

Book Review

Rev. Angus Stewart

*The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures
in the Worship of the Christian Church*

Volume 5: Moderatism, Pietism and Awakening

Hughes Oliphant Old

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004, paperback, xviii + 620 pp.

ISBN 0-8028-2232-0

In volume 5 of his fascinating series on the history of preaching, Hughes Oliphant Old takes us on a guided tour of notable preachers and national or denominational schools of preaching—chiefly in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. We begin with moderatism in England and continental Europe (ch. 1); pietism and revivalism in Germany, colonial America and England (ch. 2); and Congregationalism in New England (ch. 3). Then we turn to Roman Catholicism both in the old world and in the new world: Counter-Reformation baroque preaching in the Austro-Hungarian empire (with a few Protestants thrown in; ch. 4) and Spanish Franciscan missions in California (ch. 5). Next we move to Romania (ch. 6) and Russia (ch. 7) for Eastern Orthodox preaching, before ending on more familiar ground: Scottish Presbyterianism from John Knox to Thomas Chalmers (ch. 8) and evangelical Anglicanism (ch. 9).

Old writes sections on Matthew Henry (who is unexpectedly classified under “Moderatism;” 24-34), George Whitefield (135-152), Jonathan Edwards (248-293), Thomas Boston (445-457), William Romaine (549-554) and many others, including lesser known figures like Old School Presbyterian John Willison in Scotland (457-464) and the Hungarian Reformed theologian István Kis whom the Turks made preach in chains (306-308).

In this volume, we see a Frenchman Jacques Saurin preaching on the perfections of God to the Huguenots (and others) in the Hague (41-48) after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes (1685); Samuel Willard (author of the first American systematic theology) expositing the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* in his Tuesday lectures in Boston, New England (239-240); Robert Bruce explaining King Hezekiah’s illness and recovery in St. Giles in Edinburgh (433-437); and John Newton expounding the biblical texts used in Handel’s *Messiah* in the

English parish of Olney (556-557). We hear a moving sermon on the love of God by Andrew Thompson at a communion service (508-512); Thomas Chalmer's speculations about life on other planets (515-516); and Jesuit Péter Pázmány's extremely earthy language (318-320).

Old weaves all sorts of interesting material into his history of preaching. We read of the Hungarian Reformed ministers sold by the Hapsburg emperor, Leopold I, to the Spanish navy as galley slaves. Upon their deliverance by a Dutchman, Admiral de Ruyter, in the Bay of Naples, they sing Psalm 116 in gratitude to God (328-330). We hear Jesuit Franz Piekhart in Vienna give the funeral eulogy for Prince Eugene of Savoy, comrade in arms with the Duke of Marlborough at Blenheim, Oudenarde and Malplaquet (345-350). We observe the prophetic preaching of Johann Kasper Lavater in Zurich in response to the French Revolution, including his six sermons on the signs of the times from Luke 21:9-10 (62-63). We see Charles Simeon presenting the twenty-one volumes of his works to King William IV at his court (568).

In keeping with the last clause of his title (*The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church*), Old speaks of the role of the *Westminster Directory of Public Worship* both in Matthew Henry's Presbyterian church in Chester in England (28-30) and in the Congregational churches in New England (170-178). Writing of evangelical Anglicanism, Old notes, "its insistence on orthodoxy is the basis of its doxology." He continues,

It is orthodox Christianity which glorifies God. Deism, like the Arianism of the fourth century, is an insult to the majesty of the Son of God, and if an insult to the Son, it is an insult to the Father as well. On the other hand, when true doctrine is taught, then God is glorified. That, at least, is the way the orthodox have always looked at it. For Evangelicals it is the inner presupposition of true worship. It is the faith of the heart which is the essence of worship (561).

Old explains what was unique about moderatism (1-5) and pietism (69-75), how pietism led into revivalism (75-77), and the roots of English pietism (542-546). He adds a few evaluations on Philipp Jakob Spener (1635-1705) whose *Pia Desideria* might be called "the manifesto of pietism" (72).

Spener's pietism is very similar to the late medieval pietism Luther had found so oppressive. It was so depressingly introspective. Even those who had been born again were consistently encouraged to re-examine themselves to be sure that they really had been born again. That was just what Luther was trying to get away from (83).

The classical Protestantism of the sixteenth century had turned away from the mysticism of the late Middle Ages, preferring a more objective religious experience. Pietism as revived by Spener was a return to a more subjective piety. Protestants began to look within to find God. The question is whether in doing this they lost a basic insight of the Reformation (87).

Old notes the usefulness of pietism to Frederick, the elector of Brandenburg. "He saw in pietism, with its de-emphasis of doctrine" "a means of spiritually uniting the Lutherans and the Reformed in his widespread domains" (74). Revivalism, pietism's daughter, also de-emphasizes doctrine and leads to a spurious sort of unity.

Sadly, Old shows false charity towards the false churches of Rome and Eastern Orthodoxy (see esp. ch. 4-7). He speaks of the "transporting joy" he experienced in an Easter service in a Russian Orthodox church in Paris in the late sixties, after taking "a two-week seminar in Orthodox theology and worship sponsored by the World Council of Churches" (428). He reckons that the Franciscans in California "made a heroic attempt to fulfil the apostolic commission to go into all the world and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them and teaching them all that Christ commanded" (366). As if baptismal regeneration, flagellation (355) and the Council of Trent (with its anathemas against the gospel) were part of Christ's teaching! How this fits with Old's Presbyterianism (351), which views these communions as "synagogues of Satan" (*Westminster Confession* 25:5), it would take a paradox theologian to explain. Old's false ecumenism is evident at points in his previous four volumes in this series. Volume 1 even carries the dedication: "To His Beatitude Teoctist Patriarch of Romania. God's faithfulness to your Church gives me hope for my own."

Old's analysis of John Wesley is likewise inconsistent. At first, he rightly states, "During [the seventeenth] century Anglicanism had gone far in the direction of Arminianism, and Wesley persevered in this throughout his life" (113). Yet later he writes, "Wesley was not a Calvinist. [Massive understatement: he

hated Calvinism with a passion.] He was not really an Arminian either ..." Old's argument for this last statement is that Wesley's pietism meant that "he seems little interested in such things as predestination and glorification which are outside man's immediate experience" (133). Yet Wesley was so "little interested" in predestination that he fervently wrote and preached against it! Indeed, he violently opposed all the tenets of Calvinism and vigorously upheld all the tenets of Arminianism, and, as Old writes, "persevered in this throughout his life" (113).

Old rightly observes Wesley's perfectionism (126-129) and illuminism ("the pietist tendency toward illuminism often comes through with considerable vigor;" 116). Yet Old also says, "Wesley made clear the Christian way of life" (111). How can Old, a Presbyterian, make this claim about a perfectionist Arminian in the light of *Westminster Confession* 12, "Of Sanctification"?

One can only expect that Old's false charity towards Romanism, Eastern Orthodoxy, Arminianism and Pentecostalism (564) will be even more evident in the remaining two volumes of the series, which will cover the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (DV). With this very serious caveat—Old's false ecumenism—discerning Reformed readers (and especially preachers) will find much fascinating and helpful material in this volume and the others in the series.

Second Helvetic Confession [1566] 18: "God has used for his ministers, even from the beginning of the world, the best and most eminent men in the world ... namely, the patriarchs, to whom he spake very often by his angels. For the patriarchs were the prophets or teachers of their age, whom God, for this purpose, would have to live many years, that they might be, as it were, fathers and lights of the world. They were followed by Moses and the prophets renowned throughout all the world. Then, after all these, our heavenly Father sent his only-begotten Son, the most perfect teacher of the world; in whom is hidden the wisdom of God, and from whom we derive that most holy, perfect, and pure doctrine of the Gospel. For he chose unto himself disciples, whom he made apostles; and they, going out into the whole world, gathered together churches in all places by the preaching of the Gospel. And afterward they ordained pastors and teachers in all churches, by the commandment of Christ; who, by such as succeeded them, has taught and governed the Church unto this day. Therefore, as God gave unto his ancient people the patriarchs, together with Moses and the prophets, so also to his people under the new covenant he sent his only-begotten Son, and, with him, the apostles and teachers of this Church."