistics, and examples come from a limiting world. Indeed, Copeland’s work is an essential guide for the realities among us. But, these realities are not restricted to her target audience.

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