

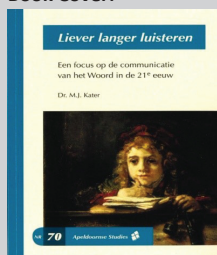
'Listening' as prerequisite for preaching in the 21st century



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Liever langer luisteren: Een focus op de communicatie van het Woord in de 21e eeuw

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Review Title:

'Listening' as prerequisite for preaching in the 21st century

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Liever langer luisteren ('Rather listen longer') is a timeous contribution to the field of Practical Theology, focused on Homiletics. This short work (43 p.) by M.J. Kater represents the full text of his inaugural lecture at the Apeldoorn Theological University in 2017.

Written against the background of a society which has lost the skill of listening (*luisterarmoede*), the book pleads for a Practical Theology and a Homiletic which are carried by the art of 'listening'. The argumentation in this book rests on the reformed assumption that preaching is the *viva vox Dei*, i.e. the living voice of God (p. 11) and not merely a human dialogue *about* God. This calls for a reappraisal of current homiletic practices which will result in preachers and theologians paying renewed attention to the act of listening as part of their Practical Theological work.

Apart from the Introduction (p. 7) and Personal word (p. 41) the book revolves around three chapters.

In chapter one, *De communicatie van het Woord – liever langer luister* (The communication of the Word – rather *listen* longer), the author stresses the importance of listening by discussing three important aspects regarding Homiletics. Firstly, that preaching conveys the Word of God and therefore leaves no room for the preacher to approach preaching in a superficial way. In the second part of this chapter, Kater discusses the important insight, namely that the homiletic process can also be understood as a movement from *preek naar tekst* (from sermon to text) and not simply a movement from the text to the sermon where the preacher methodically attempts to bridge the gap between the ancient text and the current context. This insight sensitises the preacher for the fact that God is already active in the text that the preacher is trying to convey. Instead of trying to bridge the gap by general methodical steps, it could be beneficial for preaching on a deeper level to indeed listen *longer* and trying to hear what God is saying in the text through which He speaks. However, to convey what has been heard through listening, it remains the task of Practical Theology to understand communication in the 21st century. This aspect is also the third and final focus of the first chapter. In the visually stimulated 21st century, Kater pleads that Practical Theology should contemplate how we can manage the art of '*luisterend leren*' (learn by listening). And therefore, Practical Theologians should also learn to listen longer, not just to Scripture itself, but also to the 21st century context in which preaching must take place.

With the importance of listening underlined, the second chapter propagates *longer* listening: *De communicate met de praktijk – liever langer luisteren* (Communication with practice, rather listen longer). The focus here is on motivating Practical Theology to engage (listen) thoroughly with at least three partners. This implies ongoing Practical Theological research within the ecclesial sphere, dialogue with other sciences and those people who think and believe differently.

In terms of other sciences, Kater encourages dialogue with at least six other fields of studies, which includes Language Philosophy, Communication theory, and Sociology. Kater's comprehensive understanding of listening becomes evident as he also encourages a listening-dialogue with those people who think and believe differently, bringing the apologetic side of the Homiletic process into focus.

The third and final chapter serves as a motivational chapter when the author explains that listening is something the preacher should *long* to do. Wanting to listen – and listen longer, should be grounded in the realisation that preaching plays out in the tension field between God's righteousness and grace as embodied in Christ Jesus. Preaching thus can only happen through our connectedness to Christ. In the light of this, the third (and shortest) chapter is aptly titled: *De communicatie van het Woord als communion cum Christo – liever langer luisteren*

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(The communication of the Word as the communication of Christ – rather listen longer). In this way, Kater reminds the reader that Reformed Practical Theology stands in service of the *praxis pietatis* which believes that spiritual growth results from communion with Christ. The communion with Christ that results from the communication of the Word of God – which is the result of concentrated listening (p. 39) – should be the focus of the Practical Theological action of Homiletics.

Liever langer luisteren: Een focus op de communicatie van het Woord in de 21e eeuw will be of interest to students in Homiletics as well as seasoned preachers and Practical Theologians contemplating effective preaching in a visually over-stimulated and listening-impaired 21st century context.

Within the confines of an inaugural address, this book succeeds to stimulate much needed thinking on the importance of listening as part of Practical Theology and Homiletics.